

A Guide to the Teaching About Covert Action

by Jon A. Wiant

There is no action but covert action.

Alec T. Quinn, 1967
(Pseudonym)

Introduction

The post 9/11 fascination with intelligence issues and the consequent growth of academic interest in intelligence have led to a significant expansion of intelligence courses and seminars. Some focus almost exclusively on analytical issues while other syllabi suggest a rambling through all sorts of subjects that might fall loosely under the umbrella of intelligence studies. This Guide focuses on teaching about covert action. First, we need to define what it is, and what it is not.

There is little discipline in the language of intelligence. Existing literature and our media use the terms “intelligence” and “spying” interchangeably, and few editors seem to ponder whether intelligence is an adjective or a noun. Similarly words like “covert” and “clandestine” are used synonymously when in both modern law and operational doctrine these terms have distinctly different meanings. Clandestine is properly associated with the secret collection of information where primary operational attention is placed on ensuring that the target is unaware that the protected information has been taken. In the covert world, the actions are readily apparent but every effort is made to hide those who are responsible for the actions.¹

1. This attempt at lexical clarity undoubtedly will provoke some letters to the editor questioning whether the author has ever heard of covert SIGINT, a doctrinal term used by SIGINT collectors to cover secret forms of close-in signals collection. Similarly we use covert communications (COVCOM) for communicating secretly with agents. Elsewhere in the Anglo-Saxon world we will find practitioners of clandestine warfare, a term that could mean covert paramilitary operations or it could also

These actions run the gamut from influence and propaganda operations, not dissimilar from advertising campaigns, to complex programs seeking to destabilize a government or oust a tyrannical regime. These activities may include sub-rosa political warfare, economic dislocations, and the fomenting of political violence from street demonstrations to a coup d'état. In recent years covert action has been used to strengthen the counterterrorist capabilities of other countries, or allow us to use direct action to preempt a terrorist attack or to capture or kill terrorists.

Covert action is a policy tool used along with other instruments of national power to achieve a national security objective.

In the Readings for Instructors section we will look at each type of covert action, but first another cautionary note is warranted about confusing covert action with intelligence operations. Covert action has little to do with intelligence in so far as we define the functions of intelligence as collection and analysis or, more broadly, as a function of the intelligence cycle. **Covert action is a policy tool used along with other instruments of national power to achieve a national security objective.** While covert action is often performed by intelligence organizations it is not an intelligence function nor must it inherently be conducted by an intelligence organization. There are, however, characteristics of intelligence organizations as well as operational tradecraft that can facilitate covert operations. This fact and some peculiarities of history result in these two operationally distinct and often conflicted responsibilities sharing the same organizational bed, albeit without great comfort.²

mean military special operations. Words do mean something and I will endeavor at least to be consistent with the definitions of covert and clandestine in this article.

2. Why is CIA the principal agency for conducting covert actions? The missions of the CIA other than to conduct covert actions are to collect foreign intelligence; perform independent, all-source assessments; and conduct counterintelligence overseas. Covert actions require foreign intelligence collection, all-source analysis, and counterintelligence to ensure the operation's security. So the agency's other missions fit well with the covert action role. CIA is also focused overseas. All other agencies of the government have a domestic (and in some cases also an overseas) focus. CIA is prohibited by law from having any police powers in the US and by policy from influencing domestic activities. CIA maintains a worldwide, clandestine infrastructure. This includes bases, safe houses, land, air, and sea

What is Covert Action?

Most of the techniques, the stratagems, the “dirty tricks” that today we associate with covert action are not new. To the contrary both early Western and Eastern history are rich with examples of these practices. What makes “covert action” a modern concept is not the novelty of the actions but rather the institutionalization of operational responsibilities, the integration of the tools of covert action into broader national security and foreign policy programs, and codification of rules governing its practice.

We can find many examples of covert activities in World War I. The Germans, for instance, ran a very robust program in the United States prior to the US entry in the war; T. E. Lawrence’s Bedouin army was prototypical of paramilitary resistance programs; and British black propaganda designed to shift world opinion against the “brutal Hun” had many of the qualities of modern psychological warfare.

Nevertheless, it is World War II and the mobilization of all forms of national power, that provided the foundation for the modern covert action organization and also presaged the difficult divisions of labor that develop between or among intelligence and military organizations over responsibilities for these activities. The British created a separate Special Operations Executive as part of “political warfare” to do activities that the British Secret Intelligence Service (SIS, or MI6) was either unable or unwilling to do. America entered the war with neither a national intelligence service nor a capability for covert operations. Neither the Army nor the Navy had developed such capabilities and were reluctant to invest in them. They also opposed the creation of an independent organization to do either clandestine or covert missions. With much lobbying from the British, President Roosevelt ordered the creation of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS). It was chartered to do secret intelligence but also paramilitary special operations and psychological operations, at that time called “morale operations.”

Historians debate the contributions of OSS and the British services to the overall war effort, though all have their advocates as well as detractors. There is, however, no consensus in either the British or the US military and foreign affairs organizations of the need to keep a special operations and political or psycho-

logistics capabilities, foreign equipment, and covert financial and communications capabilities, all of which are necessary for covert operations. Most importantly, covert action is an integral part of clandestine human intelligence, which is CIA’s principal method of intelligence collection.

logical warfare capability in peacetime. The militaries see such organizations as an erosion of their responsibilities, the foreign affairs communities view the peacetime practice of covert operations as incompatible with diplomatic relations, and the secret intelligence organizations argue that the very presence of covert operators can jeopardize the security environment for successful clandestine collection, seen by both SIS and the CIA, OSS’s successor, as their primary mission.³

The advent of the Cold War in the late 1940s and the evolution of grand strategy to contain, if not roll-back, International Communism or Soviet imperialism created rich opportunities for the reintroduction of psychological warfare, support to anti-Communist resistance groups, and covert support to contemplated military operations. The term covert action had not yet become an umbrella under which all of these activities would fit, but the Cold War generated interest and advocacy for these capabilities.

Cold War history provides a good framework for studying the evolution of covert action. While the full range of psychological warfare was directed toward the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact in the West and China and North Korea in the East, nationalist or anti-colonial movements also provided rich targets for covert action. These included countering subversion or destabilizing hostile regimes, shoring up newly independent governments or funding paramilitary programs seeking to defeat anti-colonial or nationalist liberation struggles. In the sharp bi-polar divide of the Cold War there was little middle ground for the non-aligned. Covert programs became the way of policing the divide and destabilizing countries whose strategic direction threatened the balance of power.

In the United States, Congress seemed content to fund these activities even though there was no precise definition of what they were or who could perform them. In the wake of hearings on need for intelligence oversight, Congress passed reporting requirements on some forms of covert action, and the President used an Executive Order to specify CIA’s general responsibilities for covert action.⁴ This legislation specifically

3. Peter Grose explores this tension in some detail in his biography of Allen Dulles, *Gentleman Spy* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1994). The deep divisions within CIA over the wisdom of combining covert action with secret intelligence were echoed elsewhere in the West. In his *The Secret History of MI6: 1909-1949* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2010) Keith Jeffrey draws on declassified MI6 documents as well as those from the Foreign Office to explore the spirited debate at the end of World War II whether MI 6 should inherit the wartime covert capabilities of the British Special Operations Executive. This debate remains active today.

4. The Hughes-Ryan Amendment to the 1961 Foreign Assis-

reinforced the ambiguous language of the National Security Act of 1947, Article V that authorized CIA to perform “other activities as may be directed by the NSC,” the most cited justification for CIA’s role in covert action.

Finally, a Definition

In 1991 Congress amended the National Security Act to provide a legal definition of covert action:

*Covert action is 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.*⁵

Students should focus on the key definitional attributes:

First is the expression “to influence...” This establishes the role of covert action to affect the outcome of national security objectives. In this sense covert action is a tool of national security rather than a policy. A plea to “do more covert action” is a hollow expression without relating it to the broader objectives that are being pursued.

Second is the admonition that though these are activities of the US Government they are conducted in such ways that the role of the US Government “will not be apparent or acknowledged publicly”. This is an interesting construction. It raises the question of why you have a public law discussing creation of capabilities that are designed to be plausibly deniable. This is not quite as Lewis Carroll as some have suggested but is a good recognition that government must sometimes do things that will not be stated parts of a US policy. As the late Director of Central Intelligence William Colby, himself a strong proponent of covert action, observed, if we do not acknowledge a program formally we do not compel our adversaries to acknowledge it formally and place them in a position where they must act directly to counter it.⁶

In addition to defining “covert action” both legislation and executive direction have mandated how covert action is to be authorized, defined the

tance Act established the first formal reporting requirements for the President on covert action. Through legislation and the series of Executive Orders culminating in 12333; they remain valid today though only with some creative interpretations of restrictions recognizing the challenges of active global counterterrorist programs of both the CIA and the military services.

5. The Intelligence Oversight Act of 1980 adopted as part of the Intelligence Authorization Act of 1991 50 USC 413.
6. William Colby *Honorable Men* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978) pp 194-195.

instruments for that authorization, the procedures for ensuring regular policy review, and the obligations for legislative oversight.⁷

The 1975 Senate inquiry (Church Committee) into allegations of illegal activities by CIA and other intelligence agencies initially created the impression that a “rogue CIA” was conducting covert operations of its own making irrespective of US policy. To the contrary, subsequent investigation strongly disputed the image of an out-of-control CIA engaged in this dark world of its own making. Rather, there was compelling evidence that all programs under investigation had been, in fact, ordered up by a President or his staff.⁸

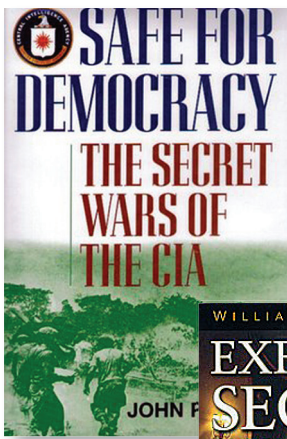
Congress directed that in the future the President must find the need for specific covert action and report his decision formally using a document referred to as a “Finding.”⁹ The congressional intelligence committees must authorize the funding for a specific covert action. The House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence (HPSCI) is the authorizing committee for covert action funding though it shares some overlapping jurisdictional responsibilities with the House Armed Services Committee and the House Appropriations Committee. On the Senate side these responsibilities are held primarily by the Senate Select

7. For a brief review of history of covert action legislation see Alfred Cummings, *Covert Action: Legislative Background and Possible Policy Questions* (Congressional Research Service, April 6, 2011). Loch Johnson’s *America’s Secret Power: The CIA in a Democratic Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990) offers among the best insights into the legislative debate over covert action.

8. President Truman was enthusiastic about covert political and influence operations to shore up pro-Western allies as a covert complement to the Marshall Plan’s reconstruction program. President Eisenhower continued many of the Truman programs but also ushered in programs to refashion governments or overthrow hostile regimes through significant paramilitary programs. Historians debate President Kennedy’s reluctant embrace of anti-Castro operations including the calamitous 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion, but elsewhere he was a vigorous proponent of covert nation building and special operations; he not only gave Special Forces the Green Beret, he did much to foster operational collaboration between Special Forces and CIA in ways that presage similar cooperation on Afghan battlefields today.

President Johnson had some wariness of CIA operations though these activities were central to his Vietnam and Laos policies. President Nixon’s use of covert action to destabilize the Allende regime in Chile as well as conducting an aggressive political action program in Vietnam were major factors contributing to the Congressional inquiries.

9. Executive Order 12333 and National Security Decision Directive 286 established the responsibilities for coordination within the Executive Branch prior to the notification of the Finding to Congress.

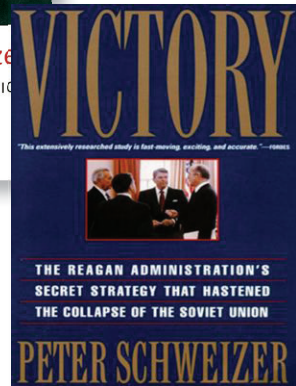
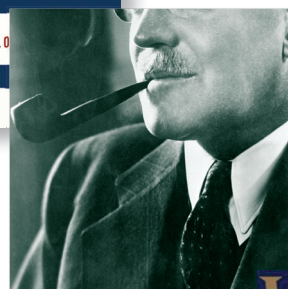
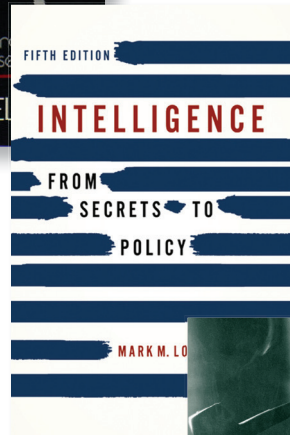
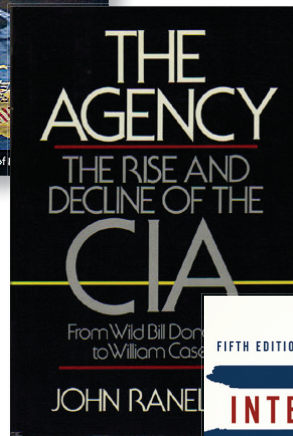
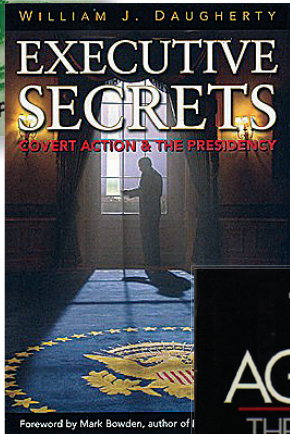


Committee on Intelligence (SSCI). Daugherty notes that President Carter issued Omnibus Findings to provide authority for global propaganda and influence operations as well as legal justification for maintaining covert

action infrastructure and capabilities must to the

bilities.¹⁰ Findings be presented oversight committees within a timely fashion; though Congress has not legislated a time period, both the President and congressional leadership have accepted the general practice that CIA will notify Congress within 48 hours of the President signing a finding directing CIA to engage in covert action.

While early Findings may have been very brief, they have become increasingly detailed particularly regarding limitations on actions. A Finding must specifically authorize CIA to engage in lethal activity whether that is in some direct action or developing the capability for a foreign group to use a level of violence that might lead to death. Regardless of having authority to use lethal action, CIA is still governed by Executive Order 12333 prohibiting engagement in assassination or supporting a group that might target political leadership. The commitment of CIA to conduct a global campaign against terrorists has required very specific guidance on targeting, and under current practice the President must approve specific actions such as the successful attack on Osama bin Laden or the use of unmanned aerial vehicles strikes against targets beyond the regular battlefield.



The history of US covert action includes issues of ever-changing US national security and foreign policy strategies, the growth of the national security bureaucracy, the evolution of presidential and executive power, and shifting American popular perceptions about the place of covert action in the conduct of American policy. The following works provide a good appreciation for this complex interplay principally over the course of our post-World War II history including the Cold War and the post 9/11 shifts in national security policies.

John Prados, *Safe for Democracy: The Secret Wars of the CIA*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2006. Prados' work spans the post-World War II period and treats both large programs and many smaller covert initiatives with careful scholarship, albeit offered up with a critical eye.

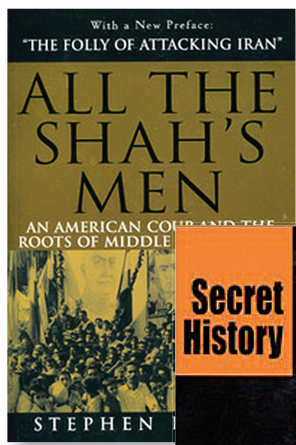
William J. Daugherty. *Executive Secrets: Covert Action and the Presidency*. (The University Press of Kentucky, 2004). This is a basic text on covert action that broadly ranges over both doctrine and practice.

Some of his political observations and his defensiveness of some less successful operations occasionally detract from the overall excellent treatment of covert action.

John Ranelagh. *The Agency: The Rise and Decline of the CIA*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986) While now dated, this is a good, basic history of CIA that offers some "insiders' view" of covert action in the 1950's and 1960's. Several retired officers were interviewed in the

work. Ranelagh's companion six-hour documentary film produced by BBC offers much commentary and illustration of early covert action program, a welcome

10. Daugherty, pp. 184-185



logian and sharp critic of the Vietnam War.

We have already noted that the concept of covert action has been treated under a variety of names and euphemisms ranging from psychological warfare and dirty tricks to political warfare or special activities. Mark Lowenthal in his widely used textbook *From Secrets to Policy*, 5th Ed. (Washington: CQ Press, 2012) in Chapter 8 discusses covert action in terms of six analytically distinct activities:

Propaganda: This includes the covert development and placement of information in print and radio and television media as well as the use of agents of influence. Hugh Wilford's *The Mighty Wurlitzer: How the CIA Played America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008) is among the best treatments of these activities during the Cold War. *Victory: The Reagan Administration's Secret Strategy that Hastened the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (New York: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1966) by Peter Schweizer, explore many of the Reagan initiatives used to erode support within the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Milt Bearden and James Risen offer a compelling "last chapter" on the Cold War conflict in *The Main Enemy: The Inside Story of CIA's Final Showdown with the KGB* (New York: Random House, 2003).

Political activity: Covert work in the political realm can include everything from *sub rosa* financing of political and campaign consultants to "buying" elections by funneling large sums of money to candidates to purchase blocs of voting. Prados and

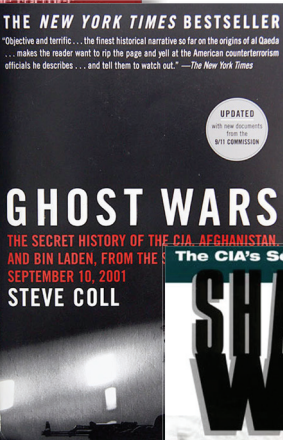
classroom supplement to lectures. Among the teaching moments is William Sloane Coffin's reflections on his work on early Eastern European paramilitary programs, long before he became a noted theo-

Ranelagh, as well as many others, treat the Italian presidential election of 1948 as a textbook case of covert political activity. A detailed examination of the policy discussions over the decision to influence a Guyanese presidential election in the early 1960s is an excellent case study of both costs and benefits of such operations. (See Prados, pp.3-19) Since the 1980s the openly funded National Endowment for Democracy (NED) has assisted many political activities that once would have been handled covertly. Congress has generally refused to fund covert activities that could or are being conducted by NED. "Arab Spring" has again raised questions whether we still need the flexibility to work covertly, as well as overtly, with helping resistance movements transform themselves into governing authorities.

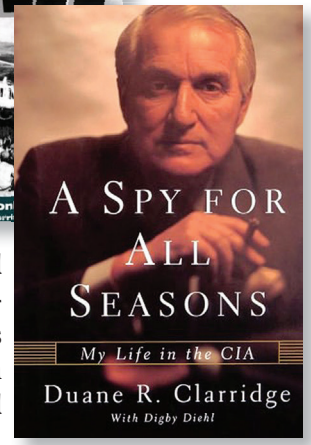
Economic activity: Sabotage against Cuban sugar mills was authorized by President Kennedy as a covert means for undermining the Cuban economy. President Nixon responded to Chilean President Allende's nationalization of American owned industries with robust covert initiatives to forestall Allende's consolidation of the Chilean economy. This covert action grew into a more comprehensive covert campaign to overthrow Allende. The United States

Senate published an extraordinary collection of both policy documents and CIA operational traffic spanning the three years from 1970 until 1973 when Allende was overthrown by the Chilean military. (University Press of the Pacific, 1978).

The



controversial covert mining of the Nicaraguan harbors in the mid-1980s was authorized as a way of blocking Nicaraguan exports and imports by creating the impression that the waterways around



Nicaraguan were unsafe for navigation. It was hoped that this situation would lead the Lloyds of London insurance underwriters to raise insurance rates to the point where cost of maritime trade with Nicaragua would become prohibitively costly – thus creating a kind of trade embargo. Duane R. Clarridge, the architect of this operation, discusses its varied objectives in his memoir *A Spy for All Seasons* (New York, Scribner's, 1998).

Coups: The covert overthrow of a government can run the gamut of activities from subversion and the fomenting of violence that erodes the foundation of a government to the covert sponsorship of forces taking a government out by a coup d'état. The early cases cited in every CIA history are Iran in 1953 and Guatemala in 1974. Good history work has doggedly followed these situations so that fifty years later we have reasonably comprehensive histories of the covert actions. Steven Kinzer's *All the Shah's Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 2003) is excellent both on the history of the action and the longer term consequences. The best case study on Guatemala is Stephen Kinzer's *Bitter Fruit: The Story of the American Coup in Guatemala, Revised and Expanded* (New York: The David Rockefeller Series on Latin America Studies, 2003). A useful classroom supplement is *Secret History: The CIA Classified Account of its Operations in Guatemala 1952-1954* by Nick Cullather (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006). Other covert involvement in coups include the 1963 overthrow of Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem, the aforementioned 1973 Allende overthrow, and the killing of African leader Patrice Lumumba. Despite compelling evidence to the contrary many authors and others treat these coups as examples of CIA engaging in assassination. Coups inevitably carry the prospect of the death of the overthrown leader, but since 1975 the President has explicitly forbade by Executive Order for CIA either to conduct political assassination or to work with groups that may have that as their intent. The December 1989 military Operation Just Cause targeted against Panamanian strongman Manuel Noriega was developed as an alternative when Congressional oversight committees refused to fund CIA's program to topple Noriega for fear that it involved Panamanians who might kill Noriega. (Daugherty, p.93).

Paramilitary operations: Since its founding, CIA has had a paramilitary responsibility and capability, though not all Presidents have been enthusiastic about using it. The paramilitary responsibility spans a wide range of activities. It is most commonly used quietly to provide training assistance and material to countries

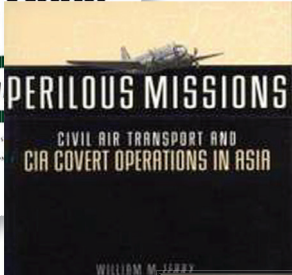
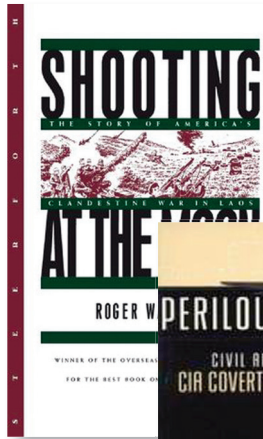
that need assistance in leadership protection, countering narcotics traffickers or combatting terrorism. As an alternative to overt military assistance and training, CIA training offers the possibility of receiving training and material without the government having to acknowledge the assistance.

But CIA's paramilitary responsibilities also include the ability to raise, train, arm, and direct a covert paramilitary force to support some broader US national security objective. Over the last 65 years this has involved numerous programs.

Early in its history, CIA supported a number of unsuccessful anti-Communist resistance programs in the new Soviet Union and Eastern Block countries. These included operations in the Baltics, Ukraine, and Albania. All failed, though whether the reasons for failure were compromises by traitors within the ranks, or simply because the time had passed for such large-scale operations, remains debated. For study purposes a number of these programs are discussed in in Ranelagh's *The Agency: The Rise and Decline of the CIA*.

CIA's involvement in the anti-Castro operation, codenamed Zapata, almost ended its paramilitary responsibilities. It is best remembered for the disaster at the Bay of Pigs and it serves as a case study for the problems of mounting a large-scale paramilitary overthrow program. Most of CIA's own Inspector General's scathing review of the operation is available in redacted versions at CIA's website in the historical section. There are also numerous books looking at the campaign from a broad policy perspective down to individual accounts of both CIA and Cuban participants. The aftermath left CIA with a cadre of anti-Communist Cuban paramilitary specialists who subsequently served in operations in Africa, Southeast Asia and Latin America.

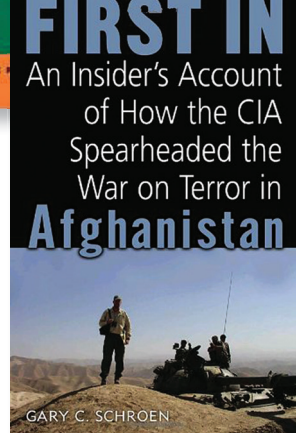
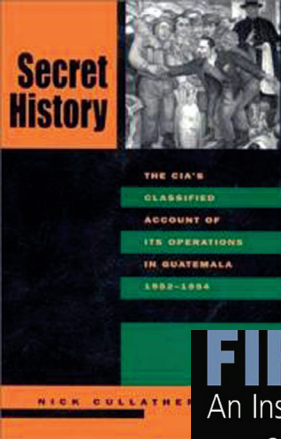
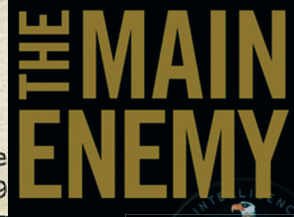
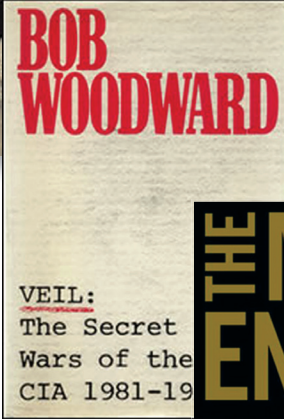
CIA conducted a multitude of covert paramilitary operations in East Asia beginning with attempts to support anti-Communist guerillas on China's southern border in Thailand and Burma. This program was continuously complicated by allegations that the units were involved in narcotics trafficking. CIA also ran a long program of covert support for Tibetan rebels but this terminated with the normalization of US/Chinese relations. CIA played a key psychological and paramilitary role in shoring up Philippine President Magsaysay in his counterinsurgency efforts against the Communist support Huk movement. CIA was much less successful with a 1958 covert program to support paramilitary opposition to Indonesian President Sukarno and likewise failed in a modest effort to unseat Cambodian King Sihanouk in the same year.



CIA had an instrumental role in shaping South Vietnam from 1954 on and it worked closely with US Army Special Forces with the mountain dwelling tribes along the Ho Chi Minh trail. CIA also conducted deep penetrations

into North Vietnam in an effort to organize resistance to the North Vietnam regime. While the US military increasingly transformed Vietnam into a more conventional military conflict, CIA did retain a key role in the pacification program. Critics have often characterized CIA's engagement in Operation Phoenix as an assassination campaign, but it was just one element of the pacification program and careful historical work has rebutted many of these allegations. Two works are especially commended here: Thomas Ahern's *Vietnam Declassified: The CIA and Counterinsurgency* (University Press of Kentucky, 2010) and William Colby's *Lost Victory: A Firsthand Account of America's Sixteen-Year Involvement in Vietnam* (Contemporary Books, 1989).

While Vietnam was something of a sideshow for CIA once the major US military commitment began in 1964, CIA's "war" in Laos was its largest paramilitary program during the Vietnam War. Kenneth Conboy's *Shadow War: The CIA's Secret War in Laos* (Paladin Press, 1995) is a useful work on this period because it includes a wealth of pictures provided by CIA veterans of the campaign. Also recommended is Roger Warner's *Shooting at the Moon: The Story of America's Clandestine War in Laos* (Steerforth Press, 1998). CIA's ability to create covertly infrastructure and capabilities became widely known during this period through accounts of Air America, a CIA proprietary firm. See William M. Leary's *Perilous Missions: Civil Air Transport*



and CIA Covert Operations in Asia. (The University of Alabama Press, 1984).

There were a number of major covert paramilitary operations ordered by President Reagan, though a number of them had their first Findings made by President Carter. The program to block the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan was considered then among the most successful covert programs though much of it was openly discussed in the press. Reagan's initiatives in Central America, however, were much more controversial and ended in the Iran-Contra affair where CIA and the Administration were investigated for conducting covertly activities that had been prohibited by US law. Bob Woodward's *Veil: The Secret Wars of the CIA 1981-1987* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1987) has a contemporary account of these programs though the book itself became controversial over the credibility of Woodward's account of death bed discussions with former DCI William Casey. The Reagan doctrine programs are also well discussed in both Daugherty and Prados.

Though CIA wound down its paramilitary capability at the end of the Cold War and dismantled much of its infrastructure for supporting paramilitary operations, the events of 9/11 and President Bush's decision to pursue aggressively Al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden resulted in a substantial rebuilding of CIA's paramilitary capabilities over the next ten years. Afghanistan became a major CIA theater. The man who led the initial

CIA paramilitary team into Afghanistan a little more than a month after the attack of 9/11 has written a revealing account of the operation. See Gary C. Schroen, *First In: An Insider's Account of How the CIA Spearheaded the War on Terror in Afghanistan* (New York: Valentine Books, 2005). Also see Steve Coll's *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004). This is probably the best

analysis of US policy, including covert actions, in the region to date.

To these traditional activities we should add another — “support to liaison.” While we generally think of receiving intelligence information through liaison, we might also engage a liaison service to join us in the conduct of one or more of the other forms of covert action or we might covertly provide them technical assistance and training as discussed above.

Lowenthal notes that others have employed an additional activity – support to military operations, including covert preparations for overt military action. At the same time the significant expansion of military special operations has sometimes blurred the distinction between covert action on the one hand, and secret operations, on the other. On the global battlefield of counterterrorism a military “advanced clandestine support to military operations” or ACSMO in the Defense acronym, has many of the same definitional attributes of “covert action.”

Finally, there are also significant questions about whether “information operations” can be a separate form of covert action. The expanding world of cyber warfare and information operations is another area where division of labor and authorities for action remain ill defined. Covert attempts to disable computers engaged in weapons research and development may technically fall within the realm of peacetime covert action. Defense cyber warfare doctrine includes computer network attacks against command and control communications and denial of communications service. Both of these could be construed as overt acts of war.

One final word on the topic of covert action: For a secret subject covert action has resulted in a voluminous bibliography. Works cited here have withstood considerable critical review. On the other hand, many authors confuse fact and fiction. Information has been leaked to cast favor on an initiative or to generate public opposition to the activity. Some is written with such flights of fancy that the writing has little tie to reality. On the other hand, critical and polemical

attacks on covert action sometimes have some truth to them. Rigorous reading and spirited classroom discussions help to sort out the good from the bad.



Jon A. Wiant is a retired intelligence officer. During his 36 years with the government, Mr. Wiant served in senior positions at Departments of State and Defense, Central Intelligence Agency and the White House. He was twice Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Intelligence and also was Director for Intelligence Policy, National Security Council. He graduated from the University of Colorado and was a Danforth Fellow at Cornell University. He was awarded the National Intelligence Distinguished Service Medal and is a decorated Vietnam combat veteran. In retirement Mr. Wiant was Professor of Intelligence History at the National Defense Intelligence College and is currently an Adjunct Professor of George Washington University’s Elliott School of International Affairs.

Cofer Black: My mission was not to ensure that little girls go to school in Afghanistan. My mission was not to establish, you know, a legal system in Afghanistan. Was not my mission. My mission was to destroy al Qaeda. And to do that, we had to overthrow the Taliban.



Lara Logan: What makes a good spy?

Hank Crumpton: I think that you have to have an intense intellectual curiosity. I think also it requires a willingness to deal with ambivalent situations. A certain degree of creativity, physical courage.

60 Minutes interview of 13 May 2012 with Hank Crumpton

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