



National Security Council on 12 Sept 2001, the day following the 9-11 Terrorist Attacks. L-R: Secretary of State Colin Powell, President George W. Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney, General Henry J. Shelton, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff. Photo by Newscom.

The intent of this monograph is to reveal to Special Operations Forces (SOF) leaders and planners the variety of considerations facing decision makers, the approaches used in strategic- and operational-level decision making, and how they can better inform and influence that process with regard to special warfare. This monograph is a companion volume to two earlier works: *Support to Resistance: Strategic Purpose and Effectiveness*, and *How Civil Resistance Works (And Why It Matters To SOF)*. This third volume describes some of the factors that decision makers have faced when considering support to resistance (STR) as a foreign policy option. This monograph should shed some light on how national security officials in the past have arrived at certain conclusions or why, in some cases, presidents have directed actions that were especially risky or controversial.

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JOINT SPECIAL OPERATIONS UNIVERSITY



Decision-Making Considerations in Support to Resistance

Will Irwin

Foreword by Lieutenant General Kenneth E. Tovo

JSOU Report 20-1

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Decision-Making Considerations in Support to Resistance

Irwin





Joint Special Operations University and the Department of Strategic Studies

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*Decision-Making Considerations
in Support to Resistance*

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*Foreword by
Lieutenant General Kenneth E. Tovo,
U.S. Army, Ret.*

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On the cover. Washington, D.C. United States President George W. Bush meets with his national security advisors in the Situation Room of the White House prior to addressing a Joint Session of Congress on 20 September 2001. Left to right: CIA Director George J. Tenet; Attorney General John Ashcroft; Secretary of the Treasury Paul O'Neill; Vice President Dick Cheney; President George W. Bush; Secretary of State Colin Powell; Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld; General Henry J. Shelton, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS); Andy Card, White House Chief of Staff. Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz is at the far left of the photo. Photo: Eric Draper, The White House via CNP.

Back cover. National Security Council on 12 Sept 2001, the day following the 9-11 Terrorist Attacks. L-R: Secretary of State Colin Powell, President George W. Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney, General Henry J. Shelton, Chairman, JCS. Photo by Newscom.

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From the Director

In today's world, as we face a revanchist Russia and a China that is seeking to expand its global influence, resistance is an important tool in the toolbox of statecraft. Not only does support to resistance increase the defensive capabilities of important allies and partners, it also acts as a deterrent against such revisionist powers. While perhaps still able to invade these allies and partners, would-be invaders now know that these states will immediately turn to civil resistance movements and insurgencies to make such occupations as painful as possible to the states that would seek to invade them. But as a tool of statecraft, support to resistance is reliant upon knowledgeable operational and strategic planners as well as political leaders who must plan and employ such a tool.

In this, the final in a trilogy of monographs on the subject of resistance, Joint Special Operations University resident senior fellow Will Irwin explores the many decision-making considerations with which past military planners and political leaders have had to wrestle. Using support to resistance as a mission set for selecting case studies, Irwin attempts to discern what kind of information contributes most to informing the decision-making process. As we have seen throughout Irwin's extensive body of work on the subject, support to resistance can be an effective—and sometimes the sole—national security tool available for the United States government to indirectly coerce, disrupt, or enable the replacement of a hostile regime or occupying force.

The intent of this monograph is to reveal to Special Operations Forces (SOF) leaders and planners the variety of considerations facing decision makers, the approaches used in strategic- and operational-level decision making, and how they can better inform and influence that process with regard to special warfare. In that his work is both unique and highly successful. It is thus crucial reading for SOF planners and policymakers in general who need to know the full range of military options available to them, not just differences in intensity (which is too often the case) but truly unique military approaches that the special operations toolbox can offer.

Colonel John D. Poucher, U.S. Air Force, Ret.
Director, Department of Strategic Studies

Foreword

For many, the collapse of the Soviet Union signaled the inevitable (and imminent) triumph of liberal democracy as the ideal form of government; it held out hope for an era of unprecedented peace to follow. The nearly three decades of conflict and instability that followed have likely dampened those hopes for all but the most optimistic individuals. Great power competition has returned to the world; the threat of great power war, once thought to have been banished into history, has reemerged. Autocratic governments proved resilient in Russia, China, and elsewhere, and resurgent in places such as Venezuela, where autocratic regimes emerged from democratic election processes. It reminds us of Churchill's admonition that, "Victory is never final, defeat is never fatal ...". The continued existence of authoritarian governments has ensured the use of popular resistance as a means to overcome them. The return of great power competition has perpetuated the use of proxies as a strategic tool to compete in the grey zone between peace and war.

The United States has a long history of supporting resistance movements, both armed and nonviolent. In three volumes, Will Irwin has explored this history, examining the successes and failures and deriving strategic implications that should guide decision makers. The trilogy in its entirety is a must read for the serious student and practitioner of unconventional warfare and support to resistance (STR).

His first monograph, *Support to Resistance: Strategic Purpose and Effectiveness*, is a historical review of the dozens of cases in the post-World War II era in which the U.S. government has supported resistance movements, mostly violent in nature. He examines the circumstances and factors that led to U.S. decision makers choosing to pursue a policy of STR and details the outcomes. The second volume, *How Civil Resistance Works (And Why It Matters To SOF)*, provides a comprehensive examination of causes and methods of this (mostly) nonviolent approach to resistance, the tools used by contemporary regimes to suppress resistance and maintain control, and the role of Special Operations Forces (SOF) as part of a U.S. effort to aid a civil resistance movement.

While the first and second monographs are loaded with lessons, implications, and considerations distilled from historical case studies, this

monograph, *Decision-Making Considerations in Support to Resistance*, is truly a goldmine for decision-makers and their planning teams at the strategic level. He presents a logical model to guide one through the key factors to evaluate whether the circumstances are favorable to an STR policy; to assess risks, anticipate second and third order effects, and determine feasibility; and finally to consider the question of propriety—is an STR policy, in the specific context under consideration, consistent with our national principles and values? His excellent use of contemporary historical examples clarifies and underscores the significance of each aspect of the model he presents. Put simply, Will Irwin has written the “*Ranger Handbook*” for those considering pursuit of a policy of STR to achieve national objectives.

There are several key implications of Will Irwin’s work for senior leaders to consider. First is the issue of access to, and influence on, policy makers—how can unconventional options be given due consideration in the policy formulation process? This monograph drives home the point that the staffs of the geographic combatant commanders (GCC), the Joint Staff, and Office of the Secretary of Defense are dominated by those from a primarily conventional military background. Their lifetime of training, education, and experience largely focused on the traditional application of military force against an adversary. The case study of the response to the attacks of 9/11 is illustrative; the introduction of an STR option to leverage the Northern Alliance against the Taliban and Al Qaeda was a result more of chance than process. The precision strike/commando side of the U.S. Special Operations Command’s portfolio is well understood and enjoys direct access to decision makers and influencers at the national level. Unconventional warfare options generated by a Theater Special Operations Command often cannot get past the GCC staff. As a result, “best” military advice to civilian leadership is often of the *small, medium, or large* variety instead of truly different options to address a problem.

The second key implication is the importance of truly understanding the operational environment, the context, and the key actors before embracing any policy, but especially one of STR. The SOF community has taken some initial steps toward incorporating operational design methodologies into its educational model; this needs to become a full embrace. Operational design, with its emphasis on framing problems based on a deep, contextual understanding of the operational environment, is key to developing options that have a likelihood of success and mitigate the potential for unwanted effects.

Design thinking is especially critical for SOF to navigate those complex, chaotic environments it is routinely thrust into, where the first question is not “How to accomplish the mission?” but “What should the mission be?”

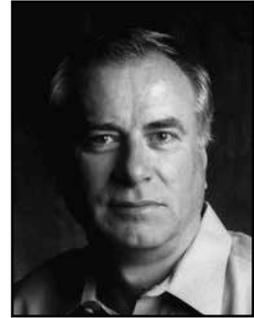
The final implication is the criticality of nesting policy within a grand strategy. While some of the challenges the U.S. has had with STR were a result of shortcomings in execution—the tactics of supporting a resistance movement—the majority of failures were the lack of linkage to, or the complete absence of, a strategic framework. Our recent STR efforts in Syria are a prime example. While arguably ISIS has been destroyed, increased Russian influence on the shores of the Mediterranean, an enlarged Iranian threat to Israel from Syria, and a widening schism with our North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) ally Turkey are less than satisfying strategic outcomes. Sun Tzu’s admonition continues to ring true, “Strategy without tactics is the slowest route to victory, tactics without strategy is the noise before defeat.”

Historically, our application of unconventional methods to pursue U.S. objectives has yielded mixed results; yet, supporting resistance movements will be an increasingly attractive policy option as we seek to compete with our adversaries while avoiding general war. Study and professional education are critical steps towards improving our capability in this area. It is incumbent on senior military leaders, and those that aid their decision making, to fully understand the range of methods available to support national policy. Will Irwin’s work provides the foundation for leaders and planners alike to fully appreciate how to properly wield this tool.

Lieutenant General Kenneth E. Tovo
U.S. Army, Ret.

About the Author

Mr. Will Irwin is a Resident Senior Fellow at the Joint Special Operations University's (JSOU) Department of Strategic Studies. He is a contractor employed by METIS Solutions in support of the JSOU mission. Since his retirement as a U.S. Army Special Forces officer, he has worked as a defense analyst, researcher, historian, instructor, and writer. His career included assignments throughout the United States, Europe, Central and South America, the Near East, the Far East, Southeast Asia, and Southwest Asia. He is a subject matter expert in strategic intelligence and policy, special operations, resistance, and political and irregular warfare. Mr.



Irwin culminated his 28-year military career at the United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM), where he was a weapons, munitions, and countering weapons of mass destruction (CWMD) requirements officer. Since his retirement from active duty, he has served USSOCOM as a contractor supporting the command's advanced technology program and later as a future concepts developer. He then supported the command as a CWMD-terrorism analyst and planner in the Defense Threat Reduction Agency USSOCOM Support Cell. Upon his return to the Tampa area, he served as an intelligence analyst at United States Central Command prior to joining the faculty at JSOU.

Mr. Irwin holds a master of military arts and sciences degree from the United States Army Command and General Staff College and a bachelor of arts degree in history from Methodist University. He has done additional graduate study at the University of Kansas and the University of Southern California, and has served as an Arroyo Center Research Fellow at the RAND Corporation in Santa Monica, California. He is the author of *Abundance of Valor: Resistance, Liberation, and Survival, 1944–1945* and *The Jedburghs: The Secret History of the Allied Special Forces, France 1944*, as well as several classified and unclassified monographs, reports, and articles. Mr. Irwin has served as a guest lecturer on unconventional warfare at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California, and the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School at Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

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This work represents the third monograph in a three-volume series on supporting political resistance that has benefited from research assistance provided by the staff of the United States Special Operations Command Research Library at MacDill Air Force Base, Florida; the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.; the National Archives and Records Administration II in College Park, Maryland; the archives at six presidential libraries; the Hoover Institution Archives at Stanford University, California; and the Hillsborough County Public Library in Tampa and Valrico, Florida.

1. Introduction

This monograph was written as a companion volume to two earlier works: *Support to Resistance: Strategic Purpose and Effectiveness*, and *How Civil Resistance Works (And Why It Matters To SOF)*. The purpose of this third volume is to describe some of the factors that decision makers have faced when considering support to resistance (STR) as a foreign policy option. The monograph should shed some light on how national security officials in the past have arrived at certain conclusions or why, in some cases, presidents have directed actions that were especially risky or controversial. To be of maximum benefit, historical case study requires that decisions be examined in the context of contemporary geopolitical conditions and with an appreciation of the information available to decision makers at the time. This brings to light how superior decision-making can result from a better understanding of the problem and the context, the presentation of more relevant and accurate information, and the application of creativity in the development of a range of possible courses of action. The intent of this monograph is to reveal to Special Operations Forces (SOF) leaders and planners the variety of considerations facing decision makers, the approaches used in strategic- and operational-level decision making, and how they can better inform and influence that process with regard to special warfare.

Looking back years later, even decision makers and planners at times question their own previous actions or judgments. As described by Richard E. Neustadt and Ernest R. May in their 1986 book *Thinking in Time: The Uses of History for Decision Makers*, political and military leaders sometimes, when viewing foreign policy experiences retrospectively, find themselves asking, “How in God’s name did we come to do *that*? Why did we believe *that*? Why did we expect *that*? What made us believe that he or she (or they) would do *that*?”¹ Or, in the words of President John F. Kennedy following the 1961 Bay of Pigs debacle, “How could we have been so stupid?”² This monograph explores the many troublesome and consequential decision considerations with which past planners and decision makers have had to wrestle and seeks to discern what kind of information contributes most to informing the decision making process. STR is the mission set used to illustrate this.

When our officers study military history, they must understand that history is not simply a linear process, a pre-scripted chain of events resulting from people acting and making decisions that would be expected of them to inevitably result in the world we know today. Leaders have acted and made decisions based on the situation, as they understood it at the time, without the benefit of our knowledge of how events would evolve or what the residual effects of an operation would be. Leaders need to develop the ability to read history with a certain detachment from the present, to understand why a certain leader in the past made a certain decision. What was his understanding of the situation? What were the facts and assumptions that he was working with? What options were open to him?

Looking forward, leaders and planners must also consider the dynamics of employing SOF in support of resistance movements in the context of great power competition. The types of support that can be provided to resistance movements or insurgencies range from rhetorical or political backing to funding, to training and advisory support, or to various forms of material support—nonlethal (medical supplies, food, clothing, vehicles, computers or other information and communication equipment) or lethal (weapons, ammunition, explosives, targeting intelligence). Future operations must account for changes that will result from the application of emerging technologies or the leveraging of big data analytics and other complex

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methods. Understanding how these affect STR operations will prepare SOF leaders and planners to provide decision makers with insightful policy and action recommendations.

As mentioned above, this monograph was written as a companion volume to earlier monographs and is

derived from much of the same research and sources. As with the earlier volumes, declassified documents such as National Security Council (NSC) meeting minutes and supporting papers offer the closest thing to a presence in the room as the issues examined in this monograph were discussed in historical cases.

STR can be an effective, and sometimes the only, national security tool with which the United States Government (USG) can indirectly coerce, disrupt, or enable the replacement of a hostile regime. The objective of an STR

campaign might be to neutralize an adversary’s power over a semi-autonomous population or region; to coerce an oppressive regime to refrain from violating human rights; to subvert, undermine, or destroy an adversary’s legitimacy and regional stature; to check its pursuit of weapons of mass destruction; or to halt its use or support of terrorism.

Following a vignette taken from recent history, the monograph is organized to follow the decision tree illustrated in figure 1. Intended to be more suggestive than prescriptive, this figure simply shows a logical flow of decision-making considerations. In reality, the steps portrayed are seldom sequential and are more often executed simultaneously.

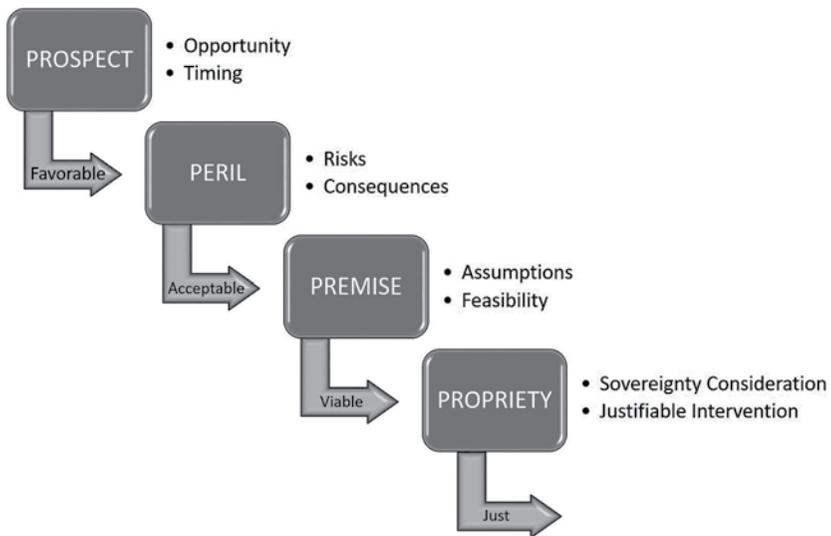


Figure 1. Source: Author

The volume begins, in Chapter 2, with a vignette illustrating how SOF leaders and planners, even at the Theater Special Operations Command (TSOC) level, can influence the STR decision-making process. Chapter 3 then looks at how STR decision making can profit from the ability to sense or anticipate opportunity and to optimize the timing of an operation. The political and personal risks associated with supporting a foreign resistance movement and the consequences of poor risk assessment are addressed in Chapter 4. The fifth chapter then reviews the importance of assumptions in the planning and decision-making functions and the devastating

consequences that can result from planning and making decisions based on unfounded assumptions. Viability and feasibility assessments, based partly on those assumptions, help planners and decision makers judge the appropriateness and practicability of a contemplated operation. The next chapter addresses the contradictory nature of a strategy of supporting resistance in that it is inconsistent with the Westphalian principles of sovereignty and nonintervention. Concluding remarks and recommendations are presented in the final chapter.

This monograph focuses much attention on the April 1961 Cuba case study from the *Support to Resistance* volume, involving the failed Bay of Pigs operation, simply because it serves as the best laboratory for the study of dysfunctional STR decision making. The failure to construct valid assumptions, the lack of sound judgment on the appropriateness and timing of the operation, the absence of a disciplined and authoritative threat assessment, and the tendency to allow the State Department too much say in tactical matters almost guaranteed failure. The operation was carried out for questionable reasons, intelligence was ignored, security was farcical,

The operation was carried out for questionable reasons, intelligence was ignored, security was farcical, and the planning effort was hindered by a measure of collective self-delusion and frustration at perceived micromanagement from the highest levels.

and the planning effort was hindered by a measure of collective self-delusion and frustration at perceived micromanagement from the highest levels. It has been written that one of the contributing factors to the politically embarrassing failure was that, during the months of planning and preparation, the president and his key advisers were never able to devote more than 45 minutes of their time to the problem.³ The importance of

helping decision makers make the most of their limited time is clear. Conceivably, a broader understanding of decision-making considerations will aid SOF leaders and planners in proposing imaginative and innovative, yet pragmatic, course-of-action alternatives to those who must decide upon the approach to take.

2. Influencing the Decision-Making Process

While senior SOF leaders are most apt to be in a position to provide advice and recommendations to decision makers, even lower ranking planners can be influential when empowered by circumstance. National security scholars have noted that in order to influence the decision-making process, one only requires access to decision-making channels.⁴ The story behind the SOF role in the initial stage of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF) in Afghanistan illustrates this point.

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The immediate commitment of large-scale conventional forces in Afghanistan following the terrorist attacks in America on 11 September 2001 was infeasible due to geographic challenges and because of the time constraint imposed by the president's desire for an immediate and effective response. The resulting operation, while unlike more traditional unconventional warfare (UW) operations in many ways, was perhaps paradigmatic of 21st-century UW, and the concept was not proposed by a senior military leader but by an operational level SOF planning officer. It involved a plan for leveraging an existing resistance militia coalition—the Northern Alliance—that provided the bulk of the required ground force and, just as important, put an Afghan face on the operation.

In a Pentagon conference room late on the afternoon of Wednesday, 12 September 2001, the day following the terrorist attacks on the U.S. homeland, President George W. Bush told the assembled Department of Defense (DOD) leadership that he considered the country to be at war, that he wanted a strategic response against those responsible, and that he wanted it soon.⁵ A joint resolution of the U.S. Congress authorized President Bush to use any force necessary, and the president ordered U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) to destroy the al-Qaeda terrorist network, kill or capture al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden, and eliminate Afghanistan as a safe haven for terrorists.⁶

In a meeting the following day, Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Director George Tenet introduced CIA officer Cofer Black, who proceeded to brief

the president on a plan to “insert a CIA paramilitary team into Afghanistan to work closely with opposition forces—primarily the Northern Alliance—to prepare the way for Special Operations Forces.” The president, according to Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) General Hugh Shelton, was “completely captivated” and “totally on board.”⁷ This preliminary concept would undergo further refinement before next being presented two days later at Camp David.

The USCENTCOM staff had previously prepared contingency plans aimed at striking al-Qaeda training camps and Taliban target sets in Afghanistan with Tomahawk Land Attack Missiles (TLAMs) and manned bombers.⁸ But because no land warfare with U.S. forces in Afghanistan had ever been considered, no campaign plan for conventional ground operations in the country existed. General Tommy Franks, U.S. Army, the commander of USCENTCOM, recognized that his staff had a complex plan to build and not much time in which to do it.⁹

Identified as the group responsible for the 9/11 attacks, Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaeda group were residing and training in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan. The only opposition constituting a real threat to the Taliban government was the United Islamic Front for the Salvation of Afghanistan militia coalition in the north, commonly referred to as the Northern Alliance. With a force estimated at 10,000 to 20,000 after five years of fighting,¹⁰ the Alliance had been pushed back to the rugged extreme northeast part of the country by September 2001. Taliban forces included armor and double the manpower of the Northern Alliance, but the militia coalition was a viable UW proxy client.¹¹

On Saturday morning, 15 September, President Bush assembled his national security team at Camp David to begin exploring response options. The first briefing was presented by CIA Director Tenet, who recounted the course of action proposed two days earlier. This option would require increased authority for expanded covert paramilitary operations, which the president subsequently approved.¹²

Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld then called on General Shelton, the outgoing Chairman of the JCS, and his replacement Vice Chairman General Dick Myers, U.S. Air Force (USAF), to present three military options. Secretary Rumsfeld, openly disappointed with the lack of imagination on the part of the Pentagon staff, prefaced the briefing with a comment to the president that the Chairman’s presentation “was not,” in his opinion, “a

satisfactory recommendation of the Defense Department but simply some of his preliminary ideas to begin the discussions.”¹³

The first option presented by General Shelton called for cruise missile strikes on al Qaeda camps in Afghanistan, an option that could be implemented immediately and would put no American troops at risk. The second option added several days of aerial bombing to the cruise missile attacks, which exposed American pilots to some minimal physical risk. Lastly, a third option combined cruise missile strikes with manned bomber attacks, along with ground force engagement by a mix of SOF and conventional forces.¹⁴

General Shelton added that the third option would take a considerable amount of time—measured in months—for force deployment and would pose additional problems because of the remote, landlocked location of Afghanistan. Since there was no existing plan, the third option would entail weeks of detailed military planning, the advanced placement of a combat search and rescue force, and diplomatic efforts to obtain basing rights and overflight permission.¹⁵ Vice President Dick Cheney disliked all three options. “It wasn’t clear,” he later wrote, “what mission the troops on the ground would have.”¹⁶

An aspect of the CIA proposal that President Bush found appealing was that by supporting the Northern Alliance the United States would be helping the Afghan people play a large part in their own liberation while avoiding the appearance of an armed intervention by the United States acting as a conqueror.¹⁷ The president made it clear that he disliked any option that relied on largely ineffective half-measures, as past experience with cruise missile strikes had proven to be, or with any option that required many months to prepare and execute. He chose the most aggressive military approach—the third option—but made it clear that he wanted action soon and he wanted some level of U.S. force presence on the ground as quickly as possible.¹⁸

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Five days later, on Thursday, 20 September, General Franks and his J3, Air Force Major General Eugene Renuart, arrived at the Joint Chiefs’ conference

room in the Pentagon to brief Secretary Rumsfeld, Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, and the Joint Chiefs on the USCENTCOM war plan. General Renuart presented the plan, which consisted of four phases: “Phase 1—Set conditions and build forces to provide the National Command Authority credible military options; Phase 2—Conduct initial combat operations and continue to set conditions for follow-on operations; Phase 3—Conduct decisive combat operations in Afghanistan, continue to build the coalition, and conduct operations AOR wide; and Phase 4—Establish capability of coalition partners to prevent the re-emergence of terrorism and provide support for humanitarian assistance efforts.”¹⁹

General Shelton later described this version of the USCENTCOM plan as solid but not great. He also later recounted that General Franks seemed annoyed with the many questions asked by the Joint Chiefs. Thus far, according to then Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Douglas Feith, “neither the president nor Rumsfeld had been satisfied with USCENTCOM’s proposed ideas,”²⁰ which at that point were still very much conventional force oriented. Secretary Rumsfeld disapproved the USCENTCOM plan, in spite of the fact that General Franks was scheduled to brief it to the president the next day.²¹ Although General Franks recorded in his memoir that Mr. Rumsfeld was satisfied with the presentation, Under Secretary Feith later wrote that “the remarks the Secretary made to me immediately after the meeting ... demonstrate that Franks had misread Rumsfeld.”²²

The plan’s main shortcoming, according to Feith, was that it focused solely on striking terrorist targets and, because of the Department’s insufficient intelligence on Afghanistan and doubts about the reliability of what intelligence was available, the USCENTCOM approach would be unlikely to produce the results the president sought. The administration feared that any “less-than-impressive” response to the attacks of 11 September might only encourage another terrorist strike. A clear break with past methods was needed.²³

Gathering for the war plan briefing to the president in the Treaty Room in the second floor family residence of the White House on Friday afternoon, 21 September, were Vice President Cheney, Secretary Rumsfeld, Deputy Secretary Wolfowitz, Under Secretary Feith, General Shelton, General Myers, General Franks, and Major General Renuart. Major General Dell Dailey, the commander of a joint counterterrorism unit, represented the SOF community.²⁴ Secretary Rumsfeld prefaced the briefing by reminding President

Bush that this was a work in progress, commenting, “You are not going to find this plan completely fulfilling. We don’t.”²⁵

General Franks proceeded to brief the four-phased plan put forth at the Pentagon the previous day. President Bush understood that SOF and the CIA teams, in the first phase, would prepare the way for follow-on conventional forces.²⁶ SOF would link up with the Afghan Northern Alliance militia coalition, but the special operators’ task would essentially be limited to directing some air strikes employing precision-guided munitions against Taliban targets in support of follow-on conventional forces.²⁷

Deputy Secretary of Defense Wolfowitz argued for a more vigorous use of SOF, taking advantage of their skills in working with proxy forces and operating in some of the world’s harshest terrain. Secretary Rumsfeld agreed. Employing SOF in a UW role, in close collaboration with the CIA’s paramilitary officers, would underscore the point that the United States was fighting al-Qaeda and the Taliban, not the Afghan people.²⁸ According to Under Secretary Feith, who considered Deputy Secretary Wolfowitz’s suggestion to be an important one, USCENTCOM’s plan called for providing some support to the Northern Alliance but not with the centrality now being proposed. In a UW role, U.S. forces would be supporting indigenous elements in liberating their own country rather than taking the lead in defeating the Taliban. An added benefit was that it would allow the U.S. force presence, or ‘footprint,’ to remain small. This would limit the effort and risks involved, avoid any resemblance to the monstrous invasion army sent into Afghanistan by the Soviet Union in December 1979, and demonstrate that the U.S. could act boldly and accomplish strategic effects in an unconventional way. Moreover, by facilitating the precision airstrikes, SOF “could keep collateral damage from U.S. bombs to a minimum and win local support as a welcome instrument of liberation.”²⁹

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Upon completion of the briefing, President Bush asked how soon such a campaign could commence and seemed pleased when General Franks responded that it could begin within two weeks.³⁰

In the days following the White House briefing, the Defense Department leadership was further encouraged to make UW the main focus of

the USCENTCOM war plan. On 23 September, Deputy Secretary Wolfowitz wrote to Secretary Rumsfeld, expanding on the ideas expressed in the briefing session two days earlier. He suggested that SOF should be used not only for attacking al-Qaeda and Taliban targets, but also for serving “as a kind of armed liaison with anti-al-Qaeda or anti-Taliban elements in Afghanistan.”³¹ Doing so, Wolfowitz wrote, would leverage the manpower of the resistance—thus minimizing U.S. casualties—and would demonstrate to the world that the U.S. is willing to take risks and knows how to fight smart.

Even members of Congress urged greater support to the resistance. In a 26 September 2001 letter to Secretary Rumsfeld, Congressman Dana Rohrabacher called on the DOD to provide resistance forces of the Northern Alliance with ammunition and other supplies. Interestingly, the Congressman informed the secretary that his own national security adviser had been in touch with Northern Alliance leaders and offered to provide DOD their satellite phone numbers.³²

USCENTCOM’s special operations component, Special Operations Command Central (SOCCENT), under the command of Rear Admiral Albert Calland, was initially tasked only with providing combat search and rescue coverage for air operations against al-Qaeda and the Taliban.³³ But a few officers on the SOCCENT staff, anticipating that more would be needed, took the initiative to develop a comprehensive UW plan. To Admiral Cal-

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land, “it became quickly apparent that the way to do this was to get 5th [Special Forces] Group and put them in place to start a UW campaign.”³⁴

USCENTCOM’s campaign had two objectives: the destruction of al-Qaeda and the removal of the Taliban from power in Afghanistan.³⁵ It was yet to be determined exactly how SOF could directly contribute to achieving those objectives. In response to a USCENTCOM request, Major General Geoffrey Lambert, then commander of U.S. Army Special

Forces Command at Fort Bragg, provided his own chief of staff, Colonel Manuel ‘Manny’ Diemer, and another officer to assist the staff of the SOCCENT Special Plans Office in crafting a plan. The central figure and driving force in the planning effort was Lieutenant Colonel Dave Miller, who General Lambert later described as “a deeply-steeped UW advocate who happened to be in the right place at the right time.”³⁶ Another Special Forces general

described Miller as “a brilliant man and really doesn’t get written about or talked about very much.”³⁷

The planning team produced a comprehensive seven-phase UW plan that Miller presented in a formal briefing to General Franks and his staff in late September. The career Special Forces officer’s task was to sell a room full of predominantly conventional military officers, including the four-star combatant commander, on a bold UW campaign plan that represented a special warfare concept alien to them. According to one writer who interviewed many senior SOF officers involved in the planning effort, there had been some trepidation and debate about allowing Lieutenant Colonel Miller to present the plan in such a forum. But, as the writer concluded, the outcome proved to be “Miller’s finest hour.”³⁸

As the briefing concluded, having asked no questions and stating that he fully understood the plan, the USCENTCOM commander said, “Okay. Do it.”³⁹ The USCENTCOM staff had been advocating a full-scale invasion of Afghanistan or, at the very least, the insertion of a force of 10,000 to 12,000 Army and Marine troops to exploit any gains made by the SOF-supported Northern Alliance.⁴⁰ But given the distant and remote land-locked area of operations, General Franks was all too aware that Miller’s proposal was the only course of action that provided what the president and the secretary of defense sought—a quick and novel, hard-hitting response that could be prosecuted by a small U.S. force while putting an Afghan face on the operation. Thus the plan was approved and ordered into execution; SOF would now constitute the main effort in USCENTCOM’s war plan against the Taliban in Afghanistan.⁴¹ According to the USCENTCOM deputy commander, Marine Lieutenant General Michael DeLong, the fact that General Franks’s confidence and approval was gained so quickly and easily was “a complement to Miller’s genius, knowledge, and preparation.”⁴²

The USCENTCOM war plan, as finally approved, called for a campaign conducted jointly by the CIA and SOF, using the manpower provided by the Northern Alliance to bring down the Taliban regime and destroy its forces. The Joint Forces Air Component Commander (JFACC) was given the mission of providing “air support for friendly forces working with the Northern Alliance and other

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opposition forces in order to defeat hostile Taliban and al-Qaeda forces and to set the conditions for regime removal and long-term regional stability.⁴³ President Bush's national security team agreed that this seemed to be the most viable course of action.⁴⁴ CIA Director Tenet and Secretary Rumsfeld agreed on a command-and-control arrangement whereby the Agency exercised operational control initially, but as SOF arrived on the ground and the nature of the operation became more military, control would migrate to DOD.⁴⁵

By the end of September, Secretary Rumsfeld was considering a broader, worldwide application of UW in the Global War on Terrorism. In a memorandum to the president on 30 September 2001, he proposed a strategic theme centered on "aiding local peoples to rid themselves of terrorists and to free themselves of regimes that support terrorism." This, he urged, should be accomplished indirectly, "in coordination with and in support of opposition groups."⁴⁶

The extraordinarily successful campaign that followed led to the Taliban government's downfall swiftly and with a minimal U.S. footprint. As related in the official USSOCOM history, "it had taken fewer than 60 days of concentrated military operations and only a few hundred soldiers to seize the country from the Taliban and its terrorist allies."⁴⁷ According to an official Army history of the operation, "the overall Coalition campaign in southern and eastern Afghanistan to oust the Taliban and evict al-Qaeda from the country must be considered a success. The plan to work with indigenous anti-Taliban Afghan groups to drive the Taliban from Kabul and Kandahar worked brilliantly."⁴⁸

The preceding vignette illustrates the need for STR or UW advocates who are not only knowledgeable in the operational and tactical aspects of the mission set, but are also cognizant of the conditions that present feasible opportunities for such campaigns, conversant on the risks and other considerations, and capable of arguing the merits of such a strategy and influencing the decision-making process. During the preparation for OEF, civilian Pentagon leadership saw the value in such an approach but struggled to sway senior uniformed leadership to fully embrace it. Final approval of a UW-centric war plan only came about as a result of the convincing and persuasive presentation of a viable plan prepared by well-versed experts at SOCCENT.

3. Prospect: Opportunity and Timing

Two important aspects of supporting insurgencies or resistance movements that SOF leaders and planners must comprehend in order to better inform the intervention decision-making process are the ability to recognize or anticipate emerging STR windows of opportunity and the role timing can play in improving the likelihood of success in such operations.

Opportunity

Successful STR campaigns most often result from someone's ability to recognize a window of opportunity when it presents itself, or better yet to anticipate such an opportunity. An opportunity might be any occasion where an indigenous insurgent element, resistance group, social movement, or political opposition group has the ability to generate mass through local forces in a place and time that would put them in a position to act in ways that further U.S. security interests.

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This use of 'indigenous mass' minimizes U.S. strategic risk by eliminating the need for a large U.S. force presence and minimizes the political risks and consequences associated with direct military engagement. This could involve actions to coerce, disrupt, or overthrow a hostile foreign regime. Our ability and willingness to employ such methods can also serve as part of a comprehensive deterrence strategy in relation to hostile repressive authoritarian regimes.

While concerns of political risk associated with U.S. intervention are covered in Chapter 4, it should be remembered that doing nothing also carries risks. Opportunities need to be recognized when they arise and a thorough cost-benefit analysis should be conducted. The potential cost of a missed STR opportunity was highlighted by Dr. Nadia Schadlow, a former member of the Defense Policy Board, who wrote in August 2014:

At least as far back as 2006 ... King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia ... sought to work with the United States and others to consider regime

change in Syria. The door was open to combine U.S. expertise with Saudi resources to empower anti-Assad opposition groups, thus undercutting not only the Syrian regime itself but also Iran's regional power—by undercutting its proxy in Damascus. However, little was done during the waning years of the Bush administration on that front, and the Obama administration did even less. As a consequence, when the civil war broke out in 2011, the United States had few levers to pull to help arrive at the outcome we wanted. The result was a fractured Western-leaning opposition and an empowered jihadi movement.⁴⁹

In this example, if the USG had engaged opposition elements in Syria early on, support to a strong group whose objectives were in line with U.S. interests might have curtailed the proliferation of competing and incompatible factions, provided an improved prospect for freeing the Syrian people from the brutal Assad regime, averted the migration of countless thousands of refugees, and allowed for follow-on foreign internal defense (FID) operations to strengthen Syria's ability to defend against incursion by hostile irregular elements such as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, better known as ISIS.

The ability to perceive opportunities begins with an ability to recognize the conditions and early indicators of resistance and to conduct a continuous assessment of the movement's goals, capabilities, and trajectory. During the first few decades of the Cold War, USG officials proved to be somewhat clumsy in detecting opportunities to capitalize on political unrest in hostile states, with an inclination, at times, to attempt to create or instigate internal organized resistance where none actually existed. These attempts nearly always ended tragically, as they did in the Baltics, the Ukraine, Albania, Yugoslavia, Romania, Poland, North Korea, China, and Indonesia.

The Eisenhower administration did at least attempt to learn from its mistakes, although to little benefit. In June 1953, a month before the Korean War ended, unrest broke out in East Germany, where a series of workers' strikes quickly grew into a widespread anti-communist uprising. The White House was caught unprepared. The only action taken by the USG at that time was to use the affair as an opportunity to forward-base the year-old 10th Special Forces Group to Bad Tölz, Germany. A report prepared for the NSC by the Council's Psychological Strategy Board, approved by President Eisenhower

at the end of June, attempted to outline steps that should be taken to prepare the administration for any future such crisis. Among its objectives, the proposed policy called for nourishing “resistance to communist oppression throughout satellite Europe, short of mass rebellion in areas under Soviet military control;” taking actions “to undermine satellite puppet authority;” and exploiting such satellite unrest “as demonstrable proof that the Soviet Empire is beginning to crumble.”⁵⁰ Three years would pass before the next opportunity arrived to implement the plan.

During the early 1950s, several members of the Republican Party openly pushed for stronger involvement by the USG in supporting anti-communist opposition elements behind the Iron Curtain. Typical were statements from those such as Congressman Charles J. Kersten, Republican Representative from Wisconsin, who declared in 1951, “We have the opportunity of taking the offensive in the Cold War. Let us make some trouble for Joe Stalin in his own back yard.”⁵¹ This proposal, unfortunately, proved ill-timed and unwelcome to those in the U.S. intelligence community who, in fact, were already engaged in such operations in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. The congressman’s strong advocacy for support to anti-communist groups resulted in passage of the Kersten Amendment that year, legislation that directed Congress to appropriate as much as \$100 million annually to support resistance elements in the communist Soviet satellite states of Eastern Europe. In 1955, Kersten left Congress and served briefly as a psychological warfare consultant at the White House.

As an important part of its effort to counter Soviet power and influence in Eastern Europe, the United States formed government-funded radio broadcast organizations to transmit anti-communist propaganda and to report news and other information to the populations of communist Eastern Europe and to keep the spirit of liberty alive. Voice of America was formed in 1947 and Radio Free Europe went on the air three years later. Primarily intended to provide listeners in the target countries with political commentary and news from around the world, events in 1956 led to allegations that the networks attempted to sow the seeds of discontent and resistance. Under the terms of their charter, the stations were actually prohibited from openly advocating revolt or suggesting that the USG would come to the aid to those entering into active resistance against communist authorities.⁵²

A later classified DOD study on U.S. policy toward Eastern Europe in the 1950s, now declassified and released in its final draft form, revealed that

senior U.S. intelligence officials expressed their concern that the Eisenhower administration failed to learn from the 1953 uprising by planning and preparing for the next such opportunity. Thus, they argued, when a revolt in Hungary began three years later, the USG was once again unprepared and lacking of policy options.⁵³

When the people of Hungary rose in rebellion in support of the anti-Soviet Nagy government in Budapest in 1956, the administration of U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower declined to support the movement in any way. Rebel conspirators within Hungary, however, firmly believed that the United States would not only provide arms and other equipment by parachute drop, but that U.S. forces from West Germany would arrive to occupy the country and protect its population from Soviet retaliation.⁵⁴ Eventually, an estimated 80 percent of Hungarian Army troops joined in support of the rebels, causing Soviet troops to enter Budapest in force in October 1956.⁵⁵ By the first week of November, ruthless Soviet repression was carried out by some 200,000 troops deployed to Hungary, resulting in many hundreds of deaths on both sides.⁵⁶

So, in spite of pressure from the Republican Party to take any action that might lead to the liberation of Eastern Europe throughout the early 1950s, the Eisenhower administration failed to act when the opportunity presented itself.⁵⁷ The risk calculation on the part of the NSC resulted in the judgment that directly supporting the uprising in Hungary could easily have escalated to armed U.S. confrontation with the Soviet Union, possibly including the use of nuclear weapons.⁵⁸ A not insignificant contributing factor was that the crisis occurred a month prior to the U.S. presidential election.

One exception to the poor track record of the Eisenhower administration in supporting resistance was the case of Tibet during the late 1950s, when the U.S. intelligence community was approached by leaders of a growing resistance movement opposing the occupation of their territory by forces of the new Communist Chinese government. The Eisenhower administration, seeking ways to disrupt the expansion and consolidation of power by Communist China, recognized this as an opportunity to challenge their Cold War adversary on terrain that was particularly disadvantageous to the occupiers.⁵⁹

Probably the most adept at recognizing such opportunities was William J. Casey, director of the CIA in the Reagan administration. Early in President Reagan's first term, Casey appeared at the White House to brief the president on the state of the Soviet economy. Elaborating on data displayed

on a series of charts, Director Casey explained: “I want you to see for yourself how sick their economy is and, as a consequence, how vulnerable they are. They are overextended. The economy’s in shambles. Poland’s in revolt. They’re bogged down in Afghanistan. Cuba, Angola, Vietnam: their empire’s become a burden. Mr. President, we have a historic opportunity. We can do serious damage to them.”⁶⁰

The administration’s approach was to target unstable Soviet client states whose governments were weak and facing ongoing insurgencies. These situations provided an opportunity to challenge Soviet power at little cost and with minimal risk of escalation to direct armed confrontation.⁶¹ Nicaragua was a case in point. “We have an opportunity in Nicaragua,” wrote Director Casey in a memorandum to the president on 25 June 1983, “without risk of war to achieve a historic first—the rollback of a Communist government.”⁶² Following a decade of U.S. support, that is precisely what occurred. Similar opportunities were exploited in places such as Angola and Cambodia. But it was the support provided simultaneously to two resistance movements throughout the 1980s—armed resistance to a Soviet occupation army in Afghanistan and nonviolent civil resistance against the Soviet satellite government in Poland—that had the most far-reaching effect.

These situations provided an opportunity to challenge Soviet power at little cost and with minimal risk of escalation to direct armed confrontation.

In the case of Afghanistan, U.S. officials considered that “as long as the *mujahideen* were prepared to pay almost any price to kill Russians, it was a heaven-sent opportunity for America to help them against the common foe.”⁶³ Success in the early years emboldened the USG to switch from a strategy of disruption to one of coercion beginning in early 1985, choosing to equip the *mujahideen* with highly effective Stinger anti-aircraft missiles to help drive the Soviets out of Afghanistan.

As the historically successful anti-Soviet campaign in Afghanistan was unfolding, the USG also chose to support the Solidarity civil resistance movement in Poland. The phenomenal success experienced by this movement created a situation that former Secretary of Defense and CIA Director Robert Gates described as “intolerable to the Soviet Union,” striking as it did at “the foundations of communist power in Poland, the security forces.”⁶⁴ In the end, the spread of such unrest to neighboring countries threatened “the

entire communist system and Soviet control over its satellites.”⁶⁵ Combined, the two successful and simultaneous resistance victories, in Secretary Gates’s judgement, contributed significantly to the breakup of the Warsaw Pact and the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Recognizing viable STR opportunities requires an appreciation of the internal tensions present in a rival country and the indicators of latent- and incipient-stage insurgencies or resistance movements. Intelligence should strive to answer questions regarding the capability of the people involved to create a more tolerant and participative form of government if successful and on the group’s willingness to work with the USG and accept its support. After awkward, half-hearted, and unsuccessful attempts to support armed insurgent groups in Iraq and Afghanistan during the 1990s, the administration of President Bill Clinton grasped the opportunity to support a student-led civil resistance movement called *Otpor* that resulted in the overthrow of Serbian dictator Slobodan Milošević in 2000. This brought to an end the 13-year reign of a brutal war criminal.⁶⁶

The decision to take advantage of any identified opportunity is best made when it results from careful consideration of several criteria. Covert action expert William J. Daugherty has written of the importance of clear goals and objectives and the favorable public opinion on the foreign policy that an operation would support.⁶⁷ James A. Barry recommends framing the decision debate around questions derived from Just War Theory, to include: Against whom will the operation be conducted and why? What will be the probable result of a successful operation and how will the population and the international community benefit from it? What are the arguments against the operation? What other options have been attempted and what was the result? Have overt options been tried or considered? If not, why not? Is covert action necessary? What level of secrecy is needed and why? What is the probability of success, what is the measure of success, and what will success look like? What will the extent of damage or disruption be and can it be justified? What controls will be in place to guard against disproportionate damage or the deaths of innocent civilians? Whether a success or a failure, how would the operation be terminated?⁶⁸ Gregory Treverton, a member of former President Jimmy Carter’s NSC staff, has stressed the importance of any operation being consistent with overt U.S. policy and further recommends covert action only in cases that would generate minimal political debate if publicly revealed.⁶⁹

U.S. joint military doctrine further provides mission criteria guidance to be followed by commanders and planners during consideration of SOF employment as part of the Military Decision Making Process, or MDMP. This doctrine includes five basic criteria: Is the mission appropriate for SOF? Does the mission support the combatant commander's overall campaign plan? Is the mission operationally feasible? Are the required resources available? Will the expected outcome of the mission justify the risks involved?⁷⁰

Timing

Whether seeking to prudently employ the degree of force necessary to coerce a hostile or competing government to modify its behavior, or to alter its risk calculus in some way that is beneficial to U.S. interests, or empowering an indigenous opposition element in its quest for self-determination, initiating U.S. support at the right time can be of crucial importance.

Special warfare requires SOF to build trust and confidence with surrogate forces, which can take time, but U.S. support should be executed at the time when it stands the greatest chance of succeeding. Some sources caution that such support efforts should only be made as a last resort, after all other policy options have been exhausted. This may not be the wisest approach, as uncommon, potentially high-payoff opportunities sometimes present themselves before sanctions or other options have run their course. The Syrian opportunity related at the beginning of this chapter is a case in point. The successful STR operations conducted by the USG in Poland, Afghanistan, and Nicaragua during the 1980s were all instituted without hesitation when the undeniably advantageous opportunity presented itself. As Richard Haass has written, "gradualism, or incrementalism, makes little military sense. It provides the adversary time and opportunity to adjust and adapt, politically, psychologically, and militarily."⁷¹ Haass recognizes that sooner is often more effective than later. "Waiting until other policies have failed may limit or forfeit the opportunity to use force effectively," he continues, observing that using intervention as a last resort results in loss of surprise and initiative and can prolong the suffering of innocents.⁷²

Another factor in timing is the stage of development of an insurgency or resistance movement when external support is initiated. The USG may decide to commence support early in the movement's development, when it is still in the latent and incipient stages and we would have the best chance

of influencing, shaping, and steering the movement. This was largely the case in the relationship between the Allied powers and the resistance groups within German occupied Western Europe during the Second World War. This also allows, as it did then, the opportunity to encourage and facilitate the consolidation or coalescing of compatible factions to avoid counterproductive competition. Competing factions or groups that are incompatible or adversarial might be the object of actions designed to thwart or inhibit their development.

Circumstances might indicate that support would be most beneficial late in the movement's development, when outcomes and consequences are easier to forecast and when U.S. support might be just enough to tip the scales in favor of a resistance movement or insurgency that has been largely stalemated. A successful example would be our support to the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan in the fall of 2001 that resulted in driving the Taliban from power in that country. A more problematic example would be the late decision by the Obama administration to provide support to selected factions of the Syrian resistance, when our assistance might be only marginally successful, if not counterproductive. Had the USG initiated support to the emerging Syrian resistance in the early months of its existence, when such support could have encouraged more widespread defections by military and security forces, and before the proliferation of competing factions, many years of turmoil and unrest, deaths and refugee crises, and the intervention of ISIS, possibly could have been avoided.

Many other factors come into consideration with regard to timing for STR operations. Election years, as discussed earlier, can be a factor, as they were for the Eisenhower administration in 1956 and for the Nixon campaign in 1960. With regard to timing the injection of support to a particular stage of a movement's development, a better understanding of tipping points and cascading effects would be beneficial, as would a study of Everett Rogers's diffusion of innovations theory to better understand how ideas spread.

The next chapter reviews some of the many risks that can be associated with supporting foreign resistance movements, how those risks are addressed by decision makers, and the ever-present option of deliberately accepting a degree of risk.

4. Peril: Risks and Consequences

In his memoir, former President George W. Bush described some of the risks that were considered when his national security team debated response options in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States.

I knew in my heart that striking al Qaeda, removing the Taliban, and liberating the suffering people of Afghanistan was necessary and just. But I worried about all that could go wrong. The military planners had laid out the risks: mass starvation, an outbreak of civil war, the collapse of the Pakistani government, an uprising by Muslims around the world, and the one I feared most—a retaliatory attack on the American homeland.⁷³

Decision makers have long been cognizant of the risks associated with large-scale military intervention, but some level of risk is also inherent in low-level STR activity and operations. Supporting resistance can be politically risky for those who authorize and provide oversight to the operation, as well as to those who support it, and personally risky to those who must execute it. Personal risk is a special concern in the case of UW, which is typically conducted in territory variously categorized as denied, hostile, nonpermissive, or semipermissive. Failure to capitalize on an opportunity to leverage a foreign resistance movement, however, can also result in strategic risk by ceding the security and control of U.S. interests.⁷⁴

Planning—the process of balancing ways and means in a manner that achieves a desired end—informs decision making by identifying and articulating risks associated with contemplated courses of action, as well as assumptions required for the continuation of planning. Both risks and opportunities can be identified, as well as possible mitigation strategies. Another important dividend of planning is the assessment it provides decision makers of the potential consequences of a paramilitary or military action. Properly conducted, it provides a running assessment of cost-benefit relationships and necessary trade-offs.⁷⁵ Does the outcome justify the risk, and why?

Risk assessment begins during mission analysis. A preliminary risk assessment should “identify the obstacles or actions that may preclude

mission accomplishment and then assess the impact of these impediments to the mission.⁷⁶ But risk assessment does not end with the disclosure of risks to decision makers and senior leaders. Planners must discuss risks with leadership and develop a risk mitigation strategy.

There are several methods of mitigating or alleviating risk. Risk might be mitigated by reducing the likelihood of occurrence of some action or event

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that could negatively impact a planned operation. If the likelihood of occurrence cannot be reduced, perhaps the cost of occurrence can be lessened by reducing the negative effect of an event. Risk caused by shortfalls in forces might be mitigated by contracting support or by arranging for host-nation support.⁷⁷ In a UW context, such shortfalls can be alleviated by expanding the size of the indigenous irregular force. Risk can often

be reduced to an acceptable level through extensive intelligence collection and analysis, meticulous planning, operational preparation of the environment, good operations security (OPSEC), signature reduction measures, and thorough mission preparation.

Finally, a standard and reliable risk reduction tool is secrecy. This can be accomplished through covert paramilitary action to conceal U.S. sponsorship or through an operation conducted clandestinely to obscure the operation itself. Support can even be provided to resistance more openly but in a low-visibility—acknowledged but not advertised—manner, as early U.S. support to the Nicaraguan Resistance (Contras) was carried out. “Secrecy and denial,” according to two covert action legal experts, “increase the target’s sense of uncertainty and make its ability to prepare for contingencies more difficult and costly. It thus theoretically improves the likelihood of a successful operation.”⁷⁸ Moreover, the avoidance of media coverage and analysis, particularly in the case of contemplated operations that are controversial or potentially costly, can provide policy makers more latitude.⁷⁹ But while there are many advantages to running an operation covertly, there is also the risk of national embarrassment in the event of public exposure.⁸⁰

Deniability and secrecy can sometimes cause more problems than they solve and were major factors in the Bay of Pigs debacle in April 1961, when extreme measures were taken to conceal U.S. involvement and to reduce visibility of the operation. Secretary of State Dean Rusk, for example, insisted that the amphibious landing by U.S.-trained rebel forces on the coast of

Cuba be conducted during the hours of darkness, something even the U.S. armed forces had never attempted. All such deniability dissipated within 48 hours once the operation began.⁸¹ Richard M. Bissell, Jr., the CIA officer who headed the operation, later judged that “almost the worst mistake we made on that operation was clinging to the belief that this could be done in a way that was not attributable to the U.S. government.”⁸² The constraints imposed by the quest for deniability greatly reduced tactical options, prohibited greater use of experienced U.S. personnel, and precluded the use of better facilities from which to launch and support the operation.

Deniability can also be a factor in the provision of arms to insurgents or resistance movements. When President Jimmy Carter began providing material support to Afghan freedom fighters—the mujahideen resistance—in their fight against Soviet occupation forces during the 1980s, the administration initially provided funds to the government of Egypt, who then provided Soviet-made weapons to the Afghan resistance to aid the USG in maintaining plausible deniability.⁸³

OPSEC, of course, can make or break an STR operation. Several weeks before the ill-fated Bay of Pigs operation, one intelligence official arranged for Cuban exiles serving as the Miami-based political leadership for the resistance to visit the secret training camp in Guatemala where U.S. Army Special Forces were preparing the rebel force. Upon their return to the United States, the exile leaders couldn’t resist sharing their experience with reporters, resulting in several articles in *The New York Times* and other papers in the weeks leading up to the operation. President Kennedy observed at the time that Cuban leader Fidel Castro had no requirement for spies in the United States; he only had to read our newspapers.

Foreign espionage, if not successfully countered, can have devastating results for STR operations, as was proven by the work of senior British intelligence officer Harold “Kim” Philby during the early Cold War years. Philby, then serving as British intelligence liaison to the American intelligence community, had been secretly working as a spy for the USSR since the 1930s. In his service at the highest levels of British and U.S. intelligence, he was aware of all Anglo-American operations planned and executed in support

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of anti-communist resistance behind the Iron Curtain. Philby fed all such information to his Soviet handlers, who then shared it with the security forces of the Soviet satellite states of Eastern Europe. As a result, all such operations ended in disaster as operatives were arrested immediately upon entry into the target countries.⁸⁴

Under certain circumstances, resistance can be supported openly and overtly, as was the case when the USG provided assistance to the *Otpor* student civil resistance movement in Serbia. *Otpor* had grown into a nationwide movement by the time it succeeded in overthrowing dictator Slobodan Milošević in October 2000. Although *Otpor* was one of several opposition movements, it was described by one senior State Department official as by far the most effective.⁸⁵ Political risk for the USG was mitigated by openly describing the support to *Otpor* and other opposition elements as a democracy promotion project, although it was intended from the beginning as a means to facilitate regime change.⁸⁶ Overt support carries with it many advantages, including increased freedom of action and broader international support. There was little international support for Milošević, viewed by countries around the world as a tyrant who abused human rights and—as confirmed by his conviction following his overthrow—a war criminal.

Risk, both political and personal, can also be mitigated through coalition or alliance with friendly states who share our security interests. Although STR is most commonly done unilaterally, it might be accomplished through multinational operations under certain circumstances. In such cases, the requirement for unity of effort will emphasize common objectives and shared interests, which could include the sharing of risk, although the ability or willingness of a partner to contribute to risk mitigation might be influenced by the partner's legal constraints, doctrine, equipment, culture, or politics.

International cooperation has often been a factor in America's history of supporting resistance, beginning with the close collaboration between the U.S. Office of Strategic Services (OSS) and Britain's Special Operations Executive (SOE) and other nations' special operations organizations during the Second World War.

Support often comes in the way of basing or overflight agreements. In the months leading up to the Bay of Pigs operation against the Castro regime in Cuba, Guatemalan President Ydígoras Fuentes granted the use of a base for the training of the rebel force of Cuban exiles by U.S. Army Special Forces, as well as a status-of-forces agreement. Next door, Nicaraguan dictator General

Luis Somoza agreed to allow the CIA the use of a landing strip at Puerto Cabezas in northeastern Nicaragua.⁸⁷

The United States joined Honduras and Argentina in supporting the Nicaraguan Resistance (the Contras) during the 1980s.⁸⁸ Even Saudi Arabia's King Fahd provided funding to the Contras.⁸⁹ Concurrently, in supporting the Polish civil resistance movement Solidarity during the 1980s, the USG benefitted from close cooperation and access assistance provided by the Vatican, which allowed the USG to tap into its vast network of supporters throughout Eastern Europe.⁹⁰ Another lengthy STR operation during the Cold War involved U.S. support to two Angolan insurgent groups—the National Liberation Front of Angola (FNLA) and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA)—that were locked in a civil war against a third, Soviet backed group. The U.S. benefitted from a staging airbase in Zaire, transshipment basing in Zambia, and funding and equipment from South Africa. The latter even contributed its own armored forces in support of the insurgents. King Hassan of Morocco agreed to channel aid to UNITA and provide sanctuary for the group's external headquarters in exchange for \$307 million worth of U.S.-supplied military equipment.⁹¹

The United States received pledges of political support from countries around the world in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on America on 11 September 2001. U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell worked hard to rally support for a UW operation that leveraged the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance resistance coalition in Afghanistan. The support of neighboring countries for temporary basing, passage, and overflight rights was crucial. Secretary Powell was even successful in rallying the support of Pakistan, one of only three countries that recognized the Taliban as Afghanistan's legitimate government. Cooperation from Uzbekistan and Tajikistan was needed for logistical purposes, and President Bush, in a 22 September phone call to Russian President Vladimir Putin, gained the assistance of the Russian government which still maintained significant influence with the former Soviet republics.⁹² As a result, coalition forces were granted permission by the Uzbek government to establish a base at Karshi Kanabad.⁹³

In fact, the USG's success in gaining rights to base STR operations from another country during peacetime date back to the earliest years of the Cold War, when operations into Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union were launched from Germany. Beginning in the mid-1950s and continuing for more than a decade, the CIA supplied Tibetan resistance fighters against

Communist Chinese aggression with operations flown from an air base in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh).⁹⁴

When countries refuse to support U.S. operations, the risk impact on SOF can be considerable, as was the case in the invasion of Iraq in 2003. The government of Turkey, a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) ally, rejected the use of its territory for the passage of the U.S. 4th Infantry Division to launch an attack into northern Iraq in support of the invasion from the south. Risk to SOF increased greatly as it then fell to a task force of 5,000 U.S. and British SOF to partner with some 70,000 Kurdish Peshmerga irregulars, along with air support, to hold in place 13 Iraqi divisions in the north to prevent their use against U.S. invasion forces advancing from the south. The UW operation also succeeded in neutralizing a Sunni Islamic terrorist group called Ansar al-Islam and capturing the key cities of Kirkuk and Mosul and critical oil fields in the north.⁹⁵

On rare occasions, a host nation might be tempted to use a temporary basing agreement with the USG to its advantage for other purposes. When

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young Guatemalan military officers staged a brief revolt in November 1960, Guatemalan President Ydígoras asked for U.S. assistance in suppressing the rebellion, specifically by allowing him the use of the U.S. Green Berets then in Guatemala training the Cuban exile brigade for operations against Castro.⁹⁶ Fortunately, the uprising soon dissipated.

For international as well as domestic political reasons, countries sometimes choose to give their political support and encouragement for a U.S. STR campaign, although they choose not to make this known publicly in order to mitigate their own political risk. In January 1988, National Security Adviser Colin Powell of the Reagan administration met with four Central American presidents who backed the U.S. support effort to the Contras, “but none of them want to come out and say so.”⁹⁷

One reason countries that assist U.S. STR operations by providing basing or transit rights, or by offering sanctuary to resistance forces, wish to keep such arrangements secret is that they face the wrath of the targeted regime or occupying power. This was why, when Guatemalan President Ydígoras allowed SOF to train Cuban exiles at a base in his country, he was anxious

to get the trainees out of Guatemala as soon as possible.⁹⁸ This was also a factor throughout the 1980s with Pakistan during the U.S. and Saudi support program to the Afghan *mujahideen*. When CIA Director William Casey met with Pakistan's President Zia ul-Haq, Zia explained that his desire was to provide the mujahideen just enough support "to keep the pot boiling, but not boil over."⁹⁹ He feared that supporting the resistance too strongly might provoke a Soviet attack on Pakistan.

The governments of Honduras and Costa Rica harbored similar concerns while providing sanctuary to the U.S.-backed Nicaraguan Resistance. In March 1988, Nicaraguan Sandinista troops were becoming bolder in attacking Contra forces, even entering Honduran territory to do so. To aid in deterring such incursions, Honduran President José Azcona requested a show of support from the United States, and President Reagan responded by sending helicopter aviation units and several battalions of airborne and light infantry. More than 3,000 U.S. troops arrived in Honduras within 48 hours of the Honduran request, with soldiers of the 82nd Airborne Division parachuting into the country.¹⁰⁰ Later that month, when Nicaraguan troops had advanced 15 miles into Honduras to strike Contra camps, President Reagan approved weapons shipments and helicopter lift to Honduran units in response to a request from the Honduran president.¹⁰¹ Even Salvadoran President José Napoleon Duarte expressed concern in January 1988 at having a Contra radio broadcast facility on the territory of El Salvador, fearing that it could invite Nicaraguan retaliation.¹⁰²

A major host nation concern in such cases involves the risk of provoking armed retaliation by the target regime or occupying power if details of an operation are leaked to the media or otherwise become public knowledge. In addition to the danger of attack, revelation of such support might cause political embarrassment (domestically, regionally, or globally), empowerment of a state leader's critics, or the onset or increase in internal conflict. These consequences could also have an adverse backlash affect for U.S. strategic interests, whether the operation fails or succeeds.¹⁰³

Regardless of the thoroughness of a risk reduction strategy, some residual risk is bound to remain and must be clearly understood by decision makers. It is incumbent upon combatant commanders to discuss risks with senior civilian leaders and stakeholders to ensure that they are better informed when considering options. Senior DOD officials and the president may have differing views on how to best mitigate risk. Planners should avoid

the inclination to ignore risky aspects of an operational concept in order to make a plan less contentious.¹⁰⁴ Just as important, they should avoid yielding to the temptation to eliminate otherwise feasible courses of action on the grounds of perceived risk.

Frustrated at the paucity of innovative operational concepts emerging from the Joint Staff during the weeks following the 9/11 attacks, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld issued a stern memorandum to the chairman and vice chairman of the JCS on 10 October 2001. Explicitly calling for more creative thinking from the military, he lamented that, since the beginning of the crisis, DOD “has produced next to no actionable suggestions”¹⁰⁵ other than employing cruise missiles and bombs. The secretary described a risk-averse environment within the Pentagon that was unresponsive to the needs and requests of the president and himself. In assessing the problem, the secretary wrote:

All I can imagine is that down the line, in many locations in OSD [the Office of the Secretary of Defense], the Joint Staff, and the CINCs [theater commanders in chief, now referred to as combatant commanders], there are middle-level people making terribly wrong judgments with respect to political risk and military risk, decisions they are not qualified to make and ought not to be making. They must be systematically dumbing down all proposals that anyone creative is coming up with to the point that they block every idea except cruise missiles and bombers.¹⁰⁶

The secretary stated that this practice “has to stop and fast,” and that “the NCA [National Command Authorities—i.e., the president and the secretary of defense] will decide whether or not we think they are actionable. We will make judgments as to risk. That is our job.” In closing, the secretary reiterated that “it is the NCA’s job to balance risks and benefits.”¹⁰⁷

There are risks associated with every proposed action, or in every deliberate omission of an action under consideration, and the president’s decision on which risks are worth taking is “the essence of strategic decision making.”¹⁰⁸ It is the job of SOF leaders and planners to inform that decision-making process. Joint doctrine describes military risk characterization as “an integration of probability and consequence of an identified impediment.”¹⁰⁹ In determining what risks are involved, planners rely on personal experience, historical data, intuitive analysis, and informed judgment. In the words of

John Collins, “Degrees of risk are mainly a matter of judgment.”¹¹⁰ Sometimes calculated risks—those recognized and willingly incurred—are accepted.

Risk can result from misperceptions or miscalculation on the part of planners. This might involve overrating or underrating the capabilities and intentions of adversaries or partners. In some cases, this has been the result of overreliance on faulty assumptions, a hallmark example being a mistaken assumption by CIA officers planning the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba. Disregarding the Agency’s own intelligence that indicated otherwise, planners persisted in their belief that the Cuban population would rise up in revolt against the Castro regime once the landings began. No such development occurred.

Decision makers often choose to employ SOF because of their broad range of proven capabilities, relative speed of employment, political astuteness, interagency collaboration flexibility, language skills, negotiation and mediation abilities, regional knowledge, and high level of autonomy and self-sufficiency. But they are also often the force of choice because, although their use can represent a high degree of political and personal risk, it is considered an acceptable degree of risk when compared to that associated with a larger-scale intervention. The employment of SOF rather than larger forces also reduces the likelihood of civilian casualties and collateral damage. Early use of SOF can pay dividends disproportionate to their size, limiting both the scope of conflict and the expenditure of national resources.¹¹¹

Political Risk

During decision briefs and option consideration, senior leaders and planners must be prepared to address political implications, whether an operation is successful or in the event that it fails or is publicly exposed prior to completion. Among the many political risks associated with supporting resistance, especially when conducted outside of wartime conditions, is the risk of provocation, escalation, or retaliation. Any aspect of political warfare, even the exercise of economic power, might conceivably lead to open warfare. American foreign relations historian Walter LaFeber has written of how economic policies during the 1930s contributed to competing political blocs that moved from economic warfare to global military warfare.¹¹²

Risks included in direct intervention include exorbitant financial costs—especially in the case of protracted conflicts—censure by the international

community, political embarrassment in the event of failure, the risk of provocation or escalation, and physical risk to members of the armed services engaged. Much of this risk can be mitigated or minimized through the use of proxies, making small-footprint STR much more acceptable and sustainable—politically and fiscally—than many alternatives.¹¹³ President Eisenhower recognized the value of proxy warfare in reducing political risk and financial burden as early as 1955, when he described it during an NSC meeting as “the cheapest insurance in the world.”¹¹⁴ Added to the attraction

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of reduced risk is the politically useful option of conducting proxy warfare in a way that adds the element of plausible deniability.

A state that discovers or believes itself to be the object of an American STR operation, especially if U.S. troops are known to be on the ground, will certainly consider such an intervention into its internal affairs as a breach of its sovereignty. The aggrieved state might view it as a dangerous provocation, even consider it an act of war.¹¹⁵ Escalation

management is a concern for both direct and indirect forms of intervention, but the risk of escalation is commonly considered to be lower in limited, low-visibility operations than in larger conventional force interventions or with precision strike options.

When such sizable operations are considered to be inappropriate or infeasible because of a high risk of escalation, smaller and more discreet operations, including the support of a resistance movement or insurgency, may be preferred.¹¹⁶ This proved to be the case when the government of Laos was threatened by communist takeover in the late 1950s. President Dwight Eisenhower did not want to commit U.S. ground forces in support of the Royal Lao government, wishing to avoid the risks associated with overt military intervention.¹¹⁷ As an alternative, the president chose to arm and support an indigenous force of Hmong tribesmen under the leadership of Royal Lao Army Lieutenant Colonel Vang Pao, with training and advisory support provided by U.S. Army Special Forces, USAF air commandos, and American intelligence operatives.¹¹⁸ Such smaller proxy engagements also provide greater diplomatic flexibility, where a decision to suspend an

operation is much less traumatic and costly than would be the case in a large-scale intervention.

In some cases, the possibility of escalation is not even viewed as a risk in the usual sense. During planning throughout 1960 for the Cuban Bay of Pigs operation, intelligence officials felt that the possibility of Soviet intervention should not negatively impact U.S. planning. Any such action on the part of the USSR was viewed as beneficial in that it would openly expose Soviet activity and interests in Cuba. This would represent a propaganda failure for the Soviets and a diplomatic tool to be used against the Castro regime.¹¹⁹

Risk of escalation can also result from actions taken by our adversary, as was the case when Reagan administration officials learned on 25 June 1987 that Cuban pilots were flying gunship helicopters against the U.S.-supported Contra insurgents in Nicaragua.¹²⁰

A final point on escalation risk is that it has changed in the post-Cold War years. Administrations can now make decisions on intervention with far more latitude in terms of risk than was possible during the Cold War.¹²¹ Before the post-Cold War erosion in bi-polar adversary alliances, any intervention carried with it the feared imminence of a Third World War.¹²² That prospect has diminished considerably.

Another possible pitfall is the jeopardy of international condemnation, even the risk of negative reaction by friends and allies. International opprobrium or censure could materialize if a clandestine or covert operation were compromised, but might also emerge if such support was provided openly. The United States might be viewed by the international community as, at best, brokers of instability, and at worst, aggressors.¹²³ This proved to be the case in the fallout from the failed Bay of Pigs operation in 1961, when America's European allies, failing to see how Cuba posed a threat to the United States, deplored the operation not because of its failure but because of the decision to launch it. In the view of Western European political leaders, America's credibility as a world leader suffered damage as a result of the disaster.¹²⁴ Such a dramatic and high-profile failure can undermine American prestige and the perception of U.S. military strength, resulting in political compromise.¹²⁵

STR operations can sometimes necessitate moral concessions in terms of relationships with otherwise undesirable partners, similar to those faced by President Franklin Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill when they entered into an alliance with the ruthless dictator Joseph Stalin.

In post-9/11 operations in Afghanistan, U.S. decision makers considered support to the Northern Alliance—a militia coalition led by men with a record of treachery, war crimes, and human rights abuses—an acceptable moral trade-off in that it represented an alliance with indigenous Afghan elements that precluded the need for an American invasion.¹²⁶ In fact, the Northern Alliance represented the only feasible indigenous anti-Taliban proxy force. Similarly, when the U.S. theater commander in World War II China asked OSS to conduct UW operations in Vietnam in support of an Allied ground campaign aimed at securing seaports on the coast of southern China, Ho Chi Minh's Viet Minh guerrilla group, suspected even then as being communist, was selected as the most viable resistance force for the Americans to work with. General Colin Powell also experienced this when Zaire's dictator, President Mobutu Sese Seko, allowed the United States to stage out of his country when supporting insurgent elements in Angola. As Powell described it, "Cold War politics sometimes made for creepy bedfellows."¹²⁷ Again, during the 1980s, the Reagan administration found it in America's interest to support an anti-communist resistance coalition in Cambodia—aimed at ousting a Vietnamese occupation force and puppet government—that included as one of its factions the murderous and infamous Khmer Rouge, the coalition's most effective fighting force.¹²⁸

There are significant political risks associated with the exposure of STR operations that were intended to be conducted covertly or clandestinely. Particularly in the case of failure or perceived failure, such exposure of an operation can be publicly and politically embarrassing to the president and can negatively impact his relationship with Congress, as well as with other nations and their leaders. Failure of an operation can, and usually does, also spur a negative domestic reaction, which can result in political backlash and declining public confidence in the federal government.¹²⁹ In the aftermath of the Bay of Pigs debacle, President Kennedy called the failed invasion "the worst experience of my life."¹³⁰

Election years can have an impact on covert action programs under consideration, where a compromised operation could be politically awkward for a presidential candidate. This risk also played a role in the 1961 Bay of Pigs operation. Originally planned for execution in 1960, Vice President Richard M. Nixon, the Republican presidential nominee in that year's election, pushed to have the operation delayed until after the elections because of the political damage that such an intervention's possible failure could have for

his Party's campaign. The delay of several months proved beneficial to the Castro regime as its restrictions on freedoms, its identification and penetration of dissident groups, its arrest and imprisoning of key opposition leaders, its emplacement of a network of informants, its improvements in military capabilities and capacity, its increasing control of the media, and its general tightening of security had more time to develop. The impending 1956 presidential election also might have been a factor in President Eisenhower's decision not to go to the aid of anti-Soviet resisters during the Hungarian Revolution that began in October of that year.

The delay of several months proved beneficial to the Castro regime

But another aspect of the 1960 election campaign was the attention paid to the Cuban threat by both parties. As a result of this, polls showed that President Kennedy's popularity actually rose to 85 percent following the Bay of Pigs debacle, possibly indicating that the American people at least viewed the attempt favorably. This marked the pinnacle of Kennedy's popularity, even ranking 11 percentage points higher than his popularity during the following year's Cuban missile crisis.¹³¹

Even a successful STR operation can incur politically damaging costs. While U.S. support to the Contras in Nicaragua during the 1980s succeeded in halting the flow of Cuban arms through Nicaragua to communist guerrillas in El Salvador and caused the Managua government to enter negotiations and hold fair elections, the operation is remembered for the illegal activities of NSC staff members in what came to be known as the Iran-Contra affair.

On occasion, the public remains unaware of a failed operation but it nonetheless causes political discord within the USG, such as an exposed operation against or within a country with whom we were not at war, causing political and personal embarrassment to U.S. diplomats. This can take the form of the rare and risky, not to mention ill-advised, practice of subverting the sovereignty of a friendly foreign state for the purpose of using it as a base for staging operations into a hostile state. When, for example, the U.S. attempted to support anti-communist resistance in Yugoslavia in the early Cold War years, a security compromise of the mission resulted in guerrillas being captured upon parachuting into the country. Compartmentation of the highly secret operation resulted in U.S. Ambassador to Yugoslavia Cavendish Cannon learning about it only from unofficial sources. The ambassador was highly critical of such an action by the USG at a time when diplomatic

efforts were underway to encourage Yugoslav leader Tito in his break with Moscow.¹³²

Similarly, the U.S. intelligence community began arming and training former Nationalist Chinese troops—a rogue remnant force that had encamped in northern Burma following their 1949 defeat in the Chinese Revolution—in the early 1950s. Using these troops as a proxy force to launch cross-border operations into southern China during the Korean War, the administration did not inform its ambassador to Rangoon. The USG intent was to arm and train the force and use it to launch an operation into China’s Yunnan Province to hopefully draw Chinese forces and attention away from the Korean Peninsula. The operation was a twofold disaster—first because it failed militarily and second because it was done without the approval of or even in consultation with the Burmese government. The USG ignored all protests from friendly Rangoon and disavowed any knowledge of the affair. Professionally embarrassed by the incident, the U.S. ambassador to Burma, who only learned of the operation from the Burmese, resigned in protest.¹³³ A few years later, U.S.-supported Tibetan rebels, under great pressure from effective Chinese counterinsurgency operations, crossed into Nepal and began operating from there without the consent of the Nepalese government. Although the resistance force undertook this action on its own—it was not suggested or encouraged by the USG—it was still affiliated with the USG.

Sometimes an operation in support of resistance in one country can be seriously impaired as a result of a completely unconnected operation that has been exposed in another part of the world. When the Soviet Union shot down a U.S. U-2 spy plane on 1 May 1960, President Eisenhower ordered a halt to all C-130 air resupply missions to resistance groups in Tibet. The risk of a second shoot-down by communist forces was too great.¹³⁴

Intelligence should provide decision makers with as complete a picture of resistance potential in the country as possible, including a thorough

The USG must be cognizant of situations where support to a particular resistance group might risk inflaming rivalries

understanding of the differing agendas of various groups and factions. The USG must be cognizant of situations where support to a particular resistance group might risk inflaming rivalries—generated by personal or group ambitions—to the point that groups are more focused on battling each other than

they are on fighting the common foe. In rare situations, this might require

U.S. support to operations targeting resistance groups whose objectives run counter to those of a rival U.S.-sponsored group.¹³⁵

Likewise, there can be a risk of enabling malign actors when USG support is provided to an unpopular resistance leader. A potential political consequence of this is that such a relationship with the USG can result in the leader accruing undue prestige in a way that could hinder long-term U.S. interests. There have been occasions where successful U.S. subversive intervention activities in other countries incurred unforeseen political liabilities for the United States. This was especially true in the early Cold War years, when operations in Iran (1953) and Guatemala (1954)—both tactically successful—nevertheless failed to result in a change for the better for the people of those countries when the newly installed governments proved more repressive than the ones they replaced.

Another political risk that incurs a cost to a population the U.S. hopes to support is that of unintentionally raising the hopes of the people. During the Cold War, broadcasts to oppressed Eastern European populations by networks such as Voice of America, Radio Free Europe, and Radio Liberty played an important role in informing the people of world events in a way that countered regime propaganda. While the primary intent of these broadcasts was to provide news of current events, they had the unfortunate side-effect of unintentionally fomenting revolution by the target populations when the U.S. had no intention of supporting such uprisings to avoid escalation risks. The people of Hungary rose up against their communist government in 1956, reportedly after being stirred to action as a result of Radio Free Europe broadcasts.¹³⁶ This resulted in an invasion by Soviet forces to restore order in their satellite state, causing the deaths of thousands of people, which was not only politically embarrassing to the United States, but also introduces the element of personal risk.

Personal Risk

Policy makers will also consider those people whose lives and welfare will be placed at risk in the event of a U.S. intervention involving support provided to a resistance movement or insurgency. This can include SOF and inter-agency operators, American diplomats or other citizens and their families, and the local civilian population.

An operation in support of resistance or insurgency, especially in wartime, can call for operators to be inserted, by parachute or other high-risk means, into hostile, denied territory. Operators then need to function in very small teams, possibly even operating alone for days at a time, among indigenous people whom they have never met and who will, at first, be wary and suspicious of outsiders. Prior to the insertion of interagency and SOF elements in northern Afghanistan in the fall of 2001, in response to terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, it was unknown to what extent Northern Alliance resistance leaders would welcome, or even tolerate, U.S. forces in the country.¹³⁷ Intelligence takes on added importance in ensuring that decision makers, leaders, and planners can accurately assess the personal risks involved.

SOF are a limited, high-value resource and the risk of losing them must always be a paramount concern of decision makers. Operators might be killed or seriously injured, or they might be captured, in which case they could face harsh treatment or find themselves being used as political pawns in negotiations for their release. During the Korean War, the United States provided support to anti-communist resistance groups in China. Although U.S. officers were prohibited from accompanying guerrillas on operations, two CIA employees accompanied a group of Manchurian guerrillas on an infiltration flight in November 1952. The flight was shot down and both men were captured, tried, and imprisoned by the Chinese. The two officers were only released in the early 1970s as the USG was in negotiations with the Chinese government for re-establishment of diplomatic relations.¹³⁸

SOF operators, interagency partners, and indigenous irregular forces in denied, hostile, nonpermissive, or semipermissive environments will often need to function without readily available friendly support. This greatly reduces any margin for error and puts a premium on accurate and timely intelligence and effective preparation. It also requires close rapport with indigenous elements that can provide some measure of security for UW operators.

Force protection under such conditions differs from that required by larger conventional combat or support units. Security can be greatly improved by utilizing local auxiliary personnel—those civilians who provide support to the resistance while carrying on their daily work routine and benefitting from some freedom of travel around the area—as an outer security cordon capable of providing early warning of government or occupation

force activities. Limiting resupply operations and communications, and avoiding patterns in such activities, also helps to mitigate personal risk.¹³⁹

Resistance forces can be very effective in providing a ring of security around U.S. operators, and they can sometimes provide protection in unusual ways. One of the more imaginative approaches was taken by Thailand's Prince Regent Pridi Phanomyong, the acting head of state and leader of the anti-Japanese Free Thai resistance movement during World War II. Pridi arranged for OSS operatives to establish their headquarters in the lavish Suan Kulap Palace, the former residence of Premier Pibul Songgram, who had been ousted by the Thais for collaborating with Japanese occupation authorities. Thailand was under occupation by some 60,000 Japanese troops, with an estimated 7,000 in the capital city of Bangkok.¹⁴⁰ The palace that eventually housed an OSS headquarters of

Resistance forces can be very effective in providing a ring of security around U.S. operators

nearly 30 Americans—located next door to Regent Pridi's palace in the heart of Bangkok—soon housed six powerful radio transmitters that were almost continuously on the air as OSS elements established and ran six resistance training camps throughout the country. Japanese occupation forces were informed by the Thais that their Criminal Investigation Division occupied the building.¹⁴¹

It is not even necessary for U.S. operatives to be in denied territory to be at risk. During operations in support of the Nicaraguan Resistance—the Contras—even U.S. personnel operating across the border in Honduras because they were prohibited from accompanying guerrilla forces into Nicaragua, were subject to attack. Nicaraguan forces pursued Contra fighters into Honduran territory on a few occasions and, in January 1984, a U.S. helicopter flying in Honduran airspace was shot down by Nicaraguan forces, killing the pilot.¹⁴² Four years later a Contra resupply aircraft was shot down, this time in Nicaraguan airspace.¹⁴³

When prohibitions are placed on U.S. personnel accompanying the indigenous guerrillas they trained when they are sent on missions into denied territory, the risk to those indigenous forces increases. In June 1951, during the Korean War, two Americans were lost—assumed to have been captured or killed—while on a UW mission into North Korea.¹⁴⁴ As a result, the U.S. Far East Command prohibited any further participation in such operations by U.S. personnel, a decision that would have disastrous consequences. The

prohibition effectively removed the most highly trained and experienced men from behind-the-lines operations, leaving the mission in the hands of untested and poorly-trained Korean operatives. “As a result,” according to historian Michael Krivdo, “more than 400 Korean guerrillas were parachuted into North Korea between 22 January 1952 and 19 May 1953 and none were ever seen again.”¹⁴⁵

The loss of SOF operators and the indigenous guerrilla forces they arm, train, and advise or lead also results in the loss of U.S. arms and other equipment, which might then one day be used against friendly forces. When U.S. intelligence officers interdicted a shipment of communist-supplied arms to leftist guerrillas in El Salvador during the insurgency in that country in the 1980s, the shipment was found to include M-16 rifles captured from U.S. forces in Vietnam nearly two decades earlier.

Decision makers must also consider the safety risk to American citizens in a country where U.S. intervention is being considered. If planned operations in support of a resistance movement or insurgency take place in a country where the United States maintains a diplomatic presence, presidents must take into consideration the safety and security of embassy or consulate personnel and their families. One of the major concerns cited during early discussions on a potential covert operation against the Castro regime in Cuba was the risk that such an operation posed for the safety of 10,000 U.S. citizens working or living on the island.¹⁴⁶ In a 10 March 1960 meeting of the NSC, members discussed their concern for the safety of the U.S. Country Team and other American citizens left in Cuba after the Castro takeover. The chairman of the JCS informed the Council that contingency plans had been drawn up for the evacuation of the 10,000 American citizens in Cuba and that military forces were prepared to execute the plans, if necessary.¹⁴⁷

Likewise, the safety of U.S. Embassy personnel in Kabul was a concern of President Jimmy Carter’s when he initiated support to the Afghan *mujahideen* resistance in 1979 and was again a point of concern for President Ronald Reagan nine years later. As U.S.-backed mujahideen fighters laid siege to the Soviet-occupied country’s capital in October 1988, President Reagan feared for the safety of 17 American citizens still working in the U.S. Embassy.¹⁴⁸

Finally, decision makers must also consider the risk facing the population of a country in which the United States supports a resistance movement or insurgency, since it is they who must suffer the consequences of retaliatory measures by the regime or occupying force.

Consequences

Any potential negative long-term or unintended consequences of an operation must be considered to the extent possible. Examples of U.S. covert actions that have had long-term adverse repercussions are well known. The rise of Ayatollah Ruholla Khomeini to power in Iran as a result of the 1979 Iranian Revolution was, among other causes, an indirect result of the U.S.-orchestrated overthrow of Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddegh a quarter of a century earlier, in August 1953.¹⁴⁹

There are more recent cases. In accordance with an agreement reached by the governments of Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the United States following the Soviet invasion and occupation of Afghanistan in 1979–1980, all aid for the Afghan rebels was to be funneled through and distributed by the Pakistani government’s intelligence arm, the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) organization. This resulted in the bulk of Saudi- and American-supplied arms and cash being provided to the fundamentalist Muslim groups and militant Islamist leaders that Pakistan favored, such as Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, who would become a major antagonist of the United States in later years.¹⁵⁰

Judging what the long-term effects of an operation might be is a fundamental part of the STR decision-making process and is essential in determining whether or not the objectives are worth the risk. Often, the overthrow of a dictatorship or removal of the present regime is not enough. As one retired U.S. ambassador who experienced more than one forceful change of regime told this author, “the overthrow is the easy part.”¹⁵¹ The imperative objective in cases of regime change is the establishment of a society and government that embraces self-determination and the rule of law and that outlaws human rights abuses. Clarity on this point, and on the feasibility and likelihood of success, will go far in influencing policy makers and Congressional leaders.

Unfavorable consequences can generate far-reaching policy fallout. The political embarrassment to the Kennedy Administration resulting from the Bay of Pigs misadventure, and the setback it caused to America’s credibility as a world leader, had long-lasting repercussions. For the remainder of his time in office, President Kennedy maintained his respect for the JCS, but was forever afterward wary of the advice he received from them, since they had given their stamp of approval to the CIA plan.¹⁵² The president also believed that he had been misled by the CIA on the expectation of a popular uprising in Cuba generated by the U.S.-backed invasion by an exile

rebel force.¹⁵³ Moreover, the president became skeptical of the CIA's covert action expertise and came to rely more on the DOD for such activities, most notably in Vietnam. As for Fidel Castro, his position was strengthened in the aftermath of the failed operation. His grip on power and his control of the Cuban people was enhanced, and his triumph over his much larger and more capable foe hardened his stance and inflated his image internationally. He formally declared Cuba to be a Marxist-Leninist state, signed a defense pact with the Soviet government, and agreed to allow the USSR to base ballistic missiles on the island. The U.S. operation had succeeded only in driving the Cuban dictator into a stronger alliance with the Soviet Union.¹⁵⁴ As later described by U.S. Army General Alexander Haig, "the Bay of Pigs was a very good example of the sort of enterprise that sets the law of unintended consequences in motion with a vengeance."¹⁵⁵

Successful operations, if not properly followed up, can also have untoward consequences in the form of blowback. Following the highly successful coalition effort in support of the Afghan mujahideen resistance during the 1980s, coercing the Soviet occupation force to withdraw from Afghanistan, the United States lost all interest in the liberated country, leaving a political and economic void that was soon filled by the more militant elements of the resistance. The United States and much of the world would pay a high price for failing to follow through by enabling stability during the transition to a new government.¹⁵⁶ Following the ensuing civil war, the Taliban came to power and began implementing harshly repressive measures in Afghanistan. In time, they grew more radical and provided sanctuary to groups such as al-Qaeda.¹⁵⁷

Although they did not involve U.S. support to legitimate insurgencies, the CIA-engineered coup d'états in Iran in 1953 and Guatemala in 1954, while temporarily serving U.S. interests, in the long run proved to have disastrous consequences for the prestige of the United States and for the lives of the populations involved.¹⁵⁸

As stated earlier, however, decision makers must be reminded that there is another perspective in the 'long-term consequences' debate—what might be the long-term consequences of doing nothing? Closely related to the calculation of risks and consequences is the establishment of sound assumptions upon which to base a plan and an assessment of a contemplated operation's feasibility.

5. Premise: Assumptions and Feasibility

Two considerations—assumptions and feasibility—that are commonly thought of as crucial elements of the planning process should also come into play, at least to some extent, in the decision-making process. Assumptions fill gaps in intelligence or insufficient awareness of an adversary’s intentions or capabilities. The feasibility assessment process seeks to determine if an operation under consideration is achievable, acceptable, and suitable and determines the availability of the means and resources required to accomplish the mission.

Assumptions fill gaps in intelligence or insufficient awareness of an adversary’s intentions or capabilities.

Assumptions

As with risk assessment, the articulation and validation of assumptions—essential for campaign design and planning in the absence of facts—commences during initial mission analysis. In fact, little in the way of planning can be done until leadership validates some primary assumptions.¹⁵⁹ Assumptions must be logical and realistic and, because they add some probability of error into a plan, they should be reviewed and updated as planning progresses; new information gained along the way may invalidate an assumption and necessitate a change to a plan or the development of a new course of action.

Intelligence requirements should be developed to seek facts to replace or validate assumptions. Strategic guidance and other direction should be consulted for any imposed assumptions. Continuing discussion by senior commanders and staff with DOD leadership will expedite assumption and planning adjustments based on any changes in planning or guidance. These could be threat-based or could involve changes in anticipated international basing, airspace, or access permissions, or in the contributions of allies or coalition partners.¹⁶⁰

For the most illustrious example of the far-reaching consequences of unsupported assumptions, we must turn once again to the unpropitious Bay of Pigs affair. Foremost among the assumptions upon which the plan

for that operation was based was the belief that the landing of a U.S.-trained rebel force on Cuba would provoke a nationwide uprising, with the people actively joining and supporting the anti-Castro operation. Unfortunately, intelligence provided not a shred of evidence to support this.

On the contrary, probably the best assessment of public opinion in Cuba at the time—a strong indicator of resistance potential—was a paper provided to the NSC late in the Eisenhower administration by pollster Lloyd A. Free, co-founder of the Institute for International Social Research at Princeton University. The son of a six-term Republican Congressman from California, and possessing a Stanford law degree, Free was known for producing international public opinion surveys that were widely hailed for their accuracy. In 1960 he surveyed Cuban public opinion and found overwhelming support for Fidel Castro at that time. This should not be surprising since Castro had ousted the very unpopular authoritarian ruler Fulgencio Batista and provided some hope for social and economic advancement for the Cuban people, particularly among the lower classes. That hope would only be dashed as the true nature of the Castro dictatorship later evolved. Although the report gained much attention when first circulated at the NSC, its importance was apparently missed in the transition to the Kennedy administration in January 1961. According to one report, Free's study "was not read by President John F. Kennedy's principal advisers until after the Bay of Pigs fiasco."¹⁶¹

Nor was Free alone in his judgment. Air Force Brigadier General Edward G. Lansdale, the deputy assistant to the secretary of defense for special operations and the administration's foremost insurgency and counterinsurgency expert, stated in a meeting of the NSC's Special Group that he, too, doubted the likelihood of a popular uprising by the Cuban people.¹⁶² Sherman Kent, then chairman of the CIA's Board of National Estimates, informed Director Allen Dulles that Castro's position would grow stronger as time passed. While his popularity with the Cuban people would likely plummet over time as the true character of his regime became apparent and the country's citizens began to suffer, the effectiveness of the Cuban security forces and Castro's progressively strong control over the population would only increase.¹⁶³

In providing his after-action assessment of the debacle to President Kennedy, historian and presidential adviser Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., reported, "the fact appears to be that the intelligence branches of CIA and the State Department were never consulted in connection with the Cuban operation."¹⁶⁴ In fact, Schlesinger learned that the CIA's own intelligence branch had never

been officially made aware of the planned action. In his opinion, had it been consulted, the intelligence directorate “would have given quite a different estimate of the state of opinion in Cuba from that on which the operation was based.”¹⁶⁵ Proposing something akin to murder boarding or red teaming, Schlesinger proffered his recommendation:

One further device might be considered: that is, attaching to every major operation planning group an official son-of-a-bitch—a man charged with raising every question, forcing every objection, and picking every hole before a decision is finally made. In the Cuban discussions, the case against the operation was never fully stated. Hereafter, I would hope that, if necessary, someone should be appointed to oppose any major operation under consideration, so that those making the decision will have the benefit of an explicit and candid confrontation of the issues involved.¹⁶⁶

Activities involving the infiltration of SOF and other elements into denied territory represents a period of heightened operational and personal risk. For that reason, in addition to judging the appropriateness of such action, all efforts should be made to accurately assess the viability and operational feasibility of any proposed operation.

Appropriateness

SOF leaders must first assist in determining if an operation under consideration is even appropriate for SOF. Because SOF is such a limited, high-value resource, the risks must be justified by the expected outcome of the mission.

In gray zone conditions, decision makers might determine that the commitment of conventional combat forces is inappropriate or that such armed intervention is not feasible under the prevailing conditions. In such cases, decision makers may consider employment of SOF in a special warfare role to be the option of choice.

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Determination of a military response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks is a case in point. President Bush sought a timely response aimed at defeating both al-Qaeda and the Afghan Taliban regime that provided sanctuary to Osama

bin Laden's organization. Afghanistan was a land-locked country whose topography and infrastructure posed serious challenges to traditional military intervention. Roughly the size of Texas, Afghanistan featured immense mountain ranges and remote valleys in the northern areas adjacent to countries most likely to provide bases from which to launch and sustain operations. Adequate roads for the movement of heavy forces were scarce and in poor condition; rail lines were nearly nonexistent. Moreover, the deployment and staging of large conventional forces might take months, much longer than the President was willing to wait. Bombing and cruise missile attacks provided a more rapid option, but would certainly not be decisive and had proven largely ineffective in the past. After careful consideration, even conventional staff officers determined that SOF represented the most appropriate means, at least in the short term, to respond to the terrorist attacks.¹⁶⁷

Viability

Early on, during the consideration of STR as an option, senior leaders and decision makers, supported by the intelligence community, conduct an assessment of the viability of the proposed operation. This is an informal process, meaning that there is no established format or process as there is with the tactical- and operational-level feasibility assessment. Decision makers, strategists, and planners, though, will benefit from a rigorous and disciplined process for judging the propriety, soundness, and plausibility of an STR operation under consideration.

Assessments need to be made of the practicability of an operational concept and of the risks associated with executing that concept. This assessment must consider the level of political and military risk, the operational payoff that could reasonably be expected, the capability and utility of available irregular elements, possibility of unintended or unexpected consequences, and the overall cost-effectiveness of the proposed operation

Senior leaders of DOD, USSOCOM, and other government agencies must be capable of persuading government leaders of the viability of STR or UW as a strategic option when appropriate conditions exist. They should understand the nuances and requirements associated with recommending a strategy of empowerment of a particular foreign irregular group or movement. It is incumbent upon the intelligence community to prepare and support them in this responsibility.

Feasibility

The purpose of the feasibility assessment process is to determine, based on known facts and assumptions, whether or not a proposed operation is achievable given the assets and resources at hand, the threat and other conditions in the area of operations, and the time available. Most important, the analysis required to produce the assessment must determine whether or not the operation will achieve the desired objective and produce the desired effects.¹⁶⁸ The likelihood that an operation will fail or result in unintended consequences is greatly increased in the absence of a proper and thorough feasibility assessment.¹⁶⁹ Although the more detailed and formal feasibility assessment is conducted by the operational force as part of its deliberate planning process, some amount of preliminary feasibility judgment is necessary to inform early decision making.

Joint doctrine defines feasibility as “the plan review criterion for assessing whether the assigned mission can be accomplished using available resources within the time contemplated by the plan.”¹⁷⁰ Closely related to feasibility is the notion of acceptability, defined as “the plan review criterion for assessing whether the contemplated course of action is proportional, worth the cost, consistent with the law of war, and is militarily and politically supportable.”¹⁷¹

The SOF feasibility assessment is normally done as part of the target analysis associated with direct action mission planning. In this role, it is intended to determine if a proposed target is viable for SOF employment. It can also be used, however, in planning for SOF employment in a special warfare role, such as in support to an insurgency or resistance movement. The initial assessment typically focuses on the viability of contemplated infiltration and exfiltration methods. This is then expanded to assess the viability of the overall mission. The feasibility assessment is usually done by the mission planning agent (MPA), which in the case of STR and UW is typically an Army Special Forces Group.

Much depends on a meeting between SOF or civilian USG officials and representatives of the indigenous insurgency or resistance movement, a meeting or series of meetings that can take place in the denied territory, in a neighboring country, or in the United States. In the case of U.S. support provided to the *Otpor* student-led civil resistance movement in Serbia in 2000, Srdja Popovic, a co-founder and leader of the movement, was brought to Washington, D.C., for discussions with several government officials and

meetings with nongovernmental organizations. He returned to Serbia with the funds necessary to expand the movement's operations.

Operators can make their most accurate assessment of resistance potential and capabilities when these meetings take place within the denied area. On-the-ground evaluation by the SOF or interagency pilot team will confirm or refute the preliminary feasibility assessment and possibly even some planning assumptions. If risk to operational personnel is judged to be excessive, the decision might be made to mitigate the risk by exfiltrating resistance members to an area outside the target country for training as a cadre for insertion back into the operational area.¹⁷² If the pilot team's assessment is favorable and the risk of operating in the denied area is considered by decision makers to be acceptable, the team can coordinate the further infiltration of SOF elements and supplies.¹⁷³ If necessary, a contemplated course of action can be further evaluated through war-gaming, helping to determine if an action or operation can be conducted, if it can be supported, and if it will achieve the desired results if successful.¹⁷⁴

Similar to risk mitigation, actions might be taken to improve mission feasibility, such as: persuading a resistance group to cease unacceptable actions, degrading an adversary government's control over its population,

Similar to risk mitigation, actions might be taken to improve mission feasibility

or taking action to bolster the population's will to resist.¹⁷⁵

Once risk assessment and mitigation have been addressed, matters of assumption and feasibility have been settled, and pragmatic course-of-action alternatives are developed for decision maker consideration, detailed execution planning and mission preparation can commence. The next chapter will provide a brief look at the justification and permissibility of such operations under international law.

6. Propriety: Sovereignty and Intervention

Every major power in modern history has engaged in some sort of STR or other clandestine intelligence operation or covert action in another country, and in doing so has violated the domestic laws of that country and defied its sovereignty. William H. Webster served as a federal district and circuit court judge from 1970 to 1978, director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) from 1978 to 1987, and director of the CIA from 1987 to 1991. While serving as CIA director, Judge Webster was once confronted by a Third World leader on the topic of ethical standards as they apply to clandestine operations and covert action.

“I don’t understand it, Mr. Director,” said the Third World leader. “You are a judge, a man committed to upholding the law; and yet you have been placed at the head of an essentially lawless organization.”

Judge Webster succinctly explained this conundrum. “In the United States,” he responded, “we obey the laws of the United States. Abroad, we uphold the national security interests of the United States.”¹⁷⁶

This chapter addresses the contradictory nature of STR application, with its undeniable inconsistency with Westphalian principles of sovereignty and nonintervention. It includes a brief examination of the legal and moral implications of such operations and illuminates those conditions under which STR might be permissible under international law or sanctioned by international organizations such as, for example, the United Nations (UN), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the Organization of American States (OAS), or the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

The Principle of State Sovereignty

Today’s world order is based on a nation-state system that originated with the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. One of the key tenets of the Westphalian doctrine is respect for sovereignty and non-intervention in the internal affairs of another state, as codified in Article 2 of the UN Charter. This Article explicitly states that “All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state” and that “Nothing contained in the present Charter shall authorize the United Nations to intervene in matters which

are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state....”¹⁷⁷ United States Joint UW doctrine recognizes that the concept of supporting a foreign resistance movement or insurgency in another country is clearly at tension with this principle.¹⁷⁸

UN General Assembly Resolution 2131, adopted on 21 December 1965, is even more explicit, declaring that no state “has the right to intervene, directly or indirectly, for any reason whatever, in the internal or external affairs of any other state” and furthermore that no state “shall organize, assist, foment, finance, incite, or tolerate subversive, terrorist, or armed activities directed towards the violent overthrow of the regime of another State, or interfere in civil strife in another state.”¹⁷⁹

Providing external support to internal dissension or resistance within another country clearly violates territorial integrity and undermines state sovereignty, thus impinging on the internal affairs of that state. But is it necessarily a violation of international law? Are there instances when such action is judged by decision makers to be necessary and appropriate? What legal provisions exist for operations in support of resistance? How do states justify such actions? This section addresses these questions.

Admiral Stansfield Turner, CIA director under President Jimmy Carter, believed that states are sometimes justified in intervening or interfering in the internal affairs of another state “because waiting too long might cause a detrimental trend to become irreversible or leave them at a considerable disadvantage.”¹⁸⁰ In fact, the admiral explained, we routinely and openly interfere with the internal affairs of other states through press releases, economic sanctions, trade barriers, technology transfer restrictions, diplomatic pressure or coercion, and threats to governments that support or harbor terrorists or pursue the development of weapons of mass destruction. In the view of Leslie Gelb of *The New York Times*, such interference or intervention “is exactly what foreign policy is. All foreign policy is the extension of one’s internal policies into the internal policies of another nation.”¹⁸¹

Decision making in gray zone conditions differs from decision making in purely peacetime or wartime conditions because of the ambiguous or equivocal nature of gray zone threats and responses. Hybrid warfare, cyberspace operations, and other forms of intervention or intrusion are facilitated by an erosion in the Westphalian concept of sovereignty. “The line between intervention in the internal affairs of another state and exercising the legitimate

right of self-defense” in the world of the early 21st century, argues Richard L. Millett, “has become blurred.”¹⁸²

If the murkiness of the gray zone political and security environment were not enough, organizations and treaties devoted to maintaining global peace and security are not always helpful. Political scientist Quincy Wright, onetime professor of international law at the University of Virginia and the University of Chicago, wrote that the United Nations Charter “constitutes a binding agreement by the signatory nations to work together for peaceful ends and to adhere to certain standards of international morality.”¹⁸³ It adheres to the general principles of “sovereignty, good faith, pacific settlement, non-aggression, and collective security.”¹⁸⁴ But the Charter, in the words of Professor Wright, “is full of ambiguities and even inconsistencies making possible wide divergences of interpretation and development.”¹⁸⁵ This might be partly explained by the fact that global conditions existing at the time the UN Charter and other agreements were drafted during the 20th century differ notably from the conditions prevailing in the 21st century. Richard Haass foresaw this in 1999, when he wrote that “we are now living in a period of history that can be characterized as one of ‘international deregulation.’ There are new players, new capabilities, and new alignments, but as of yet, no new rules.”¹⁸⁶

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The Right of Self-Defense

Article 51 of the United Nations Charter declares that “Nothing in the present Charter shall impair the inherent right of individual or collective self-defense if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations....”¹⁸⁷ Accordingly, the UN Security Council can and has authorized the collective use of force in cases of egregious acts of aggression, as it did in response to North Korea’s invasion of South Korea in June 1950. In complying with this resolution, the United States and its allies not only conducted conventional combat operations against communist forces, but also carried out several UW operations in support of the overall UN campaign. The United States and its coalition partners again conducted both conventional combat

operations and UW operations under the provisions of UN Security Council Resolutions 660 and 661 in response to the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait.¹⁸⁸ In response to the terrorist attacks on the United States in September 2001, the United States unilaterally invoked Article 51 of the Charter and launched OEF against al-Qaeda and the Afghan Taliban regime that provided sanctuary to that group. The USG supported the Northern Alliance in its resistance to Taliban rule, providing just enough assistance to tip the scales in favor of the Alliance.¹⁸⁹

Self-defense, however, is not the sole justification for supporting foreign resistance movements. Such action has also occurred as a result of a breach of the social contract between a state and its people.

Human Rights and the Right of Self-Determination

A state's entitlement to sovereignty comes with certain obligations and responsibilities, one of which is the protection of human rights. Many scholars of international law have supported the concept of humanitarian intervention—the introduction of forces by an outside power for the purposes of protecting a population from extreme human rights abuses. Such interventions, in truth, are not totally altruistic, however, but are typically “tainted by the self-serving interests of the intervening power.”¹⁹⁰ According to some scholars, an emerging perspective on military intervention by outsiders for humanitarian reasons—to protect a vulnerable population from a severely repressive government—is not only warranted but is sometimes necessary.¹⁹¹ This concept was officially recognized at the United Nations World Summit meeting in 2005, when member states formally committed to the “Responsibility to Protect” doctrine. Included in the meeting's Summit Outcome document, a General Assembly resolution adopted by Heads of State and Government, the doctrine serves as a political commitment to curb the worst human rights abuses and recognizes every state's responsibility to protect its population's welfare.¹⁹²

Closely related to human rights is the concept of a right to self-determination. Under the terms of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the UN through General Assembly resolution 217A in December 1948, a government can only be considered legitimate and authoritative if it is based on the will of the people as expressed through free and fair elections.¹⁹³ This principle was reinforced in the 1993 World Conference on

Human Rights and the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, which clarified that “it is the duty of States, regardless of their political, economic, and cultural systems, to promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms.”¹⁹⁴

A people’s right of self-determination is recognized by the International Court of Justice and is preserved in Article 1 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, a multinational treaty adopted by the UN General Assembly and in effect since March 1976.¹⁹⁵ University of Houston Professor of International Law Jordan J. Paust stresses the point that “the right of self-determination is that of peoples and not that of states, governments, political or religious factions, or terrorist minorities” and that any state actively denying self-determination to its citizens and violating human rights “has no right under international law to assure its own survival. Its claims of necessity are illegitimate.”¹⁹⁶

The fact that international law and most Western legal traditions recognize the ‘right to revolution’ is based in part on the revolutionary history of many of the world’s current governments, where self-determination is a widely accepted aspiration of the people. In these societies, it is understood that.¹⁹⁷

Free elections are the only viable mechanism for allowing the majority of the population of a country to make its own decisions. Despite the many limitations of the bourgeois electoral process, Marxists have generally recognized that people are unlikely to resort to revolution when they have the option of expressing their will through the electoral process.¹⁹⁸

In the years since the Second World War, the UN General Assembly has fervently supported the right of the people of Third World colonies to seek by any means necessary to free themselves from domination by European colonial powers.¹⁹⁹ The Universal Declaration of Human Rights goes further, explicitly declaring that people who have exhausted all other approaches may have to resort to “rebellion against tyranny and oppression.”²⁰⁰

The Right to Rebel and to Seek Assistance

According to Professor Paust, people suffering from oppression under a regime that routinely violates human rights have not only a need but also

a right to rebel and that this right has become a recognized principle of international law. The concept is not a new one, having once been raised by nineteenth-century French novelist Victor Hugo, who wrote, “when dictatorship is a fact, revolution becomes a right.”²⁰¹ Paust goes even farther in maintaining that international law recognizes not only the right of rebellion or revolution but also “the concomitant right of a given people to seek self-determination assistance.”²⁰²

Other international agreements are much more explicit in recognizing the right to rebel. The African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights, for example, proclaims that “Oppressed peoples shall have the right to free themselves from the bonds of domination by resorting to any means recognized by the international community.”²⁰³ The Charter even asserts that those undertaking such action against the state have a right to seek external assistance.

In the view of Richard Haass, the concept of states having “the right or even obligation to intervene to help peoples vis-à-vis their own governments or one another,” even “to alter the domestic policies or change the leadership of other countries ... reflects the emergence of a new perspective about the inviolability of state sovereignty.”²⁰⁴ Regarding the principle of respect for sovereignty, Professor Paust argues that:

it should be noted that sovereignty is not absolute under international law nor impervious to its reach. More specifically, the pretended cloak of state sovereignty ends where human rights begin. It is well recognized that human rights violations and international crimes are of international concern rather than internal affairs of a single state even if they occur totally within a single state. As the International Court of Justice recognized decades earlier, violations of basic human rights are violations of *obligato erga omnes*, ‘are the concern of all States,’ and all states ‘can be held to have a legal interest in their protection.’²⁰⁵

Only a government that is viewed as legitimate by its own citizens, then, according to Paust, “would enjoy full external sovereignty and freedom from intervention.”²⁰⁶ Actions taken to protect the people of a state from oppression by their own government, Paust continues, is recognized as appropriate under both the 1970 Declaration on Principles of International Law and the UN General Assembly-adopted 1974 Definition of Aggression, which condemns the use of armed force by a state against its own people and affirms

that “violations of such duty constitute international crimes of aggression or offenses against peace.”²⁰⁷ It was under this principle that the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1973 in 2011, authorizing the use of armed force by member nations to protect the civilian population of Libya during the Arab Spring uprising in that country. It should be noted, however, that states can act independently in supporting resistance, without the sanction of a UN resolution. This was the case, for example, when the Clinton administration launched an overt operation in 2000 to support a civil resistance movement to oust Serbian dictator Slobodan Milošević without such a resolution.²⁰⁸

Both the 1970 Declaration and the 1974 Definition also recognize not only the right of people seeking self-determination to use force in pursuing that goal, but to seek and receive external assistance in their struggle.²⁰⁹

Recognizing that governments at times *do* find justification in supporting dissident elements in other states, M. E. Bowman has explained that states sometimes “sidestep Westphalian sovereignty” by seeking “to distance themselves from the activity.”²¹⁰ In

fact, conducting such activities in a way that hides the identity of the state sponsoring the action (i.e., covertly) can sometimes work to the benefit of both states. Bowman argues that, in order to lessen the risk of war and to preserve some level of stability in spite of such

Both the 1970 Declaration and the 1974 Definition also recognize not only the right of people seeking self-determination to use force in pursuing that goal, but to seek and receive external assistance in their struggle.

interference, “the ability of the actor to disclaim responsibility, and of the affected nation to disclaim knowledge, is a necessary charade. Without plausible deniability, nations would be forced into humiliating political retreat and to curtail, or even sever, diplomatic ties in the face of a sovereign affront. At the extremes, even war can result.”²¹¹

While this section should illuminate the allowances that international law makes for resistance and STR, some writers prefer to disavow the need for such statutes altogether. In his 1992 book *Regulating Covert Action: Practices, Contexts, and Policies of Covert Coercion Abroad in International and American Law*, author W. Michael Reisman takes a rather cynical view, describing as somewhat mythical that *de jure* law in the form of codified statutes, charters, treaties, etc., that constitutes what is commonly referred to as international law. He describes this as the idyllic aspirations of statesmen,

proposing that there is also a *de facto* system of international law—what he calls the “operational code”—that consists of unwritten understandings that dictate the actual behavior of states in the real world.²¹²

Finally, the right of the people of a nation occupied by a foreign force to resist that occupation and to seek and receive external assistance in doing so has historically been seen as legitimate. Intervention by one state to aid the people of another state in forcing the withdrawal of an occupying power was seen as permissible by British philosopher John Stuart Mill more than a century ago and continues to be sanctioned more often than not.²¹³

Supporting a foreign resistance movement, of course, involves many other legal considerations, from domestic ones such as lawful funding, the careful development and monitoring of authorities to conduct the operations, and the establishment of rules of engagement, to international ones such as the legal status of personnel conducting the operation in a foreign country. In the case of covert paramilitary operations, requirements include proper sanctioning of the operation by a presidential finding and keeping appropriate congressional committees informed.²¹⁴

7. Conclusion

As explained in the introduction, this monograph was written as a companion volume to two earlier works: *Support to Resistance: Strategic Purpose and Effectiveness*, and *How Civil Resistance Works (And Why It Matters To SOF)*. The purpose of this three-volume set is to provide SOF an in-depth and fairly comprehensive study of past U.S. support to insurgencies and resistance movements and how these experiences offer insights that can prepare the force for future similar operations.

The first monograph of the series, *Support to Resistance*, included 47 short case studies to examine the many ways in which the United States has conducted STR and UW operations and the variety of purposes behind them. Each case study provided a brief narrative describing the political environment or condition, the political or military objective pursued, the type of operation carried out, and the campaign's ultimate outcome. While reaffirming the conclusions of some earlier works, *Support to Resistance* also provided new insights. Foremost among the findings were that most U.S. STR operations have been conducted for disruptive purposes, that those conducted under wartime conditions were nearly twice as successful as operations conducted in peacetime, that STR is most successful when conducted in direct support of a military campaign, that STR has been most effective when used for coercive purposes and least effective when used to enable regime change, that most failed STR operations were due largely to security compromises, that supporting nonviolent civil resistance is more likely to be successful than supporting armed resistance, and that most STR efforts by the USG are carried out to address short-term rather than longer-term interests.

Whereas the first monograph mostly examined the U.S. experience in supporting armed resistance, it included two cases of U.S. support to nonviolent civil resistance. The second monograph, *How Civil Resistance Works*, expanded on this form of organized dissent and explained how the historically effective method is most often conducted. It also expresses a need for continued collaborative effort, through workshops and interagency discussion forums, to explore ways in which SOF and other USG entities can support civil resistance and to expand our UW doctrine to include the tactics,

techniques, and procedures unique to this new special warfare venue. Much of the results of these workshops might be best kept in classified form.

This work on civil resistance takes on an added importance as the global erosion of democracy continues; more countries are coming under the rule of authoritarian leaders, setting the conditions that can spawn popular discontent and the kind of civil unrest that marked the beginning of the Arab Spring movements in 2011. Revisionist powers, as described in the National Security Strategy, will also threaten world order with their expansionist policies and abuse of human rights. These states continue to seek ways to control their populations and suppress internal dissent, often employing emerging technologies in the process. Autocratic states are learning from recent civil resistance history and are applying the lessons to the development of more effective methods of countering the threat to the state posed by civil unrest. Our UW doctrine must evolve to incorporate procedures for aiding those seeking greater freedom and self-determination, whether through armed resistance to occupation, subversive insurgency, or civil resistance.

This final monograph in the three-volume resistance series is intended to highlight some of the many considerations that decision makers typically face when considering STR or UW as a course of action. A better understanding of these factors, coupled with the knowledge of the breadth of possible application provided in the first two monographs, will serve to educate and prepare a capable corps of special warfare planners and leaders. Special warfare will serve as a valued foreign policy tool when leveraging local popular discontent against adversary governments serves to protect U.S. national security interests. ↑

Acronyms

AOR	area of responsibility
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CINC	commander in chief
CWMD	countering weapons of mass destruction
DOD	Department of Defense
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FID	foreign internal defense
FNLA	National Liberation Front of Angola
GCC	geographic combatant commander
ISI	Inter-Services Intelligence organization (Pakistan)
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff
JFACC	Joint Forces Air Component Commander
JSOU	Joint Special Operations University
MDMP	Military Decision Making Process
MPA	mission planning agency
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCA	National Command Authority
NSA	National Security Agency
NSC	National Security Council
NSD	National Security Directive

OAS	Organization of American States
OEF	Operation ENDURING FREEDOM
OPSEC	operations security
OSD	Office of the Secretary of Defense
OSS	Office of Strategic Services
SOCENT	Special Operations Command Central
SOE	Special Operations Executive
SOF	Special Operations Forces
STR	support to resistance
TLAM	Tomahawk Land Attack Missile
TSOC	Theater Special Operations Command
UN	United Nations
UNITA	National Union for the Total Independence of Angola
USAF	United States Air Force
USCENTCOM	United States Central Command
USG	United States Government
USSOCOM	United States Special Operations Command
UW	unconventional warfare

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