

US COVERT ACTION:
SACRIFICING PRUDENCE FOR EXPEDIENCE

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Abstract

The United States (US) is damaging its diplomatic efforts, international power, and public safety as results of strategically employing covert operations. In order to avoid further degradation of its international influence, the US must adhere to American democratic principles and thoughtful diplomatic relations, and abandon covert action in favor of congressionally-approved, overt military action when US interests are threatened.

There is an imperative to explore the residual effects of US covert actions that make many nations hostile towards Americans and US policy objectives. Understanding the modern demand for government transparency and oversight, policymakers, diplomats, and academics must recognize that fundamental changes for conflict resolution are required to secure US strategic interests, diplomatic goals, and public safety.

By employing library and archival research methodology, this thesis illuminates the damaging effects of covert action on US international relations at both the macro and micro levels. Further, research perspectives on the morality of covert action and its lasting effects on societies – domestic and foreign – are also integrated into this research. Ultimately, results are intended to approach the topic of US covert action from the unique perspectives of diplomacy and security, to include assessments of a holistic solution, previously unexplored in other academic writings.

Introduction

Covert Action Defined

Covert action, for which the United States (US) government has demonstrated a fervent and reckless affinity, consists of any clandestine government operation aimed at undermining or influencing the political or social processes of other, sovereign nations.¹ Covert activities run the gamut from so-called “modest intrusions,” such as low-level funding of groups friendly to US objectives, to more “extreme options,” which include assassinations and large-scale secret wars.² A cornerstone of covert operations is the necessity for their secrecy, “so as to conceal the identity of the sponsor or else to permit the sponsor’s plausible deniability of the operation[s].”³ For this reason, the US government has charged its centralized intelligence organs with carrying out its covert overseas campaigns from the mid-twentieth century until present.⁴

A Wartime Centralized Intelligence Apparatus

Traditionally referred to as “special activities,” US covert action is not a recent phenomenon;⁵ however, these operations gained widespread legitimacy among US policymakers while facing the threat of being drawn into World War II. Prior to attempts at reforms, foreign intelligence was collected and analyzed by a variety of US entities, including the Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI), the Department of State, and the Military Intelligence Division (MID), though dissemination of intelligence products was seldom a focused, concerted effort.⁶

¹ David Isenberg, *Cato Institute Policy Analysis No. 118: The Pitfalls of U.S. Covert Operations* (Washington, D.C.: Cato Institute, 1989), 1-2.

² Loch Johnson, *Strategic Intelligence: Covert Action, Behind the Veils of Secret Foreign Policy* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2007), 98.

³ Allan E. Goodman, “Reforming U.S. Intelligence,” *Foreign Policy* 67 (1987): 130.

⁴ Isenberg, *Policy Analysis*, 2.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Philip Bigger, *Negotiator: The Life and Career of James B. Donovan* (Bethlehem: Lehigh University Press, 2006), 33.

Recognizing the threats posed by instability in Europe and the necessity for a centralized intelligence agency capable of collating these products, President Franklin D. Roosevelt set about forming the Office of the Coordinator of Information (COI).⁷ Rather than being a subject of the US Navy or War Department, on July 11, 1941, Roosevelt created the COI as a civilian agency which reported directly to the Office of the President.⁸ To lead the COI, Roosevelt turned to his personal friend, William J. Donovan, a man who declared that “in a global and totalitarian war....intelligence must be global and totalitarian” and to whom “ideas were his plaything.”⁹ While Roosevelt’s COI was originally intended to fill only analysis, dissemination, and overt propaganda functions,¹⁰ Donovan’s vision included far grander plans, including the employment of covert action.¹¹

Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor and America’s entry into the war on December 7, 1941, proved windfalls for Donovan and hastened the expansion of the COI’s mission. While attending the Arcadia Conference (held between December 22, 1941, and January 14, 1942), President Roosevelt accepted the counsel of British leaders “that an essential element in the grand strategy [against the Axis powers] was to be the employment of subversion.”¹² Though he was purportedly hesitant to engage in such activities,¹³ President Roosevelt nonetheless charged the COI with conducting the US government’s covert campaigns and guaranteed its freedom of operations by backing its expenses with “little-audited presidential funds.”¹⁴ Given that the MID and ONI had no formal methods for engaging in covert operations, this expansion of the

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Tim Weiner, *Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA* (New York: Anchor Books, 2008), 4-5.

¹⁰ G. J. A. O’Toole, *Honorable Treachery: A History of U.S. Intelligence, Espionage, and Covert Action From the American Revolution to the CIA*, Revised ed. (New York: Grove Press, 2014), 488-489.

¹¹ Albert Lulushi, *Donovan’s Devils: OSS Commandos Behind Enemy Lines-Europe World War II* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2016), 1.

¹² O’Toole, *Honorable Treachery*, 489.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Bigger, *Negotiator*, 33.

Executive's power was initially welcomed by the services' directors, albeit for only a short time.¹⁵

Donovan proved up to the task of commanding the COI, and by March 1942 had launched several covert campaigns, two of which included mobilizing anti-Nazi forces in Yugoslavia and amassing a commando army of some 2,000 US citizens of Greek and Yugoslavian descent.¹⁶ However, his popularity in Washington, D.C. quickly waned. Donovan's far-reaching and ambitious designs, which included COI operations throughout Latin America, began to draw the ire of the directors of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs.¹⁷ Furthermore, Donovan's personal friendship with President Roosevelt, the ever-expanding wartime role of the COI, and the British Prime Minister's support for the agency, all led the MID and ONI to fear the civilian COI's influence on making war as well as the possibilities for their own losses of autonomy.¹⁸ In an attempt to appease the directors and allay their fears, President Roosevelt set about retooling the COI.

Understanding the danger this posed to the COI and the future of US covert action, Donovan proposed that his agency be placed under the supervision of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS).¹⁹ Donovan's proposal was accepted, and on June 13, 1942, the responsibilities of the COI were split between two organizations: overt propaganda activities became the purview of the Office of War Information, and covert activities, which remained under Donovan's direction, were entrusted to the Office of Strategic Services (OSS).²⁰ Following the transfer of authority,

¹⁵ O'Toole, *Honorable Treachery*, 489.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 490

²⁰ Bigger, *Negotiator*, 33.

Donovan was recommissioned as a Brigadier General and the ranks of the OSS swelled to approximately 13,000 men and women, a majority of whom were uniformed service-members.²¹

The utility of overseeing a covert agency during war proved undeniable, and the JCS soon employed the OSS “in commando-type actions, special and paramilitary operations, psychological warfare, covert propaganda and morale operations, and other activities” throughout the European and Pacific theaters of operations.²² While many of its records remain classified, those which have been released suggest that the OSS was integral to many of the Allies’ successes.²³ Furthermore, intelligence collected by OSS agents stationed in “neutral European capitals” proved invaluable in informing policy decisions.²⁴ Such was the case in crafting US diplomatic measures to halt Swedish sales of ball bearings to Nazi Germany, dramatically slowing the Nazi war machine.²⁵

For all of his wartime achievements, however, Donovan had an equal or greater number of failures by early 1945 and many in Washington, D.C. were once again unimpressed with both him and his agency’s exploits. FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover loathed Donovan and envied the OSS’s international influence, largely due to his own desire for controlling the US intelligence apparatus.²⁶ Additionally, some in the White House feared that Donovan hoped to transition the OSS into a peacetime “American Gestapo.”²⁷ For its part, the JCS wished for the soon-to-be-postwar OSS to serve the Pentagon rather than the Executive and to replace Donovan’s staff with senior military officers.²⁸

²¹ Ibid., 33-34.

²² Lulushi, *Donovan’s Devils*, 1.

²³ O’Toole, *Honorable Treachery*, 506-507.

²⁴ Ibid., 507.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Weiner, *Legacy*, 4.

²⁷ Ibid., 5.

²⁸ Ibid.

Rather than conceding defeat, Donovan lobbied the President for his proposed 'Central Intelligence Service,' which he professed would determine the "capabilities, intentions and activities of foreign nations" all the while engaging in "subversive operations abroad."²⁹ Unfortunately for Donovan, President Roosevelt had begun to doubt the general wisdom of maintaining a postwar OSS or leaving Donovan as its leader.³⁰ Furthermore, Donovan had already earned the reputation of being a deluded risk-taker, losing many of his agents to his "ridiculous" plans.³¹ Thus, Roosevelt ordered Colonel Richard Park, Jr., his chief military aide, "to conduct a secret investigation into the wartime operations of the OSS."³²

Roosevelt's death in 1945 meant that President Harry S. Truman was the first to view Colonel Park's findings once they had been published. The change in the recipient, though, did nothing to temper Park's scathing report. The more serious indictments presented in the investigation's findings include: widespread infiltration of the OSS by foreign, especially communist, adversaries; a state of being "hopelessly compromised to foreign governments" and OSS agents being viewed by British intelligence personnel as "putty in their hands"; poorly vetted intelligence information which resulted in the deaths of thousands of Allied soldiers; employing incompetent agents as products of a woefully inadequate system of training; causing embarrassment to the US government in its failures to maintain sufficient levels of secrecy; airdropping agents into neutral territory; wholly forgetting about agents stationed in remote areas; and using foreign nationals, one of whom was a suspected communist sympathizer, to conduct psychological vetting of prospective agents, among many others.³³

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., 5.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Richard Park, *Memorandum for the Record: Colonel Park's Comments on OSS* (Washington, D.C.: Truman Library, 1945), 4-7.

In an attempt to salvage his position and reputation, as well as the future of the Central Intelligence Service, Donovan rushed to brief President Truman in Washington, D.C. on May 14, 1945.³⁴ Donovan was dismissed off-hand by the President in less than 15 minutes and was fired only four months later on September 20, 1945.³⁵ The OSS was effectively gutted and, of the previous high of 13,000, less than 2,000 agents remained by the end of 1945, all of whom were placed in a US State Department research bureau.³⁶ However, the birth of a new war with a new enemy would ensure that, no matter the name, the absence of America's centralized intelligence organ was short-lived.

The Threat and Containment of Communism

With the end of hostilities in World War II and the subsequent rise of the Soviet Union, the US saw its newfound sphere of global influence in peril. To combat this threat, policymakers embarked upon a postwar foreign policy dominated by the compulsion to limit the spread of Communism. Fueled by the findings in George Kennan's *Long Telegram* and previously-anonymous *Sources of Soviet Conduct*, the necessity for "containment" was based on perceptions of Soviet desires to undermine capitalist societies and incite protracted civil wars; thereby enabling the spread of Communism.³⁷ Kennan's telegram warned US policymakers that, while capitalist and communist societies could coexist, outright peace could never be achieved with the Soviet Union.³⁸ To Kennan, this conclusion was practically guaranteed given the Soviets' inherent treachery and core belief in the natural state of conflict between the two ideologies.³⁹

³⁴ Weiner, *Legacy*, 8

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 8.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 13.

³⁷ George Kennan, *Long Telegram* (Washington, D.C.: Truman Library, 1946), 2-3.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

While this state of aggression was expected to complicate US-Soviet relations, Soviet designs did not necessarily demand the immediate overthrow of Western powers.⁴⁰ In fact, based on their belief that capitalist societies would invariably collapse, Soviet actions were seldom hurried.⁴¹ Acknowledging this, and advocating a measured, diplomatic approach, Kennan argued that:

In these circumstances it is clear that the main element of any United States policy toward the Soviet Union must be that of a long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies. It is important to note, however, that such a policy has nothing to do with outward histrionics: with threats or blustering or superfluous gestures of outward "toughness." While the Kremlin is basically flexible in its reaction to political realities, it is by no means unamenable to considerations of prestige. Like almost any other government, it can be placed by tactless and threatening gestures in a position where it cannot afford to yield even though this might be dictated by its sense of realism.⁴²

Kennan further cautioned the US against taking impulsive actions toward the Soviet Union, explaining that Soviet leaders were quick to recognize and exploit any losses of temper or self-control.⁴³

This is not to say, however, that Kennan recommended an entirely passive approach. Based on his conviction that the Soviet Union was the weaker of the two powers, Kennan stated that the US should, with reasonable expectations of success, engage in "a policy of firm containment, designed to confront the Russians with unalterable counter-force at every point where they show signs of encroaching upon the interests of a peaceful and stable world."⁴⁴ After all, the US was not necessarily interested in making an ally of the Soviet Union, but in limiting its global influence.

⁴⁰ George Kennan, "Sources of Soviet Conduct," *Foreign Affairs* 25, no. 4 (1947): 574-575.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 581.

For his part, President Truman had long-seen the Soviet Union as a threat to US global interests; in 1941, when the two nations were allied in the fight against Nazism, then-Senator Truman suggested that “if we see that Germany is winning the war we ought to help Russia, and if Russia is winning, we ought to help Germany and in that way let them kill as many as possible.”⁴⁵ Furthermore, all eyes at the time were focused on the growing “Red Menace” in Eastern Europe. Considering the circumstances, few in Washington, D.C. were surprised when President Truman unveiled his far-reaching plans to combat the Soviets.

Greece had been embroiled in civil war since the Nazi’s withdrawal and was in danger of falling to the communist National Liberation Front.⁴⁶ Western policymakers also feared that Turkey would succumb to Soviet pressures and split control of a strategic shipping lane connecting the Aegean and Black Seas.⁴⁷ Undersecretary of State Dean Acheson suggested that if Greece and Turkey were to fall, Communism could spread throughout Southwest Asia.⁴⁸

Speaking before Congress on March 12, 1947, President Truman requested \$400 million in economic and military aid to assist the two nations in their struggles against the communist adversary, and announced his wildly interventionist approach.⁴⁹ President Truman’s belief, which would dictate the US foreign policy of the era, was that “it must be the policy of the United States to support free people who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures.”⁵⁰ Thus, the Truman Doctrine and Cold War were born.

⁴⁵ John Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy during the Cold War*, Revised and Expanded ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 4.

⁴⁶ Michael Beschloss, *Our Documents: 100 Milestone Documents from the National Archives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 194.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

Rise of the Cold War

Cloak and Dagger

Should the US launch its global campaign, it would need an agency up to the task of overseeing and executing its designs. President Truman had been actively seeking a competent successor to the OSS in the brief postwar period between its disbanding and his announcement of the Truman Doctrine. While the directors of the Department of State, FBI, JCS, and the Postmaster General all sought control of a new US intelligence organ, President Truman ultimately accepted the counsel of Donovan's former deputy, Brigadier General John Magruder, who advised that "a new clandestine service [which was beholden to neither the Pentagon nor the State Department] would have to take charge."⁵¹

On January 24, 1946, President Truman called into his office and knighted a reluctant Rear Admiral Sidney Souers "as chief of the 'Cloak and Dagger Group of Snoopers' and 'Director of Centralized Snooping.'"⁵² Recalling the event in his diary, Admiral William Leahy wrote "at lunch today in the White House, with only members of the Staff present, RAdm. Sidney Souers and I were presented with black cloaks, black hats, and wooden daggers, and the President read an amusing directive to us outlining some of our duties."⁵³ This ludicrous and fanciful ceremony marked the creation of the Central Intelligence Group (CIG), placing Souers as the director of some 2,000 intelligence personnel, many of whom "had no idea what they were doing, or what they were supposed to do."⁵⁴ While President Truman later professed that his intelligence service "was intended merely as a center for keeping the President informed on what

⁵¹ Weiner, *Legacy*, 13.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 14.

⁵³ Michael Warner, "Salvage and Liquidation: The Creation of the Central Intelligence Group," *Central Intelligence Agency*, August 3, 2011, accessed February 11, 2016, <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/kent-csi/vol39no5/html/v39i5a13p.htm#rft>

⁵⁴ Weiner, *Legacy*, 13-14.

was going on in the world” and not as a covert spy organization,⁵⁵ his theatrics and now-public actions betray his words.

Shortly after taking office as the second Director of Central Intelligence (DCI), which the Director of Centralized Snooping came to be called, General Hoyt Vandenberg was told by the JCS to make ready for the CIG’s “first covert operation of the Cold War.”⁵⁶ Realizing that covert action was not in his organization’s scope of duties, Vandenberg sent two aides to meet with White House counsel, Clark Clifford, to receive approval for changing the CIG’s mission to that of an “operating agency”; which they received in the absence of any legal authority.⁵⁷ Vandenberg was then granted an additional \$10 million to finance his agency’s various covert operations aimed at undermining the Soviet Union and uncovering its plans.⁵⁸ As involved as it was in global affairs, however, the CIG was ultimately short-lived. On July 26, 1947, President Truman signed the National Security Act of 1947 and authorized the creation of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), among several others.⁵⁹

Central Intelligence Agency and the National Security Act of 1947

Allen Dulles, the lead architect of the CIA and first civilian DCI, believed that the US had all of the necessary resources at its disposal to create the world’s greatest intelligence service, if he could only piece them together.⁶⁰ Never one to be accused of belonging to the ‘rank and file’, Dulles “was not above misleading Congress or his colleagues or even his commander

⁵⁵ Ibid., 3.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 19.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 19-25.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 27.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

in chief.”⁶¹ He envisioned the CIA as an agency that should be “directed by a relatively small but elite corps of men with a passion for anonymity.”⁶²

Dulles’ wish was granted. Under the guidelines of the National Security Act of 1947, the CIA became its own, independent agency which reported only to the Office of the President by way of the newly formed National Security Council (NSC), which, like the CIA, was also formed by the Act.⁶³ The composition of the NSC (four statutory members, which consisted of the President, Vice President, and Secretaries of State and Defense) and lack of accountability it fostered undoubtedly pleased Dulles, whose wish was to “resurrect the wartime covert operations of the OSS.”⁶⁴ To this end, neither Dulles nor the National Security Act made any mention of covert action. Instead and significantly, it was the ambiguously defined scope of the CIA’s duties which created a loophole for the continuation of covert activities.

Section 102, paragraph “d” of the National Security Act charges the CIA with performing routine advisory and analytical intelligence activities, but ends with the curious statement that it is the CIA’s responsibility “to perform such other functions and duties related to intelligence affecting the national security as the National Security Council may from time to time direct.”⁶⁵ In retrospect, the vaguely-worded nature of the paragraph is clearly intentional, given that it has since provided US presidents and the CIA with the specific authority for employing covert action as a policy tool.⁶⁶ In fact, President Truman used this loophole a shocking eighty-one times

⁶¹ Ibid., 26.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ O’Toole, *Honorable Treachery*, 523.

⁶⁴ Weiner, *Legacy*, 27.

⁶⁵ US Congress, *The National Security Act of 1947 – July 26, 1947: Public Law 253*, July 26, 1947, 80th Cong., 1st sess., 1947, S. Doc. 758,

<http://global.oup.com/us/companion.websites/9780195385168/resources/chapter10/nsa/nsa.pdf>

⁶⁶ Weiner, *Legacy*, 28.

during his second term in office;⁶⁷ this volume is surprising, given he purportedly had no intentions of creating a covert agency.

While each US president that has taken office since the CIA's inception has continued to enjoy the use of this loophole, the effects of these operations have seldom been analyzed. The inherent secrecy of most unnamed and unreported covert operations makes it difficult for anyone outside the Executive branch to assess their successes or failures, even decades later. However, the operations which failed to remain secret offer sobering insights into their long-term and damaging effects on US diplomatic efforts and the safety of US citizens. US operations in Iran, Indonesia, Cuba, Afghanistan, Nicaragua, and the modern War on Terror offer especially useful data for assessing these effects, and merit more critical analyses.

Let Slip the Dogs of War

Operation AJAX

Muhammad Musaddiq's rise to office as Iranian Prime Minister in 1951 was enabled by a singular promise to the Iranian people: an end to British imperial influence in Iran.⁶⁸ On May 1, 1951, shortly after taking office, Prime Minister Musaddiq announced that Iranian Parliament had passed the Nationalization Act which transferred the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC) from British to Iranian control.⁶⁹ An additional stipulation of this Act was the expulsion of all British subjects by October of the same year.⁷⁰

In response to the Nationalization Act, the International Court of Justice passed an early-July ruling which demanded the continuation of shared control of the AIOC.⁷¹ Attempting to

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Mayora de Moreas Ruehsen, "Operation 'Ajax' Revisited: Iran, 1953," *Middle Eastern Studies* 29, no. 3 (1993): 467.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 468.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

enforce this ruling, the British military launched a small-scale build-up in the region.⁷² Ever the watchful patriarch and concerned over the potential effects on the oil markets, the Truman Administration offered to mediate the dispute and invited Musaddiq to Washington, D.C. for a series of talks.⁷³

Though these talks failed to yield any favorable results for the US or Great Britain, Musaddiq left quite an impression on those who met him: favorable with the media, though troubling for the Truman Administration. Adding to the White House's fears, after naming Musaddiq their "Man of the Year" in January 1952, *TIME* magazine reported that:

Since [Musaddiq's] rise, U.S. correspondents have been swarming over the Near and Middle East. Their general consensus is that:

- 1) The British position in the whole area is hopeless. They are hated and distrusted almost everywhere...
- 2) If left to 'work out their own destiny' without help, the countries of the Middle East will disintegrate...
- 3) Left to themselves ... they will welcome Communism...
- 4) [and] The U.S will have to make the West's policy in the Middle East, whether it wants to or not.⁷⁴

Much like the Greeks and Turks before them, Iranians would have to be "saved" from their collective weakness for Communism.

To remedy the situation, American and British officials drafted a series of Anglo-American proposals between September 1952 and February 1953, each of which was rejected in turn.⁷⁵ Musaddiq routinely played American and British policymakers against each other. Hoping to forestall any agreements until Dwight D. Eisenhower took office, whom he believed would be friendlier to Iranian objectives, Musaddiq never flinched; he went so far as to outright

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Time, "Man of the Year: Challenge of the East," *TIME* (7 Jan. 1952), pp.18-21.

⁷⁵ Ruehsen, "Operation 'Ajax,'" 469-472.

threaten US officials with welcoming Communism if they did not meet his demands.⁷⁶ Aside from angering both the British and Americans, due to his withholding Iranian oil from the market, Musaddiq's actions also proved devastating for the Iranian economy.⁷⁷

By 1953, the Iranian people had grown weary and resentful. Purportedly “unbeknownst to President Truman,” but certainly well-known among Iranians, the CIA had been conducting poorly-covered covert activities in Iran since 1948.⁷⁸ Adding fuel to the fire, the *New York Times* published a letter written by retired diplomat Ambassador J. Rivers Childs, which “recommended that the Americans and British join forces to invade Iran and divide the country between them.”⁷⁹ Fearing the addition of American imperialism to its already lengthy list of issues, the Iranian press was incensed. A writer for the *Democrat Islami* wrote “We shall kick the Americans out as we shall not allow a group of spies posing as advisors to undermine our country and train a band of traitors in an attempt to rob us of our independence and natural resources.”⁸⁰

Upon taking office, President Eisenhower had already tired of Iranian Oil Crisis. Deeply concerned over the state of the Iranian economy and fearing an imminent fall to Communism,⁸¹ Eisenhower decided that a new tactic was warranted. In a secret meeting in Washington, D.C., President Eisenhower told US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden, “to find some new and imaginative approach to the Persian oil problem, which kept Persia in the Western orbit.”⁸² Secretary of State Dulles and his brother,

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 471-472

⁷⁸ Ibid., 473-474.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 473.

⁸⁰ Letter from R. Melbourne, with translation of editorial ('Mosadeq Must Eradicate American Influence Before it is Too Late,' February 10, 1953), February 13, 1953, F0371/104581, PRO.

⁸¹ Ruehsen, “Operation ‘Ajax,’” 473.

⁸² Ibid., 474.

DCI Allen Dulles, rightly took Eisenhower's words as an effective "green light" for covert action aimed at deposing Prime Minister Musaddiq – Operation Ajax.⁸³

To achieve this end, the CIA undertook a campaign of covert propaganda distribution and attempts at inspiring a coup d'état, particularly through the Shah of Iran, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi.⁸⁴ After several failed efforts to reach the Shah through his various family members, Kermit Roosevelt, the "head of the Middle Eastern Division of the [Office of Policy Coordination]," met with Pahlavi directly in the hopes of convincing the Shah to issue a pair of royal decrees: the first, dismissing Prime Minister Musaddiq; the second, appointing General Fazlollah Zahedi, a convicted Nazi sympathizer, as the new Prime Minister.⁸⁵ Roosevelt's efforts were successful, and the Shah signed the decrees on August 13, 1953, albeit to the dismay of the British, who described Zahedi as a "six-foot-two ladies' man with a taste for silk underwear, expensive prostitutes, and opium."⁸⁶

After this initial success, though, the CIA's plans quickly unraveled: information regarding the planned delivery of the first decree to Musaddiq was leaked and the armed envoy was overpowered and detained by Musaddiq's guards; Zahedi assumed that the plan had failed and sought safe haven in a CIA safehouse; the Shah fled the country with his wife; members of the communist Tudeh Party took to the streets for demonstrations; Americans were arrested by the state police on sight; and lastly, Roosevelt received a cable advising him to leave the country.⁸⁷

Unaware though suspicious of US involvement in his attempted ousting, Musaddiq agreed to meet with US Ambassador Loy Henderson. Henderson dismissed the Prime Minister's

⁸³ Ibid,

⁸⁴ Ibid., 474-477.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 478.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

suspicious and demanded that he order his police to put an end to the arrests of Americans. Otherwise, Henderson threatened, the US would end its aid missions in Iran.⁸⁸ The Prime Minister relented and ordered his Chief of Police to not only cease the arrests but also to break up the Tudeh demonstrations.⁸⁹

This mistake proved Musaddiq's undoing. He had now alienated his military, police, and Tudeh supporters, and over the course of seven days had completely lost his popular support.⁹⁰ By the evening of August 19, 1953, General Zahedi and his men had disarmed the loyalists and Zahedi announced his new position as Prime Minister.⁹¹

While Operation Ajax was initially regarded as wholly successful in Washington, D.C., history has since proven there was little cause for celebration. This was an operation which succeeded in securing its primary objectives in spite of itself and failed in most every other measurable way. The most obvious failure of the operation was the CIA's inability to maintain secrecy, clearly demonstrating its complicity in the coup and leaving "a legacy of anti-Americanism that continues to hamper the conduct of [its] foreign policy" to this day.⁹² Furthermore, not only did US actions result in decades of instability followed by a bloody revolution in which thousands of Iranians died,⁹³ they also fostered an environment which effectively guaranteed the eventual rise of a leader who was diametrically opposed to US objectives: Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.⁹⁴

⁸⁸ Ibid., 478-479.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 479-480.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid., 480-481.

⁹² Isenberg, *Policy Analysis*, 1.

⁹³ Tim McDaniel, *Autocracy, Modernization, and Revolution in Russia and Iran* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 222.

⁹⁴ Mark Lowenthal, *Intelligence: From Secrets to Policy*, 5th ed. (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2012), 196.

Khomeini's rise to power is especially troubling when one considers the later statements of US officials who played key roles in informing the policy decisions of the time. Former Secretary of State Dean Acheson confessed that the Truman and Eisenhower administrations miscalculated Musaddiq's intentions, stating that "we were perhaps, slow in realizing that he was essentially a rich, reactionary, feudal-minded Persian inspired by a fanatical hatred of the British ... He was a great actor and a great gambler."⁹⁵ Former head of the Policy Planning Staff, Paul Nitze, went a step further in admitting that "[Musaddiq] had a great contempt for his fellow Iranians. He had no inclination whatsoever toward Communists. He just miscalculated. He thought he could get a better deal from Eisenhower's administration."⁹⁶

Two truths have arisen from the US intervention in the Iranian Oil Crisis. The first is that Musaddiq would have welcomed a US partnership in Iran. For all of his gamesmanship in negotiating with the Western powers, he was hopeful that the US would provide a boost to his struggling nation by filling the void left by the British after their expulsion.⁹⁷ Secondly, and perhaps most troubling, Musaddiq would have proven his own undoing, even in the absence of US intervention. By the time the military coup was underway, Musaddiq had already moved to dissolve the Iranian Parliament and alienated the last of his allies.⁹⁸ It is now widely acknowledged that he would have been deposed at the hands of his own countrymen soon thereafter.⁹⁹

Given these considerations, Operation Ajax was an abject failure. The Truman and Eisenhower administrations simply let the "Red Scare" and their democratic hubris get the better of them. They seized an opportunity to employ their new, covert agency in what they believed

⁹⁵ Ruehsen, "Operation 'Ajax,'" 469.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 482.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 482-483.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 482-483.

would be an expedient and effective subversion of the Communist threat, all the while failing to realize intervention was unnecessary. Instead, US actions to defeat a manufactured threat only resulted in thousands of deaths and decades of diplomatic stalemate.

Indonesia

Far less is known regarding the individual actions of the CIA and its agents in Indonesia between 1958 and 1967. However, the actions of US-backed dictator General Suharto' upon seizing power offer a grave and startling reminder of the unpredictable outcomes of covert affairs. In what was becoming a common theme, the Eisenhower Administration deeply distrusted then-Indonesian President Sukarno, who had established the communist-leaning "Guided Democracy,"¹⁰⁰ and feared what may occur if the entire country were to fall prey to Soviet designs.¹⁰¹

In 1958, a purportedly organic coup began on several islands in Indonesia. Sensing that the situation was ripe for US involvement, President Eisenhower launched what was the "largest covert paramilitary action yet seen in [US] history."¹⁰² In support for the coup and in the hopes of installing then-General Suharto as President, the US provided the rebels with military equipment and air support from a fleet of B-26 bombers;¹⁰³ this air support provided the Sukarno regime with evidence of American involvement when, on May 18, 1958, the regime shot down one of the bombers and captured the US pilot, Allen Lawrence Pope.¹⁰⁴

The 1958 coup soon failed but did little to diminish US preoccupation in the region. Rather than face another paramilitary defeat, President Eisenhower elected to pursue a "low

¹⁰⁰ Daniel Lev, *The Transition to Guided Democracy: Indonesian Politics, 1957-1959*, First Equinox ed. (Singapore: Equinox Publishing, 2009), 61-62.

¹⁰¹ Jaechum Kim, "U.S. Covert Action in Indonesia in the 1960s: Assessing the Motives and Consequences," *Journal of International and Area Studies* 9, no. 2 (2002): 66.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 66.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

posture” covert political campaign, a program which Eisenhower’s successors, Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson, would continue to employ in hopes of undermining military support to Sukarno.¹⁰⁵

By 1965, largely due to Sukarno’s antagonistic and alienating policies, the situation in Indonesia had deteriorated. After biding its time employing less intrusive covert means, the US government saw that the nation was once again ripe for paramilitary intervention.¹⁰⁶ Another coup followed with the assistance of the CIA and, this time, succeeded where the first had failed. Although Suharto did not officially become President until two years later, he immediately launched a violent purge aimed at ridding the nation of its Indonesian Communist Party.¹⁰⁷

Though US involvement in Indonesia was flatly denied to the American public, it was being actively discussed in various organs of the government. In a nod to the Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson administrations’ nonchalance in the matter, Ambassador Marshall Green explained to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that “Of course, nobody knows [the total number of deaths]. We merely judge it by whole villages that have been depopulated.”¹⁰⁸ Though estimates vary widely, scholars agree that a minimum of 500,000 Indonesian communists were killed in the US-backed dictator’s purge¹⁰⁹ and another 1.5 million were imprisoned by 1968.¹¹⁰ While the administrations had no way of predicting the absolute bloodbath Suharto’s rise would bring about, one would hope that the lessons learned in Indonesia would be applied to other conflicts in the future, primarily that meddling in sovereign, semi-

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 66-67.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 69-70.

¹⁰⁷ Weiner, *Legacy*, 300-301.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 301.

¹⁰⁹ Isenberg, “Policy Analysis,” 5; Scott Burchill, “Absolving the Dictator,” *Australian Quarterly* 73, no. 3 (2001), 1; Adrian Vickers, *A History of Modern Indonesia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 159-160.

¹¹⁰ Vickers, *Modern Indonesia*, 159-160.

hostile nations' political and social processes almost never ends well. Unfortunately, this has not been the case.

Bay of Pigs Invasion

The US has a long and sordid history of subversion in Latin American countries. In fact, the US is so well-known in the region for engaging in covert operations, its hand is often suspected in orchestrating global conflicts even in the absence of evidence or an admission of guilt. However, in the case of the Bay of Pigs Invasion in Cuba, mere suspicion was replaced by demonstrable proof of US involvement. To better understand the history of US-Cuban tensions, though, it is best to first analyze their root causes.

The effective beginning of the Spanish-American War, in which US control of Cuba was wrested from Spain, was the February 15, 1898, sinking of the U.S.S. *Maine*, a US warship dispatched by President William McKinley to Havana, Cuba.¹¹¹ Days after the ship exploded in Havana Harbor, the US Navy Court of Inquiry launched an investigation which surmised that a submerged mine of unknown origin was the likely cause of the explosion, implicating the Spanish government's forces that occupied Cuba as either directly involved in the attack or negligent in its prevention.¹¹²

American demand for intervention was nearly universal following the release of the investigation's findings, to the point that a man who publicly objected to conflict with Spain was reportedly killed on the spot.¹¹³ By April 19, 1898, the US Congress passed a joint resolution for use of military force against the Spanish in Cuba and US Naval ships arrived only three days later to establish a blockade.¹¹⁴ Though US military personnel were deployed to engage the

¹¹¹ O'Toole, *Honorable Treachery*, 224-225.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 226.

¹¹³ The Advocate of Peace, "Vengeance and Violence," *The Advocate of Peace* 60, no. 6 (1898): 127.

¹¹⁴ O'Toole, *Honorable Treachery*, 226.

Spanish enemy, the conflict also saw the now commonplace covert practice of mobilizing an insurgency to fight a proxy war.¹¹⁵

While no official, universally accepted determination has been made on the cause of the *Maine*'s destruction,¹¹⁶ generations of Cubans have laid blame on the US government for intentionally sinking the ship as a pretext for war.¹¹⁷ Cuban history textbooks state that the suspicious events surrounding the *Maine*'s explosion "formed part of a vast plan of warfare," and a Cuban monument reads "To the Victims of the *Maine*, Sacrificed for Voracious American Imperialism in its Efforts to Take Control of Cuba."¹¹⁸

In the decades that followed, Cuban resentment kindled over America's interventionist policies and the actions of US-backed dictators. This resentment was shared by Cuba's Latin American neighbors, who were immediately distrustful and suspicious of any dictator with the appearance of receiving US support.¹¹⁹ Knowing this, US policymakers were hardly surprised to witness Fidel Castro's rise.

Contrasting the Batista regime's brutal methods, Fidel Castro's revolution was fueled by promises for social justice and self-determination.¹²⁰ While members of the CIA initially proposed supporting Castro's guerrilla war in the form of weapons and finances, the pro-Castro sentiments in Washington, D.C. soon turned hostile and the CIA began plotting his assassination or exile.¹²¹ This abrupt change in policy was largely attributed to the realization that Castro was

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 232.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 226.

¹¹⁷ Tom Miller, "Remember the Maine," *Smithsonian Magazine*, February 1998, <http://www.tommlerbooks.com/maine.pdf>, 10.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

¹¹⁹ Michael Dunne, "Perfect Failure: The USA, Cuba and the Bay of Pigs, 1961," *The Political Quarterly* 82, no. 3 (2011), 449-450.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ Weiner, *Legacy*, 179-181.

not the democratic savior of Cuba that he was originally thought to be, but rather an avowed communist.¹²²

DCI Dulles gave the order on January 8, 1960, for CIA Clandestine Services Director Richard Bissell to form a special task force aimed at bringing about the overthrow of Fidel Castro.¹²³ The original plan, proposed to and approved by Vice President Richard M. Nixon on March 2, 1960, was to employ a combination of sabotage, economic subversion, political propaganda, and the use of “a drug, which if placed in Castro’s food, would make him behave in such an irrational manner that a public appearance could well have very damaging results to him.”¹²⁴ In a subsequent briefing to both the Vice President and President Eisenhower on March 17, 1960, DCI Dulles and Bissell proposed a more involved plan that entailed the following: creating “a responsible, appealing and unified Cuban opposition” overseen by “recruited agents”; the use of a covert propaganda radio station which would transmit messages into Havana that were designed to incite an uprising; the training of sixty Cubans by CIA agents in the US Army’s jungle warfare training center at Fort Sherman, Panama; and the dropping of weapons and ammunition into friendly areas of Cuba.¹²⁵ While President Eisenhower approved of the plan, General Andrew Goodpaster’s notes from the meeting suggest the Executive’s approval was more for lack of a better option and that the President was keenly-aware of the threats posed by any type of leaks regarding the agenda.¹²⁶

While plans for Castro’s overthrow were still being refined, the Eisenhower Administration’s negotiations with the Soviet Union were dealt a crushing blow. Although ostensibly hesitant to do so, Eisenhower authorized a U2 flight originating in Pakistan and flying

¹²² *Ibid.*, 181-182.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 180.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 181.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 182.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

over the Soviet Union.¹²⁷ The spy plane was shot down and its pilot, Francis Gary Powers, was captured by the Soviets on May 1, 1960, effectively ending the brief *détente*.¹²⁸ Although the President and his CIA directors attempted to create cover stories for the crash and deny any culpability, by May 9, Eisenhower was forced admit both the knowledge and responsibility for the mission.¹²⁹ Resigning to the fact that he could no longer leave a legacy “of international peace and reconciliation,” Eisenhower changed course, abandoned restraint, and set about “policing as many parts of the planet as possible before leaving office.”¹³⁰

Global CIA operations were on the upswing and Fort Sherman did not have the necessary infrastructure or personnel to train the number of recruits arriving. To alleviate the overburdening of its training center, the CIA secured another in Guatemala, named Camp Trax, through negotiations with Guatemalan President Manuel Ydigoras Fuentes, nearly causing a Guatemalan coup in the process.¹³¹ Emboldened by the President’s new stance and hoping to negate the necessity for an invasion, Bissell branched out and contracted a Mafia hit on Fidel Castro while his agents formed an assassination plot of their own.¹³² While the mission’s planners were getting creative, though, the mission itself was slowly crumbling.

The bumbling CIA effort to arm Cuban rebels proved disastrous. Only three of the thirty airdrop missions achieved any levels of success.¹³³ On a September 28 mission, “a pallet of machine guns, rifles, and Colt .45s ... missed its target by seven miles. Castro’s forces seized the arms, captured the Cuban CIA agent set to receive them, and shot him. The pilot got lost on his

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 184-185.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 185.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 186.

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 190.

way back and landed in southern Mexico, where the local police seized the plane.”¹³⁴ CIA agents blamed Cuban pilots for the failures, while the pilots hurled accusations that the rebels had been infiltrated by Castro’s intelligence services.¹³⁵ Leaks and media coverage were mounting and anti-Castro sentiments among rebels were waning.¹³⁶ Castro’s spies had infiltrated the training camps by posing as Cuban exiles in Florida and volunteering for training.¹³⁷ Latin American newspapers were reporting on the activities at Camp Trax, and by April 1960, Castro announced US intentions to the world.¹³⁸ By the time President John F. Kennedy’s inauguration had occurred, even the *New York Times* had reported on the so-called covert operation. Like his predecessors, Kennedy is eulogized as reluctant to engage in such activities.¹³⁹ He was not reluctant, however, in playing an active role in the final planning process, modifying the designs to the point that two key planners in the CIA threatened to resign.¹⁴⁰ Finally, the CIA’s lead orchestrator, Richard Bissell, was falling apart at the seams. He consistently lied to both his superiors and subordinates about the operation’s prospects for success and turned a blind eye to any evidence which suggested otherwise.¹⁴¹

When the Bay of Pigs Invasion finally did occur, it was already doomed to failure. On April 15, 1961, nine B-26 bombers departed Nicaragua; eight were headed to Cuba to attack strategic air bases; and, in a feeble attempt to prop up plausible deniability, one flew to Miami where the pilot posed as a defector from Castro’s Air Force.¹⁴² The following day, the invasion force of approximately 1,500 rebels was nearing Cuba. Unbeknownst to them, the first wave of

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ O’Toole, *Honorable Treachery*, 576.

¹³⁶ Weiner, *Legacy*, 190.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 186.

¹³⁸ Dunne, “Perfect Failure,” 454-455.

¹³⁹ O’Toole, *Honorable Treachery*, 578.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 579.

¹⁴¹ Weiner, *Legacy*, 189-191.

¹⁴² O’Toole, *Honorable Treachery*, 580.

bombers had failed to destroy many of the targeted Cuban jets and the second wave had been called off by President Kennedy's National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy.¹⁴³ When the rebel forces landed in the early-morning of April 17, they were met with immediate resistance from the ground and sky. The rebels quickly ran out of ammunition and were pinned down for the duration of the 60-hour battle. By the end of the fighting, 114 men were killed and another 1,189 had been captured.¹⁴⁴ The Administration was embarrassed and Cubans were enraged.

While some operations may hinge on a single failure, the Bay of Pigs Invasion clearly had several. In order to maintain secrecy, planning for the covert invasion employed unique, unorthodox structures for the chain of command and information flow.¹⁴⁵ Those who designed this architecture neglected to include the Department of Defense (DoD) in any stage of planning, which could have been leveraged for advice on the feasibility of the operation as well as the training of guerrilla fighters.¹⁴⁶

Additionally, the CIA was conducting its operations with a combination of overwhelming arrogance and flawed intelligence.¹⁴⁷ The fact that Bissell willfully misrepresented the facts is beside the point. It was clear to anyone with knowledge of the situation that there was little reason for confidence in employing Cuban nationals to wittingly pursue US objectives. Furthermore, the foolhardy plan for using the selfsame aircraft to drop propaganda leaflets immediately after providing air support to the invasion¹⁴⁸ hardly demonstrated desires for peace and unity. The most startling intelligence failure, though, was the CIA's false assumption that a popular Cuban uprising would occur as a result of the operation, failing to identify the impact

¹⁴³ Weiner, *Legacy*, 201-202.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 203.

¹⁴⁵ Dunne, "Perfect Failure," 453.

¹⁴⁶ Piero Gleijeses, "Ships in the Night: The CIA, the White House and the Bay of Pigs," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 27, no. 1 (1995), 19.

¹⁴⁷ Dunne, "Perfect Failure," 453.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 453.

that Castro's knowledge of the invasion would have.¹⁴⁹ Once the opening airstrike had occurred, but prior to the invasion force's arrival, Castro ordered the arrests of between 100,000 and 200,000 Cubans he suspected of disloyalty to the government, effectively nullifying any support to the expected revolt.¹⁵⁰

The covert invasion would have been wholly unnecessary had presidents Eisenhower or Kennedy opted for overt, military action instead. Given his ultimate election based on his anti-communist and anti-Castro campaign promises, President Kennedy in particular had the requisite backing of the American people to engage in such an action had he chosen to do so.¹⁵¹

Intelligence collection for an overt operation would have been comparatively unhurried and more concerted, and would have never relied on an indigenous uprising which would never materialize to guarantee its success. Furthermore, well-accustomed to orchestrating military interventions, the DoD would have not only been involved in the planning of the operation, but its lead.

Unfortunately, it seems that President Kennedy shared Eisenhower's optimism, and, seeing a more expedient method for defeating Castro, ignored the obvious signs that any shred of plausible deniability had been compromised.¹⁵² After all, Castro and a multitude of news agencies had already announced US intentions in Cuba and the entire world knew what the US was doing at both Camp Trax and Fort Sherman; yet, the Administration still inexplicably moved forward with the covert invasion. As with other covert operations, hubris and desires for an absence of accountability trumped reason.

¹⁴⁹ O'Toole, *Honorable Treachery*, 583.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ Gleijeses, "Ships in the Night," 24-25.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 12.

Operation Cyclone

Beginning in 1979, Operation Cyclone was a US covert operation with the stated goals of containing Communism and undermining the Soviet Union's influence through fostering "Islamic fundamentalism in Central Asia."¹⁵³ In order to accomplish this feat, the US began a campaign of CIA-led training, funding, and arming of Mujahedeen rebels in hopes that they could repel the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.¹⁵⁴ Although the film *Charlie Wilson's War* may have successfully romanticized CIA and diplomatic activities as part of Operation Cyclone, it failed in depicting the true costs of the campaign, which should be measured in the resultant number of lives lost rather than dollars spent or weapons systems provided.

In what was the "CIA's biggest gunrunning mission," the US, Chinese, Saudi Arabians, Egyptians, and British all allocated weapons, finances, or both, to eventually make their way to Mujahedeen fighters scattered throughout Afghanistan.¹⁵⁵ While the operation was ultimately successful, it was hardly an organized, controlled effort. CIA agents transferred funds and weapons to the Pakistani Intelligence service, who "skimmed off a large share before delivering them to the exiled political leaders of the Afghan resistance in [Peshawar, Pakistan], east of the Khyber Pass."¹⁵⁶ From there, rebel leaders would take their own share prior to transporting the goods into Afghanistan for delivery to the fighters.¹⁵⁷

Frustrated over the reported successes of the Soviets when fighting the Mujahedeen, Deputy Director for Operations John McMahon travelled to the region to meet with the warlords and discuss the causes of the Mujahedeen failures. During these meetings, it was explained to

¹⁵³ Bryan Turner, *The Routledge International Handbook of Globalization Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 264-265.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ Weiner, *Legacy*, 444-445.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 445.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

McMahon that the goods were pilfered because “someday the [US] will not be here, and [we will] be left on our own to carry on our struggle.”¹⁵⁸ It was also discovered that the Pakistanis passed out the weapons and funds to those who they believed were most capable of fighting the Soviets. Surely by happenstance, those who received the lion’s share were also “the most committed Islamists.”¹⁵⁹

In addition to the materiel and financial support, the CIA also provided Mujahedeen fighters with sabotage training in Williamsburg, Virginia, and devoted \$4 billion to establishing militant training locations in Pakistan.¹⁶⁰ This is not to say, however, that the Mujahedeen were completely reliant on external support. Even with US aid, a large portion of the Mujahedeen’s operating funds came from the export of heroin, which was produced and sold into the world market by the rebels.¹⁶¹ In fact, the rebel controlled areas of Afghanistan at the time “were the world’s leading source of heroin exports to the US and Europe.”¹⁶²

Focusing on Soviet involvement in the region, a CIA intelligence estimate from September 1980, proved incredibly accurate; stating that:

The Soviets would be most reluctant to introduce large numbers of ground forces into Afghanistan to keep in power an Afghan government that had lost the support of virtually all segments of the population. Not only would the Soviets find themselves in an awkward morass in Afghanistan, but their actions could seriously damage their relations with India, and—to a lesser degree—with Pakistan.¹⁶³

Upon deploying forces to the region, the Soviet Union became entrenched in a military quagmire and suffered staggering losses in both personnel and materiel. Of the approximate 620,000 Soviet soldiers and advisors deployed to Afghanistan, 441,136 became some form of casualty.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Turner, *Globalization*, 264.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ US Central Intelligence Agency, Director of Central Intelligence, *The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan: Implications for Warning*, TCS-3219-80 (Washington, D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 1980), Accessed February 23, 2016. http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/89801/DOC_0000278538.pdf. 15.

Of these, 10,751 were permanently disabled; 415,932 became ill due to the harsh climate and unsanitary conditions; and 14,453 died.¹⁶⁴ Of those deaths, 9,511 occurred during combat operations; 2,386 died later from combat-sustained wounds; 817 were victims of various illnesses; and 1,739 died by accident or suicide.¹⁶⁵ Materiel losses were equally catastrophic. The Soviets lost: 451 aircraft, most of which were helicopters; 1,314 armored personnel carriers and infantry fighting vehicles; 433 pieces of artillery; 147 tanks; and lastly, 11,369 fuel and cargo trucks.¹⁶⁶

For those in Washington, D.C. who oversaw and orchestrated Operation Cyclone, the campaign was nothing short of a resounding success. For CIA Station Chief Howard Hart, it was a dream come true. Recalling it later, Hart gleefully remarked “I was the first chief of station ever sent abroad with this wonderful order: ‘Go kill Soviet soldiers’Imagine! I loved it.”¹⁶⁷ However joyous the mood may have been, all did not go as planned.

The toll the Afghan-Soviet War had on civilians bordered on genocide. An estimated one million civilians were killed and another three million fled as refugees.¹⁶⁸ The resultant international condemnation of the Soviets for their concurrent operations in Afghanistan and Poland was swift and absolute. While the US was cast as the Soviet Union’s moral superior, its taking part in the condemnation put an end to the second détente between the two nations, giving rise to what became called the “Second Cold War.”¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁴ G.F. Krivosheev, *Soviet Casualties and Combat Losses in the Twentieth Century* (London: Greenhill Books, 1997), 286-8.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ Weiner, *Legacy*, 444.

¹⁶⁸ Steve Galster, "The September 11th Sourcebooks: Volume II: Afghanistan: Lessons From the Last War," *The National Security Archive*, October 9, 2001, accessed February 25, 2016, <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB57/essay.html>

¹⁶⁹ Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005), 590.

While the rekindled animosity in the Cold War was an undesirable setback, an even more damaging consequence of Operation Cyclone was the eventual rise to power of approximately 100,000 CIA-trained, armed, and funded Mujahedeen rebels.¹⁷⁰ The Taliban crystalized from the Mujahedeen after years of infighting, and, with Pakistan's support, affected the overthrow of the Afghan government on September 27, 1996, filling the power vacuum left by the Soviet's departure and "setting in motion the events that led to the terrorist attack of 11 September, 2001."¹⁷¹

Thousands more of the former Mujahedeen returned to their countries of origin and formed a variety of terrorist and insurgent organizations.¹⁷² Noteworthy terrorists who sprang from the ranks of the Mujahedeen and whose attacks have killed thousands around the world include: Osama bin Laden, Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman, and members of the Armed Islamic Group, Jamaat al-Islamiyya, and al-Qaeda, among many others.¹⁷³ In a dismissive and trivial attempt at explaining this outcome, Deputy Director McMahon later stated that "in covert action ... you always have to think of the endgame before you start it. And we don't always do that."¹⁷⁴ The fatal flaw in this statement is the arrogance in assuming that, provided the CIA and Executive take the necessary precautions, such outcomes can even be predicted and thereby avoided.

Nicaraguan Contras, President Reagan, and EO 12333

Led by future Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega and named after Augusto César Sandino, the Sandinista National Liberation Front (Sandinistas) rose to power in 1979, after the

¹⁷⁰ Robert Durham, *False Flags, Covert Operations, & Propaganda* (Raleigh: Lulu Press, 2014), 410-412.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷² Peter Bergen and Alec Reynolds, "Blowback Revisited: Today's Insurgents in Iraq Are Tomorrow's Terrorists," *Foreign Affairs* 84, no. 6 (2005), 2-4.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ Weiner, *Legacy*, 445.

successful populist revolution ousting the oppressive and brutal Somoza regime.¹⁷⁵ The Sandinistas' purported goals were the achievements of workplace unionization, agrarian reform, expanded education, improved civil rights, and the advancement of other, popular socialist objectives.¹⁷⁶ As was the case with the governments of other Latin American countries, US policymakers could not stand idly by and watch the rise of a socialist government that was potentially friendly to Communism.¹⁷⁷ As such, US covert activities in Nicaragua began well before the Sandinistas successful revolution¹⁷⁸ and would continue in earnest upon creation of the US-backed Contra rebels from the remains of "the old Nicaraguan national guard and other opposing groups."¹⁷⁹ US covert action in Nicaragua was intended to: deny Sandinista support to a popular El Salvadoran communist-sympathizing revolution; pressure the Sandinistas into accepting democratization; achieve "security arrangements satisfactory to the [US] and the rest of Central America"; and in its failures, affect the overthrow of Ortega's government.¹⁸⁰

An additional policy objective at the time, which President Ronald Reagan was working tirelessly to secure, was the expansion of the CIA's mission under the guise of restraining the intelligence community. In 1981, less than a year after taking office, President Reagan signed Executive Order (EO) 12333 into law. While the EO and its subsequent, department-specific regulations are often regarded by military personnel as placing massive restrictions on DoD operations, the CIA's mission was greatly expanded. Unlike its predecessors, EOs 11905 and

¹⁷⁵ Héctor Perla, Jr., "Heirs of Sandino: The Nicaraguan Revolution and the U.S.-Nicaragua Solidarity Movement," *Latin American Perspectives* 36, no. 6 (2009), 80-83.

¹⁷⁶ Perla, Jr., "Heirs," 80-84; Gary Prevost, "The Nicaraguan Revolution: Six Years after the Sandinista Electoral Defeat," *Third World Quarterly* 17, no. 2 (1996), 312-318.

¹⁷⁷ Perla, Jr., "Heirs," 86.

¹⁷⁸ Lee Hamilton and Daniel Inouye, *Report of the Congressional Committees Investigating the Iran-Contra Affair: With Supplemental, Minority, and Additional Views* (Washington, D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 1989), 14.

¹⁷⁹ Richard Sobel, "Contra Aid Fundamentals: Exploring the Intricacies and the Issues," *Political Science Quarterly* 110, no. 2 (1995), 288.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 302-303.

12036, signed by Presidents Ford and Carter, respectively, EO 12333 unleashed the intelligence community as a whole and the CIA in particular.¹⁸¹

Along with charging the CIA with conducting all covert operations “unless the President determines that another agency is more likely to achieve a particular objective,” EO 12333 also empowered the agency, in coordination with the FBI, with conducting domestic counterintelligence operations.¹⁸² This was, of course, as long as the CIA abided by the guidelines established by the Attorney General and, its own leader, the DCI.¹⁸³ As of EO 12333’s signing, the same agency that had bungled the Bay of Pigs Invasion, continually misrepresented the facts of its operations to American policymakers and public, goaded guerrilla fighters into armed conflicts, and misled nations’ governments into pursuing US-friendly objectives (often to their own detriment), also had the authorization to conduct its operations within the US.

The development of EO 12333 notwithstanding, the Reagan Administration initially placed on emphasis on diplomatic measures in Nicaragua. However, this attention soon shifted to a protracted and varied covert campaign when the Reagan Administration grossly miscalculated Ortega’s response to what would be the final purely diplomatic action of the conflict. In an attempt to coerce the Nicaraguan government into abandoning its supply of arms to El Salvador, President Reagan announced the cessation of US assistance to Nicaragua, which was to come in the form of US Agency for International Development wheat shipments and \$15 million in government funds.¹⁸⁴ The Ortega government characterized the move as “interventionism,

¹⁸¹ Athan Theoharis, *The Quest for Absolute Security: The Failed Relations Among U.S. Intelligence Agencies* (Chicago: Ivan R Dee, 2007), 223.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ William Leogrande, “Making the Economy Scream: US Economic Sanctions against Sandinista Nicaragua,” *Third World Quarterly* 17, no. 2 (1996), 330-331.

blackmail, and Yankee economic aggression,” and America’s enemies were quick to capitalize on the situation.¹⁸⁵ The Soviet Union offered to provide 20,000 tons of wheat to offset the shipment Reagan had cancelled; Cuba offered “\$64 million in technical aid,” and Libya guaranteed a \$100 million loan.¹⁸⁶

Having given up on finessing the Sandinistas, the Reagan Administration then concentrated its efforts on their overthrow. Between 1981 and 1990, the US provided Contra rebels with an estimated \$322 million in financial aid alone, of which approximately \$16-25 million was procured through the controversial sales of weapons to Iran.¹⁸⁷ While this aid was intended to fund a proxy war with the Sandinistas, the Reagan Administration took significant steps to bolster its chances of success. The CIA set about creating “a special commando force of CIA contract agents,” the Unilaterally Controlled Latino Assets (UCLAs), who were recruited from throughout Latin America and charged with sabotaging “ports, refineries, boats and bridges, and [trying] to make to look like the [Contras] had done it.”¹⁸⁸ Working alongside US Special Forces personnel, the UCLAs conducted a minimum of twenty attacks on Nicaraguan ports and infrastructure, primarily targeting ships and facilities that held petroleum products.¹⁸⁹ The attacks devastated the port economy. In a single operation on October 10, 1984, the UCLAs destroyed 3.2 million gallons of fuel, injured 112 civilians, and caused the evacuation of approximately 20,000 more.¹⁹⁰ In addition to the sabotage operations, the Reagan Administration and CIA employed a variety of other covert methods, which included: supplying weapons to the Contras; using bribery and propaganda to undermine Contra-Sandinista negotiations;

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 331.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ Sobel, “Contra Aid,” 288-289; *Ibid.*, 295.

¹⁸⁸ Leogrande, “Making the Economy,” 340.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 340-341.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 341.

“blackmailing” Costa Rican government officials to support the proxy war; laundering funds through foreign and private businesses; and lastly, using anti-ship mines in Nicaraguan harbors to disrupt shipping operations.¹⁹¹

The fact that US covert action in Nicaragua remained unknown for any length of time is a mystery unto itself. However, by the end of 1986, the Reagan Administration’s secrets had come unraveled. A US cargo plane carrying weapons for the Contras had been shot down; the Speaker of the Iranian Parliament was publicly hinting about deals with the US; and Oliver North was relieved by President Reagan, ironically for carrying out his orders in diverting funds from US weapons sales in Iran to support the Contras which was in direct violation of the Boland Amendments.¹⁹²

While much of the political backlash centered on the arms-for-hostage deals in Iran, the fallout over US actions in Nicaragua was largely focused on the Boland Amendment violations and blatant lies told to Congress by President Reagan and State Department official Elliot Abrams. Speaking on the downing of the cargo plane, Reagan confidently announced that “there is no government connection with that at all.”¹⁹³ Following the President’s lead, Abrams responded to questions of funding the Contras by remarking that, other than being pleased with the successes of the Contras, the US government had no connections to the developments.¹⁹⁴ By the end of the operations, both statements were seen for the lies they clearly were. The US Congress, along with the American people, felt deceived and betrayed.

Further insulting those with knowledge of the situation, most press accounts following the discovery of US operations in Nicaragua (especially those originating in the White House)

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Weiner, *Legacy*, 470-474.

¹⁹³ Peter Kornbluh, “The Iran-Contra Scandal: A Postmortem,” *World Policy Journal* 5, no. 1 (1988), 135.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

attempted to paint the Contra rebels in a positive light. Gambling on continued public ignorance of the situation, President Reagan likened the Contras to American revolutionaries, arguing that the rebels were “the moral equivalent of our founding fathers.”¹⁹⁵ However, this praise was patently false. Intelligence reporting at the time demonstrated that the recipients of US funds and weapons were arms dealers, narcotics traffickers, and known terrorists.¹⁹⁶ So, how could the President and officials within the Administration, having read the reports, make such offensive and demonstrably false claims? The simple truth is that none of them expected all of the details would come to light. This is perhaps the greatest contribution to covert action’s popularity among the Executive: the belief that, so long as the public remains ignorant to the particulars, anything goes.

Unmanned Aerial Vehicles in the War on Terror

Similar to other covert means, the US government’s employment of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) to conduct targeted killings raises serious questions as to the prudence of such practices. However, the use of UAVs for this purpose also has two key departures from the covert norm. The first of these variations is that targeted killings have no reasonable expectations for maintaining secrecy. After all, little doubt exists as to which nation sponsored an attack when Hellfire missiles unexpectedly fall from the sky, especially when they strike a target or targets with suspected ties to terrorism. The second departure is that, given the recent government killings of US citizens while overseas, one must also question the practice’s constitutionality.

Since being elected to office, President Barack H. Obama has hastily and consistently defended his administration’s policy for targeted UAV killings and has routinely told his aides

¹⁹⁵ Roger Peace, *A Call to Conscience: The Anti-Contra War Campaign* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012), 31.

¹⁹⁶ Kornbluh, “Scandal,” 132-133.

“let’s kill the people who are trying to kill us.”¹⁹⁷ Although such sentiments have enjoyed widespread acceptance, forming a legal rationale for targeted killings of US individuals proved difficult for the US Department of Justice (DOJ). In fact, the White House and DOJ refused to acknowledge their justification for the program’s methods until their so-called *Lawfulness of a Lethal Operation Directed Against a U.S. Citizen Who is a Senior Operational Leader of Al-Qa’ida or an Associated Force* (White Paper) was leaked to *NBC News* in early-2013.¹⁹⁸ While the White Paper was purportedly drafted in preparation for the UAV strike on Anwar al-Awlaki, it remains unsigned and is dated November 8, 2011, approximately two months after al-Awlaki’s death.¹⁹⁹

The DOJ took great pains in fabricating the arguments used in the White Paper. However, careful analysis of its logic demonstrates the DOJ’s willingness to renounce reason and constitutional protections in favor of crafting any justifications which support the administration’s unconstitutional designs. The first of the White Paper’s many flaws can be found in the requirements for a target to be considered viable. In order to satisfy these prerequisites, a proposed target must be a US citizen who operates as a “senior operational leader in a terror organization” and:

- (1) an informed, high-level official of the U.S. government has determined that the targeted individual poses an imminent threat of violent attack against the United States;
- (2) capture is infeasible, and the United States continues to monitor whether capture becomes feasible; and
- (3) the operation would be conducted in a manner consistent with applicable law of war principles.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁷ Scott Shane, “Drone Strikes Reveal Uncomfortable Truth: U.S. Is Often Unsure About Who Will Die,” *New York Times*, April 23, 2015, accessed April 10, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/24/world/asia/drone-strikes-reveal-uncomfortable-truth-us-is-often-unsure-about-who-will-die.html? r=2>

¹⁹⁸ Michael Isikoff, “Justice Department Memo Reveals Legal Case for Drone Strikes on Americans,” *NBC News*, February 4, 2013, accessed April 10, 2016, <http://investigations.nbcnews.com/news/2013/02/04/16843014-justice-department-memo-reveals-legal-case-for-drone-strikes-on-americans>

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁰ US Department of Justice, *Lawfulness of a Lethal Operation Directed Against a U.S. Citizen Who is a Senior Operational Leader of Al-Qa’ida or an Associated Force* (Washington, D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 2011),

While these thresholds are seemingly self-explanatory, a critical reading reveals troubling flaws which leave room for varying interpretations, much like the loophole found in the National Security Act of 1947.

The description of a proposed target as being a senior operational leader is incredibly ambiguous and the DOJ makes no effort in defining it.²⁰¹ Additionally, although the impossibility of capture mandate clearly explains that an attack can be launched if the target's capture "could not be physically effectuated during the relevant window of opportunity or if the relevant country were to decline to consent to a capture operation," it fails to establish what satisfies these guidelines.²⁰² The DOJ makes no mention of the diplomatic lengths to which the Executive must go before a window of opportunity judgement should be made and fails to define what constitutes a prudent window of opportunity.²⁰³ Furthermore, no guidance is offered as to which types of capture operations the countries must refuse in order for an attack to be considered legal.

The gravest threats to constitutional protections, however, are found in the requirement that the target must be considered by "an informed, high-level official of the [US] government" to pose "an imminent threat of violent attack against the [US]."²⁰⁴ Although the American people have historically been comfortable with deferring national security judgments to senior officials in the government, the absence of a definition for which officials are to be considered informed or high-level is disturbing. More troubling is that the singular form of "official" is used. The combination of these two flaws presumably means that any senior official in the presidential

1, accessed April 9, 2016, <https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/oip/legacy/2014/07/23/dept-white-paper.pdf>

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.

administration is qualified to pass such judgments without the need to confer with or consider the misgivings of his or her peers, or those in other government organs.

Furthermore, the DOJ's White Paper explains that the imminence for attack threshold "does not require the [US government] to have clear evidence that a specific attack on [US] persons and interests will take place in the immediate future," simply that the target has some future plans for any attack.²⁰⁵ The DOJ justifies this ambiguity by suggesting that the Executive may lack sufficient time to defend US interests if it fails to eliminate the target prior to him or her either conducting an attack or fleeing, and thus escaping the vague window of opportunity.²⁰⁶ As the National Security Act of 1947 demonstrated before it, the White Paper's ambiguity better serves the administration in pursuing its covert objectives than the interests of potential targets.

While one would expect some form of judicial review process as part of the targeting proceedings, this is sadly not the case. Suggesting that the judgments of the Executive are above reproach, the DOJ argues that:

Were a court to intervene here, it might be required inappropriately to issue an *ex ante* command to the President and officials responsible for operations with respect to their specific tactical judgment ... And judicial enforcement of such orders would require the Court to supervise inherently predictive judgments by the President and his national security advisors as to when and how to use force against a member of an enemy force against which Congress has authorized the use of force.²⁰⁷

Therefore, the entirety of the DOJ's reasoning is more grounded in enabling the Executive and professing the necessities for urgency rather than any measure of prudence or restraint. No judicial safeguards exist against the targeted killings of US citizens overseas and the public is left to place absolute trust in not only the Office of the President, but also in the intelligence data that

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

informs the Executive's decision-making processes which, history has repeatedly demonstrated, is folly.

Although the US intelligence community has proven itself to be among the best, if not the best, in the world, it is fallible. In fact, failures in the intelligence community's operations are considered inevitable and can be attributed to a variety of causes including simple oversights, lapses in judgment, and the willful, politicized manipulation of data, among others.²⁰⁸ This fact is perfectly demonstrated in Richard Bissell's intentional misrepresentations in the lead up to the Bay of Pigs Invasion; the miscalculations of Prime Minister Musaddiq's intentions; the Sandinistas' reactions to the cessations of aid; and, particularly damning for the Administration's UAV program, the undeniable fact that of the eight Americans killed in UAV strikes to date, seven were never identified as being targets prior to the attacks.²⁰⁹ How, then, can intelligence data suggesting a US citizen's ties to terrorism be considered the final, authoritative determination? The simple answer is that it cannot.

Although the Obama Administration's UAV program remains largely shrouded in secrecy, it has certainly invigorated popular support for counterterrorism operations.²¹⁰ However, what has yet to be acknowledged by the administration or supporters of its covert campaign is that, although no US laws proscribe UAV strikes, compelling US interests are still being threatened. Along with ensuring the sovereignty of constitutional protections, which has clearly been undermined, other vulnerable interests include: the prevention of unintended casualties; deterring terrorism; and the protection of US citizens. With this in mind, it is not just the wisdom of killing US persons which must be questioned, but also that of targeting non-US citizens.

²⁰⁸ Paul Pillar, *Intelligence and U.S. Foreign Policy: Iraq, 9/11, and Misguided Reform* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 9-10.

²⁰⁹ Shane, "Drone Strikes."

²¹⁰ Marouf Hasian, Jr., "American Exceptionalism and the bin Laden Raid," *Third World Quarterly* 33, no. 10 (2012), 1804.

On January 15, 2015, Warren Weinstein and Giovanni Lo Porta had already been held captive for at least three years,²¹¹ likely mustering whatever hope they could that they would ultimately be saved by their respective countries. After receiving repeated assurances from the Obama Administration that the President's chief priority was the rescue of American hostages, Weinstein's wife, Elaine, had reason to hope that her husband would be returned home soon.²¹² Elaine likely would have been relieved had she known that, months earlier, CIA analysts had identified "an apparent Western hostage" in footage from UAV surveillance coverage of suspected members of al-Qaeda near the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region.²¹³ Unfortunately, even though it was Warren in the surveillance footage, he would not be coming home.

Instead, the surveillance of the Western hostage was allowed to lapse. Though the reasoning for this action has yet to be established, in a crass attempt at explaining the error, a US official argued that "the [CIA's] main purpose is to go kill terrorists....They will tell you it is not to rescue hostages."²¹⁴ While it remains unknown to the public whether the discovery of the Western hostage was included in the target packet, a UAV strike on the suspected members of al-Qaeda was approved, nonetheless.²¹⁵ The American Weinstein and Italian Lo Porto were both killed in the strike, along with American Ahmed Farouq, who had been suspected of having an affiliation with al-Qaeda but was not expressly targeted.²¹⁶

²¹¹ Matthew Taylor and Lizzy Davies, "Giovanni Lo Porto's Friends Break Cover Two Years After His Kidnap in Pakistan," *The Guardian*, December 26, 2013, accessed April 13, 2016, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/26/giovanni-lo-porto-friends-launch-petition-abduction-pakistan>; George Packer, "Warren Weinstein in Death and Life," *The New Yorker*, April 24, 2015, accessed April 13, 2016, <http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/warren-weinstein-in-death-and-life>

²¹² Greg Jaffe, Adam Goldman, and Greg Miller, "Officials Fear CIA Missed Opportunity to Identify Western Hostage," *The Washington Post*, September 10, 2015, accessed April 12, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/officials-fear-cia-missed-opportunity-to-identify-western-hostage/2015/09/10/6a159bf6-571e-11e5-b8c9-944725fcd3b9_story.html

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Shane, "Drone Strikes."

While the possibility that Executive officials ignored warnings of the presence of a potential US hostage is disturbing, it is even more troubling to consider that they may have never been notified after the collection of more than 400 hours of video surveillance.²¹⁷ Despite the President's ostensibly heartfelt apology to the victims' families, whether the Executive knew or not is ultimately immaterial. While their deaths are tragic, they are a symptom of a greater disease. The US launched 233 covert UAV strikes in Pakistan alone between June 2004 and April 2011.²¹⁸ These strikes are suspected of having caused as many as 2,283 deaths and, prior to 2010, an estimated 20 percent of the victims were recognized by the US as non-combatants.²¹⁹ To put it plainly, CIA executives and members of the administration do not always know who will be killed as a result of a UAV strike.²²⁰

While the unintended deaths of civilians are disturbing on their own, they become all the more alarming when one considers the fact that these attacks are ineffective in eliminating terrorist groups; they not only fail in deterring terrorists from traveling to Pakistani tribal regions for training, they serve as an effective tool for recruiting and radicalization efforts.²²¹ Approximately 66 percent of Pakistanis in tribal areas agree that "suicide attacks against [US] military targets are justified" because of the targeted UAV strikes, contrasted to only 9 percent of the total population who support them.²²² This idea is further illustrated in Peter Kornbluh's discussion of covert action in general, where he stated, "when the United States engages in terrorist and other illicit action [which is the opinion of those in targeted regions], it effectively

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Peter Bergen and Katherine Tiedemann, "Washington's Phantom War: The Effects of the U.S. Drone Program in Pakistan," *Foreign Affairs* 90, no. 4 (2011), 13.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Ibid., 14-15.

²²² Ibid.

gives license to all outlaw countries and terrorist groups to do the same.”²²³ So far as those in targeted countries are concerned, neither the US nor its citizens are in any way qualified to criticize their tactics or reprisals.

Future of US Covert Action

Summary of Damages

Although continued engagement in covert activities may allow the US government to secure exigent policy objectives, there is no reasonable expectation for improvements in the long-term effects of the operations; the damages far outweigh any immediate gains and pose grave threats to American policy objectives. While the US presently conducts covert operations in a number of countries, its activities in Pakistan, a nation with which the US has not declared war, are particularly revealing of these damaging effects and continue to frustrate the already tense relationship between the two nations. With each successive targeted UAV strike, the Pakistanis’ certainty of their own government’s blessings of the attacks continues to grow, resulting in widespread public suspicion and condemnation of not only the US, but also of the Pakistani government.²²⁴ Therefore, not only do these attacks aid in terrorist recruiting efforts, they further serve to undermine the locally perceived legitimacy of the Pakistani government.

The attack on Osama bin Laden’s compound near Abbottabad was equally damaging. Codenamed Operation Neptune Spear, the operation was covert by name only due to the use of exclusively US personnel and equipment (which made US complicity impossible to deny in the event of their loss or compromise), along with President Obama’s announcement of the mission’s success only hours later. In any case, while the operation affected the elimination of Osama bin Laden, it also enraged Pakistanis and humiliated Pakistan’s military, “which was

²²³ Kornbluh, “Scandal,” 142-143.

²²⁴ Bergen and Tiedemann, “Phantom War,” 14-15.

domestically seen as unable to secure the homeland against foreign intrusion and internationally suspected of providing refuge to America's worst enemy.”²²⁵ The US certainly has every right to make attempts at securing its objective in Southwest Asia. However, by embarrassing the government and provoking the citizenry of one of its most strategic allies in the war on terror, the US is only crippling those interests.

While US covert operations elsewhere may be aimed at achieving different objectives, the resulting international perceptions remain the same. When the US covertly invades another nation's airspace, it is seen as denying the legitimacy of that nation's borders as well as its sovereignty. By doing so to assassinate those it suspects of involvement in terror organizations, it demonstrates a complete lack of faith in the target country's judicial processes and an absolute unwillingness to cooperate with the nation's police, intelligence, or military organs. When the Justice Department effectively extends the war on terror to include all nations²²⁶ and the resultant operations cause the deaths of non-combatants, the US is regarded as a primary contributor in making the entire world a more dangerous, hostile place. Finally, when the US attempts to subvert the governments of other nations, it rejects the idea that non-US citizens are capable of self-determination. How then can the US expect to be taken seriously as the “shining beacon of democracy” that it professes to be when it is also the selfsame nation passively announcing: ‘We do not respect your boundaries, systems of justice, government organs, or rights to life and self-determination’? Furthermore, how can the US expect those who feel injured by its policies not to approach American sovereignty in the very same manner? The simple answers are that it cannot and should not.

²²⁵ Shehzad Qazi, “US-Pakistan Relations: Common and Clashing Interests,” *World Affairs* 175, no. 1 (2012), 71.

²²⁶ US Department of Justice, *Lawfulness*, 3-4.

It should come as no surprise, then, when the feelings of frustration, resentment, and anger that these operations engender coalesce into desires for retribution. When such reprisals do occur, however, they are seldom aimed at the US government but focus instead on the soft, vulnerable targets presented by the American public. It would be disingenuous to suggest that all terrorist attacks on US targets are solely motivated by previous covert actions. In truth, most are largely motivated by the interventionist policies and insolent demeanors of US policymakers,²²⁷ which also happen to fuel the employments of covert action. The influences that covert operations have had on modern terrorism, however, particularly those of Operation Cyclone and targeted UAV strikes, are undeniable.²²⁸ As such, the American public has not only the right but the obligation to demand comprehensive and permanent change.

Moving Forward

In order to remedy the existing damages from covert action and avoid further degradation of its objectives in the future, the US must first assume a strict adherence to American democratic processes and thereby abandon its employment of covert action. As indicated by the bald-faced lies of policy-makers to Congress and the American people, continued denials of US involvement in remote conflicts and blatant neglect in failing to reveal the effects of its operations, the Executive has consistently demonstrated its core beliefs that the American public cannot be trusted with such information and lacks the capacity for understanding the finer points of making policy. This will not change so long as covert action is considered a viable alternative, which simply cannot stand. It is the public's treasure which finances these secret wars; it is the private citizen who is targeted in terrorist attacks on US soil and whose family members are drawn to become American warfighters; and it is the American people who, by way of their

²²⁷ Bergen and Reynolds, "Blowback," 3-5.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 2-3; Bergen and Tiedemann, "Phantom War," 14-15.

representatives, are charged by the American system of government with declaring and making wars.

If any measurable improvements are to be made then, the Executive must allow for the complete inclusion of the Legislature in how, where, and why it wishes to commit resources aimed at forcibly securing international objectives. Although doing so would invariably compromise elements of secrecy and surprise, it would also serve to temper the Executive's enthusiasm for targeted killings and subversion of foreign governments, and force real legislative discussions of which US interests are truly compelling and merit pursuit. After all, when such decisions become public, they rightly become far more difficult to justify.

In addition to increased transparency, and in the absence of its covert third option, the US must also pursue more thoughtful diplomatic approaches to conflict and circumstance resolution. Forming the basis for a UAV assassination solely on the target nation's declining unilateral US capture operations²²⁹ is grossly insufficient and a half-hearted attempt at a solution. In fact, Yemeni officials had ordered the arrest of, were actively seeking, and had even begun the trial *in absentia* for Anwar al-Awlaki months prior to his death in a US-launched UAV strike.²³⁰ Given that al-Awlaki was killed in Yemen, could US officials not have just as easily shared information of his whereabouts with Yemeni intelligence and police services? Doing so would not only have affected his capture and potentially led to the collection of valuable intelligence data, but also demonstrated the willingness of the Obama Administration to cooperate with Middle Eastern nations. This type of cooperation could only strengthen the US-Yemeni working relationship moving forward.

²²⁹ US Department of Justice, *Lawfulness*, 8.

²³⁰ Middle East Journal, "Chronology: October 16, 2010 - January 15, 2011," *Middle East Journal* 65, no. 2 (2011), 325.

The history of US covert action is rife with similar examples of unimaginative, irresponsible solutions. While such measures may be expedient, they only serve to contradict and undermine overt diplomatic efforts. If policymakers hope to live up to their laughable professions of “global citizenship,”²³¹ they must be willing to pursue more cooperative, well-reasoned diplomatic solutions to those objectives which are deemed compelling.

Finally, when US interests are truly threatened and diplomatic efforts at resolution have been exhausted, the need for intervention may prove necessary. In these circumstances, the US must elect to employ congressionally approved, overt military action rather than resorting to covert operations; the utility of which has already passed.

Of the many reasons for America’s covert failures, enemy preparedness is a key factor, and has forced an ever-increasing scale of the operations in terms of both size and commitments.

As Peter Kornbluh notes in his discussion on the Nicaraguan conflict:

Whereas in 1954, for example, the CIA could in short order overthrow the Arbenz government in Guatemala with a few million dollars and 200 original "contras " a much more elaborate NSC-CIA-State Department coordinated effort, entailing more than \$300 million and a counterrevolutionary force of 10,000, has over seven years failed to secure a foothold in Nicaragua.²³²

As would be expected, foreign leaders have learned from other nations’ failures in repelling US interventions and are resolved not to repeat their mistakes or “appear as shaky “banana republics” susceptible to overthrow.”²³³ These nations now take steps in the mobilizing their citizenries and seeking external support in the face of US actions, resulting in stronger

²³¹ Barack Obama, “Obama in Berlin: ‘The Burdens of Global Citizenship Continue to Bind Us Together,’” *NBC News*, July 24, 2008, accessed April 23, 2016, <http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/Vote2008/story?id=5442292&page=1>

²³² Kornbluh, *Scandal*, 141.

²³³ Isenberg, *Policy Analysis*, 6.

adversaries that are more difficult to depose.²³⁴ As such, overt military action is not only pragmatically superior to covert activities, but now necessary for achieving any levels of success.

Summary

There is an imperative to acknowledge the residual effects of US covert actions that make many nations and their citizens hostile towards Americans and US policy objectives. Modern demands among the populace and media for government transparency have made US complicity in covert actions nearly impossible to deny, as have the increasing requisite scales of the operations, which have the added effect of making covert action unfeasible in general. Policymakers, diplomats, and academics must recognize that earnest and fundamental changes to these strategies for conflict or circumstance resolution are both prudent and necessary. Such changes must include: the strict adherence to American democratic processes; thoughtful diplomatic relations policies; and the abandonment of covert action in favor of congressionally approved, overt military action when US interests are truly threatened. Until this is achieved, and so long as the nation continues the strategic employment of covert action, the US will continue to erode any positive contributions that her ideology can offer and instead damage her diplomatic efforts, international prestige, and safety of her citizenry.

²³⁴ *ibid.*

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