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**COVERT ACTION:
AN INSTRUMENT OF FOREIGN POLICY
BY
CHUCK BANKS**

**AIR WAR COLLEGE
MAXWELL AIR FORCE BASE
1994**

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The purpose of this paper is to provide a brief introduction to covert action for those on the periphery of, or interested in, this aspect of intelligence activity. The objective is to examine, using open source information, what exactly is covert action, what purpose it serves, why it must be kept secret, whether it is legal and ethical, and what makes it work. It is by no means exhaustive, since there are entire books on each section on this paper.

Covert action has many definitions, but a useful one is "the attempt by a government to influence events in another state or territory without revealing its involvement."¹ Title VI of the Intelligence Authorization Act of 1991 defines covert action as:

"an activity or activities of the United States Government to influence political, economic, or military conditions abroad, where it is intended that the role of the United States Government will not be apparent or acknowledged publicly."²

Covert action is a peculiarly American term, since many other nations do not make such a finite distinction between overt diplomacy and covert intervention. Many nations seek to influence events in other nations with varying levels of associated secrecy. The line between "black" and "white" programs is not that distinct. Even in overt diplomacy, nations do not necessarily publicly display their hand, nor fully disclose the means and ends of their policies towards other nations. Also, there is a subtle but distinct difference between covert and clandestine, in that clandestine operations seek to obscure the activity itself, while in covert operations it is more important to hide the sponsoring role of the United States.

¹Intelligence Requirements for the 1980's: Covert Action, Edited by Roy Godson, pg. 1

²"Intelligence Authorization Act, Fiscal Year 1991" (PL 102-88, 14 Aug. 1991), Unites States Code Congressional and Administrative News 102nd Congress - First Session 1991 (St. Paul, MN: West Publishing Co., 1991), Vol. 1, 105 Stat. 443.

Later we will examine why it is sometimes necessary to conduct foreign affairs in such a way as to conceal the hand of the United States, but first it is necessary to review the differing types of covert action. Covert action can be thought of as a continuum, with relatively benign propaganda operations at one end, paramilitary activity at the other, and political action in between. Covert operations may be limited to any one of the three types, or in the case of a large scale program, combine all three elements.

Propaganda may involve nothing more than discreetly funding journalists in Country X in order to have articles published in foreign periodicals that are supportive of United States interests. Propaganda can also involve radio broadcasts, publication of posters, distribution of leaflets, etc. It is expected to have a "multiplier effect," where information placed in a local media outlet abroad is selected by others for republication or retransmission elsewhere, perhaps over the wire services or regional publications and broadcasts, with no US involvement whatsoever.

Propaganda is more often than not an effort to make public in a foreign land information that is correct, accurate, and supportive of US interests. "Positive" propaganda has been most effective. Propaganda efforts were particularly high during the cold war, when one writer noted that both Harry Truman and Dwight Eisenhower agreed that "we cannot hope to win the cold war unless we win the hearts and minds of men." This same author noted that, "in the contest...truth can be a peculiarly American weapon."³ Before being given independent status in 1973, both radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty were covertly supported by the CIA, with their programming generated in accordance with general government policy directives. Former intelligence officer Cord Meyer writes:

"These instruments of information and propaganda have been purveyors of reliable
? factor, thus reflecting the basic belief that in the long run candor is important to

³Truth is Our Weapon, by Edward W. Bennett, Funk and Wagnalls, New York, 1953, page 9

success in bringing others to our views. If our information and propaganda programs are to be viable, much depends on their credibility."⁴

Examples of CIA propaganda activities published in open sources are readily available. In response to the Nixon administration's directive to influence the outcome of the 1970 Chilean elections, and prevent if possible a Marxist Allende victory, the CIA managed to generate at least an editorial a day in "El Mercurio", the major Santiago daily.⁵

Although it seemed to be primarily a paramilitary operation, many propaganda successes were ^{achieved} in Guatemala in 1954, in the ~~successful~~ effort to topple Arbenz. Eisenhower was concerned about the perceived far-left, and Marxist-~~leaning~~ tendencies of the Arbenz government, and when coupled with the strategic location of Guatemala in Central America, he thought the threat significant enough to task the CIA with the covert support of a small insurgent group. The CIA-sponsored rebels, through their "Voice of Liberation" short wave broadcasts from outside Guatemala, encouraged Arbenz's soldiers to defect or desert, and created successes for the rebels when in fact the battles had never taken place. With CIA guidance, the rebels were able to support one media type with another, arranging through a fictitious Mexican entrepreneur to have announcements of their first radio broadcast published in the major Guatemalan newspapers.⁶ Through the clever use of "disinformation", the rebels were able to encourage public mistrust of the Arbenz government, sometimes through nothing more than the introduction of a subtle announcement in local newspapers that there was no truth that the government had poisoned a particular lake, which of course created rumors among the public that maybe it had happened after all.

⁴Facing Reality, by Cord Meyer, Harper & Row, New York, pg 134-135

⁵Covert Action in Chile, Hearings before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence Activities, 94th Congress, 1st sess. (December 4 and 5, 1975).

⁶The Night Watch, David Atlee Phillips, (New York, Norton, 1978)

Propaganda efforts that do not involve radio or news publications can be as simple as the CIA financed sign-painting teams that worked to influence the 1970 Chilean elections. These teams painted the slogan "su paredon" (your wall) on 2,000 walls in Santiago, invoking images of Communist firing squads threatening the Chilean public.⁷ Similar posters were published which exploited the 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, with photos linking what happened in Prague with a similar possibility of tanks in downtown Santiago.

How is propaganda promulgated by the CIA? CIA stations abroad develop "assets", journalists or others in the foreign media who will write, publish, produce, or broadcast information when tasked. The station usually receives guidance from Washington on what and when to produce information supportive of US foreign policy. Gregory Treverton writes:

"One covert action project in Chile, for example, supported from one to five assets in El Mercurio. These assets were asked to write articles or editorials favorable to US interests (for example, criticizing the Soviet Union in the wake of the invasion of Czechoslovakia); to suppress news items harmful to the United States (for instance, about the war in Vietnam); or to criticize the Chilean political left."⁸

In sum, propaganda offers the US a clandestine opportunity to introduce information favorable to our interests in foreign media. The nonattributorial aspect enhances the credibility of the information, which although the information may be true, would be suspect or disregarded if linked to a US source.

The second step in our continuum of covert action is that of political action. One author suggests that political action:

⁷Covert Action, Gregory F. Treverton, Basic Books, New York, 1987, pg. 16

⁸Ibid.

"entails money advice, and assistance to individuals and/or groups in a foreign country. Provided through secret channels, the purpose is to encourage those who are either friendly to you or hostile to your adversaries."⁹

Why undertake political action at all? The United States would, of course, prefer to deal with nations who are politically and economically stable, and preferably democratic and supportive of our interests. The cold war confronted the US with similar foreign relations issues in two distinctly different parts of the world -- how to counter Soviet influence in Europe, the Mediterranean, and Korea, and also how to limit Soviet expansionism in the Third World. Around the globe there were nations ill-equipped politically and economically to cope with a fast changing world. Scott Breckinridge writes:

"What those nations needed most was to be left alone to sort out their own problems and establish their own patterns, with some economic and technical assistance from the more fortunate nations. They were vulnerable to revolutionary opposition; the opposition, whatever its form, was vulnerable to communist infiltration and exploitation."¹⁰

It was in our national interest to politically support individuals or groups that would A) counter Soviet expansion, and ^{we hoped,} ~~hopefully~~ B) be friendly to the United States. The first result, denying the Soviets influence in the region, has traditionally had a significant probability of success. However, governments elected with US assistance have not often resulted in "puppets", and when push comes to shove those who were substantially supported (overtly or covertly) by the US tend to stand by their national interests over the personal and perceived debt to America.¹¹ That said, officials elected with US assistance can be more receptive to embassy initiatives. The difference is a

⁹Intelligence Requirements for the 90's, Edited by Roy Godson, "Covert Action" by Richard H. Schultz, Jr., pg. 166

¹⁰The CIA and the US Intelligence System, Scott Breckinridge, Westview Press, Colorado, 1986

¹¹Ibid.

matter of perspective -- we cannot expect too much from political action, but keeping the original objective in mind (effecting change), this form of covert action can be most useful.

But why is it necessary to provide such assistance in a covert manner? Much of the aid doled out by the United States in such situations can be done overtly, and if at all possible it should. As noted earlier, Radio Liberty and Radio Free Europe were supported by the CIA for years until it was determined in 1973 that sufficient credibility existed to let them stand alone as overt US. government entities. Foreign leaders can and do request support from various US. government agencies, ranging from public opinion polling to police training. That said, it is sometimes necessary for a variety of reasons to proffer such support discreetly, especially when the one to be supported is not in power at the time. Open association with the United States government can, at times be the kiss of death. John Bross writes:

"Identification with foreign support can turn patriotic opposition into what looks like treason. Secrecy also helps to avoid confrontations with other powers who have a stake in the target country and might feel threatened by a change of regime (or no change in regime)."¹²

We will defer the necessary debate on the legal and ethical concerns of political action, and indeed covert action in general until later. But assuming the President deems it necessary to intervene politically in a foreign nation, and directs the CIA via a finding to undertake political action, what exactly is it?

Political action can begin with mere support to the media in a given nation, overlapping the propaganda realm of operations. As mentioned earlier, the assets employed at El Mercurio in Chile in the 60's and 70's were instrumental in getting print space for articles opposing Allende. When the government withdrew advertising from the paper, and withheld newsprint, it became questionable whether the opposition paper would survive at all. After obtaining permission from the "40 Committee", the interagency

¹²Covert Action, Gregory F. Treverton, Basic Books, New York, 1987, pg. 209

group charged with overseeing covert action programs at the time, the CIA passed over \$1.6 million to the paper. Although they may have suspected, the publisher and the staff at El Mercurio were never informed by the CIA on the source of the funding.¹³

In 1983 President Reagan created the National Endowment for Democracy, a quasi-private institution that provided funds to democratic institutions supporting US policy. The endowment eventually found itself in controversy when it funded La Prensa, the Nicaraguan newspaper, at the time when the United States was in opposition to the Sandanistas. Credibility for the paper and the endowment suffered, with the whole event being a reminder that there is a time and a place for covert political support.

Another form of traditional political action, especially during the cold war, was support for labor unions. In response to the Soviet attempt to gain control of unions in emerging nations, the CIA found itself supporting a wide variety of anti-Communist unions, ranging from conservative to Socialist. Here is an area in which overt support was also provided by the AFL-CIO, particularly in Latin America.

A most effective form of political action is direct, clandestine support to political parties (who might not otherwise survive), and assisting those parties or select individuals in being elected to office. The main thrust of this support has been to help moderate political forces stave off the political ascendancy of those considered by the President to be hostile to US interests. For example, similar to the threat to the opposition newspaper El Mercurio, it was believed in the early 70's that the Chilean opposition parties might not survive, and the CIA was authorized to spend nearly \$4 million to support primarily the Christian Democratic Party, and also to a lesser extent the conservative National Party.¹⁴ In the 1964 Chilean elections, the CIA was authorized to funnel \$3 million to opposition parties, which one author has noted was about \$1 per Chilean voter -- a significant figure

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid.

when compared with the 50 cents per voter that Johnson and Goldwater together spent as candidates for the 1964 US. presidential election.¹⁵

The CIA's political action capability came to the forefront shortly after its creation, with the successful support of the Christian Democrats in the 1948 Italian election in which the communists mounted a formidable challenge. This was after a number of strategic setbacks in the region, with communist governments taking power in Poland, Hungary, Romania, and Czechoslovakia, and civil war erupting in Greece.

Covert action, and particularly political action was beginning to prove itself as an aggressive foreign policy option for subsequent presidents, with the success in Italy replicated in Iran and Guatemala in the 50's. As Vernon Walters writes:

"The more general form of covert action is to seek to alter in the long term the thinking in the target nation in such a way as to make them perceive that their interest does not lie in hostility to the first nation. If this can be done, then those responsible for the formation of public opinion and the key decisions may be made to see things quite differently from their original views and this can be done at considerably less cost and less loss of life than one day of open warfare. The most successful action of this type takes place without anyone in the target nation being aware of it. Most important, there is no armed clash."¹⁶

When propaganda programs do not bring about the desired results, political action alone will not achieve the objectives set forth by the President, and it is not yet time to send in the Marines, the CIA has the capability to provide paramilitary support. Paramilitary operations involve the provision of arms, advisors, training, intelligence, communications, airlift, and other logistical support as necessary to insurgencies, or their antidote, counterinsurgencies.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Intelligence Requirements for the 1980's, Edited by Roy Godson, "The Uses of Political and Propaganda Covert Action in the 1980's, Vernon Walters" pg. 115

Paramilitary operations may be small, nothing more than small arms and ammunition to a friendly force, or they may involve large scale clandestine support for a major war. It should be noted that the ability to conduct the effort secretly diminishes as the scope of the program increases. That said, paramilitary operations are overt actions by the participants, and it is again only the sponsor that needs to be cloaked in secrecy. As Scott Breckinridge notes,

" The Boston Tea Party in 1774 was an overt act, but the identities of those involved remained for historians to reconstruct from imperfect sources. In modern international affairs, this protection of sponsorship has been given the name 'plausible denial'." ¹⁷

Plausible denial is a disclaimer that allows overt diplomacy to continue, without providing a "smoking gun" (~~hopefully~~) to publicize the sponsor's participation. Plausible denial is also a reason why the CIA is charged with the responsibility for covert action. Treverton writes:

"If an American CIA officer in Pakistan were killed in a Soviet strike on an Afghan resistance base, that would be sad. But the body would be less likely to return to the United States in a flag-draped coffin than if the American had been an army colonel. Thus pressure on American leaders to avenge the killing would also be less." ¹⁸

Most covert action programs do not start as paramilitary operations. If at all possible an attempt is made to influence events through political or psychological operations first. In almost every instance of paramilitary activity, one will see that is usually the last resort among covert action options, and it is turned to either when the objective cannot be accomplished with non-lethal support, or the opposition ups the ante and a paramilitary response is necessary.

¹⁷The CIA and the US. Intelligence System, Scott Breckinridge, Westview Press, 1986, pg. 244

¹⁸Covert Action, Gregory Treverton, Basic Books, 1987, pg. 215

CIA intervention in Angola in 1975 began not as a paramilitary operation, but as political support for both Holden Roberto of the FNLA and Jonas Savimbi's UNITA. Both were in opposition to the Soviet backed MPLA. The FNLA initially received \$300,000 for a radio station and newspaper only.¹⁹ The FNLA, however, took a harder line than UNITA, and aggressive action and prosecuted attacks against the MPLA in the capital, Luanda, and in northern Angola. The Soviets responded with the resumption of considerable aid, the airlift of weapons, and introduction of a small contingent of Cuban advisors.

Interestingly enough, when the possibility of covert military assistance to Angola was discussed both in the State Department and the CIA, leadership was lukewarm to the idea. Ambassador Davis, the Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs who had been appointed chairman of an interagency task force on Angola, was against intervention. Bill Colby, DCI at the time, argued that the post-Vietnam, post-Church committee CIA was ill prepared for such an ambitious program given the severe personnel cutbacks and dismantling of the covert action infrastructure that had just taken place under former DCI Schlesinger. But after what was essentially an NSC covert action program of their own succeeded in influencing the President that intervention was the way to go, the CIA was ordered to draft a covert action program within 48 hours. Ambassador Davis resigned. At the CIA, there was some concern over how involved the Agency should be in Angola, which was squelched when the Deputy Director for Operations, William Nelson announced, "Gentlemen, we've been given a job to do. Let's not sit around wringing our hands."²⁰

President Ford approved what was to be known as Operation Feature, authorized \$14 million in funding, and even before the CIA had officially disseminated the order to the field the first planeload of arms was on its way to the FNLA via Zaire. Two more C-

¹⁹Ibid., pg. 17

²⁰President's Secret Wars, John Prados, William Morrow & Co., New York, 1986, pg. 341

141's would immediately follow, with a shipload of ordnance being simultaneously consolidated for surface delivery.²¹ Although many in the State department and CIA had believed Angola to be an Africa problem, the administration had decided it was to be a Cold War battleground.

In such a huge program, some sort of base of operation is necessary for operational and logistical reasons, and in this case, Kinshasa, Zaire was critical. Historically, such basing requirements can lead to some peculiar relationships. Somoza in Nicaragua provided bases for CIA activities against Arbenz in Guatemala in 1954 and against Cuba in 1961. (An ally by 1961, Guatemalan real estate was used also in 1961 against Cuba.) By the early 80's Nicaragua itself was the target, and the anti-Sandinista Contra program was managed from Honduras. For one Nicaraguan port town, their relationship with the CIA went full cycle. Used as a base against Guatemala in 1954, the town itself came under attack by the Contras thirty years later!²²

The bread and butter for the paramilitary program is the provision of ordnance. The objective is to supply weaponry that is ostensibly "sterile", meaning non attributable to the United States. Although historically difficult to procure, the collapse of the Soviet Union created a buyer's market for Bloc weaponry for more recent programs. The ordnance received by the Afghan resistance was almost all of Soviet manufacture.²³ Weapons provided for these types of programs can range from modest amounts of small arms, to sophisticated weaponry such as the Stinger missile, dependent of course on the capabilities of the user, the battlefield requirements, and political sensitivities.

Another necessary paramilitary capability conducted by the CIA has been non attributable airlift. Airlift is done under "commercial" cover, with Agency aircraft owned and operated by CIA proprietaries. This provides the necessary plausible deniability, and allows Agency aircraft to operate with a lower profile around the world. Some of the

²¹Ibid.

²²Covert Action, Gregory Treverton, Basic Books, 1987, pg. 29

²³Ibid., pg. 27

first flights were done with C-119 "Flying Boxcars" under the name of Civil Air Transport (CAT) in Indochina, where 24 CAT pilots flew 684 sorties into Dien Bien Phu in support of the French in 1954.²⁴

A decade later it was to be "Air America" to the rescue, operating both in support of the war in Laos and in South Vietnam. By 1968 Air America was the largest private charter airline in the world, with over 200 planes. The airline used primarily C-45's, C-46's, and C-47's, but also had on loan from the Air Force several C-130's. Through Air America, the Agency was moving 6,000 tons of cargo per month, and over 16,000 passengers. The Agency also had a small contingent of 21 helicopters, and during the first two years of the Laotian bombing, Air America was rescuing four times as many downed pilots as the United States Air Force.²⁵

Having introduced the reader to the concept of covert action, it is now appropriate to discuss where covert action fits in with overt diplomacy, and briefly examine the legal and ethical concerns that inevitably arise when one contemplates covert intervention.

First, is it legal? Absolutely. Covert action is currently authorized by the Intelligence Oversight Act of 1980 and Executive Order 12333, although the euphemism "special activities" is used. Every president since Harry Truman has authorized covert action in some fashion or another, and even Jimmy Carter initiated what ^{was} to be the largest covert action program of all time -- support to the Afghan mujahedin. ^{was} Covert action has been inexorably linked with "dirty tricks" in the US., with the low point being the revelations of the Church Committee in the mid-70's, describing CIA assassination plots and anguishing over US. involvement in destabilizing foreign governments.

Congress at that time seized the initiative and much political mileage was made from introducing legislation to limit or eliminate covert action activities. In 1974 Representative Elizabeth Holtzman proposed legislation, which was defeated, that would

²⁴President's Secret Wars, John Prados, William Morrow & Co., 1986, pg. 115

²⁵Ibid., pg. 277

have prohibited the appropriation of funds for the purpose of destabilizing or undermining the government of any foreign country.²⁶ Senator James Abourezk followed with legislation which would authorize funding for intelligence collection only, and prohibit disbursements that encouraged activities within any foreign country that violated US laws or those of such countries!²⁷ Finally, in December 1974 what was to be known as the Hughes-Ryan amendment was passed, part of which reads:

"No funds appropriated under the authority of this or any other Act may be expended by or on behalf of the [CIA] for operations in foreign countries, other than activities intended solely for obtaining necessary intelligence, unless and until the President finds that each such operation is important to the national security of the United States and reports, in a timely fashion, a description and scope of such operation to the appropriate committees of Congress."²⁸

But when all was said and done, even the Church Committee reluctantly recognized the necessity for the special activities capability, and elected to leave provisions for future covert action activities as the President saw fit. They wrote:

"Given the open and democratic assumptions on which our government is based, the Committee gave serious consideration to proposing a total ban on *all* forms of covert action. The Committee has concluded, however, that the United States should maintain the option of reacting in the future to a grave, unforeseen threat to the United States national security through covert means."²⁹(original emphasis)

Is it ethical to intervene in another government's domestic affairs in order to further the national interests of the United States? Morton Halperin, a controversial senior official in the Clinton administration ^{nsc}State Department contends that since the proposed action has not been publicly debated, it is wrong for a president to carry out

²⁶Church Committee Report, Book I, pages 502-503

²⁷Ibid., pg. 504

²⁸Section 622 of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1974

²⁹Ibid., pg. 159

these operations,³⁰ and that "the United States should not conduct covert action."³¹ Henry Kissinger, however, offers this:

"Whether and to what extent the United States should seek to affect domestic developments in other countries is a complicated question, the answer to which depends on a variety of elements, including one's conception of the national interest. Presidents of both parties have felt the need for covert operations in the gray area between formal diplomacy and military intervention throughout the postwar period."³²

One must ask, is it not meddling in another nation's affairs to link economic assistance (or enact economic embargos) with political reform, human rights, or democratization? Is it not meddling to put diplomatic pressure on other nations to open up their trade markets? Is it unethical to offer financial incentives in exchange for environmental improvements in third world nations? Absolutely not, when it is in our national interest to do so.

Former DCI Bill Colby has argued that, "a standard for selection of covert actions that are just can be developed by analogy with the long-standing effort to differentiate just from unjust wars."³³ Former DCI William Webster had three key questions when proposed covert actions came before him in the CIA's Covert Action Review Group: Is it entirely consistent with our laws? Is it consistent with American values as we understand them? And will it make sense to the American people?"³⁴ Probably the clearest criteria of all is that of James Barry, Deputy Director of the CIA's Center for the Study of Intelligence. He believes that Americans would support a covert action if:

³⁰"Should the US Fight Secret Wars", Morton Halperin, Harper's, September 1984, pg. 37

³¹US Congress, House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, Subcommittee on Legislation, Hearing on H.R. 1013, H.R. 1371, and Other Proposals Which Address the Issue of Affording Prior Notice of Covert Actions to Congress, 100th Cong., 1st Sess. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1987), pg. 90

³²The White House Years, by Henry Kissinger, Little, Brown, Boston, 1979, pg. 658-659

³³"Public Policy, Secret Action," Ethics and International Affairs, 1989, p.63

³⁴Address to the Eighth Circuit Judicial Conference, July 12, 1991

"The action is approved by the president, after due deliberation within the Executive Branch, and with the full knowledge and concurrence of appropriate members of Congress; the intentions and objectives are clearly spelled out, reasonable, and just; other means of achieving the objectives would not be effective; there is a reasonable probability of success; and the methods envisioned are commensurate with the objectives."³⁵

We now know what covert action is, and that is both legal and ethical, but what makes it work? Authorities on covert action and foreign policy are unanimous that the two must be woven from the same fabric, with the President seen as leading and supporting both. "Such action exists not as a substitute for policy, but as part of a process that seeks to get something accomplished that is compatible with the national interest and US norms." writes Richard Schulz.³⁶ Scott Breckinridge suggests that, "When the United States decides on a covert action program, it does so as part of a broader government policy." ³⁷ Dr. Samuel Huntington agrees that, "The two necessary prerequisites for effective covert action are, first of all, clear policy direction from above and then good intelligence from below."³⁸ In fact, Dr. Ray Cline suggests that covert action is not, in fact, an option of last resort, but rather one of the first resorts to supplement strategic planning and policymaking.³⁹

Roy Godson, sums up the role of covert action in foreign policy below:

"What is needed for effective covert action capability? One set of ingredients concerns the President and overall foreign policy making. In order to be useful, covert action *must* be part of overall policy, characterized by sound direction and continuity. United States covert action it seems has been best when integrated this

³⁵"Covert Action Can Be Just", James A. Barry, Orbis, Summer 1993, pg. 378

³⁶Intelligence Requirements for the 90's, Edited by Roy Godson, "Covert Action," Richard H. Schulz, Jr. pg. 171

³⁷The CIA and the US Intelligence System, Scott Breckinridge, Westview Press, 1986, pg. 213

³⁸Intelligence Requirements for the 1980's, Edited by Roy Godson, Comments by Samuel Huntington, pg. 207

³⁹Intelligence Requirements for the 1980's, Edited by Roy Godson, pg. 125

way. It appears to have been at its worst when used as a quick fix or as something to be thrown into the breach in an ad hoc fashion - or when all else failed."⁴⁰

Godson also suggests that covert action should be integrated bureaucratically as well, with all parts of the foreign policy apparatus working in concert, directly or in supporting roles. "Half hearted efforts or protracted bureaucratic wars between the Department of State and the CIA, or between various elements of the intelligence agencies themselves, can only be damaging. Yet only the President and his senior officials can ensure overall direction and government wide coordination."⁴¹

A foreign policy that includes covert action with consistent and identical objectives also increases the probability of public support if and when the covert action is inevitably made public. The purpose of conducting the activity in secret is to increase its probability of success by concealing American involvement in the operation, not to hoodwink the American public. Individuals in the Reagan administration set the integrity of covert action back considerably when the President was publicly claiming no negotiations would take place with terrorists on hostages, which was followed and contradicted by the disclosure that senior officials had, in fact, been negotiating for their release in the Iran-Contra fiasco. On the contrary, when in the early 80's the American press published stories that the US was discreetly funding and arming the Afghan mujahedin against the invading Soviets, American public support for the overt foreign policy was already in place, and the issue faded from the public eye very quickly.

Traditionally, covert action challenges during the Cold War were in the context of countering Soviet expansion. With the diminished role of the Soviet Union in the international arena, current conflicts must be evaluated based on their intrinsic value to the United States and how they impinge on our national interest. The hot spots, militarily and politically as of this writing are Haiti, Bosnia, Yemen, North Korea, China, Israel, Iraq,

⁴⁰Ibid., pg. 5

⁴¹Ibid.

Iran, and the former Soviet Union itself, to name just a few. Covert action may or may not be appropriate to further U.S. national interests in these areas, dependent upon what our foreign policy is and whether overt efforts were possible. Would propaganda efforts assist in our confrontation with the North Koreans, if the populace had access to accurate information on the security of the peninsula? Would paramilitary assistance to Haitian insurgents supporting Aristide be more effective in the long run than sending in the Marines, if in fact it is declared vital that Aristide be returned? Should the arms embargo be lifted on the Bosnian Muslims, and if so, is it in our national interest to arm them clandestinely? Would political support and/or funding for opposition parties in the Sudan be appropriate, given the Iranian influence there? Who are the "good guys" in Yemen, or Rwanda, or Somalia, what do we want our relationship with them to be like when the dust settles, and is there a need to establish at least a discreet communication link with them?

In cases where a strong foreign policy exists, and where it may be necessary to conceal the hand of the United States in effecting change, covert action may still have a role to play in the 90's. But it must be properly understood and properly utilized. As Huntington notes:

"The strength of US covert action clearly has been its relative effectiveness. By and large the record is very good. One only has to think of what the world would be like if we hadn't engaged in covert action in Western Europe, or in the Middle east, or in the Philippines or Central America and the Caribbean. Obviously it would be a different - and a much worse world."⁴²

⁴²Intelligence Requirements for the 1980's, Edited by Roy Godson, Comments by Dr. Samuel P. Huntington, pg. 208