

ABSTRACT

You are Who You Fight: The CIA, Covert Action, and National Security

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Hollywood thrillers, conspiracy theories and political discourse, often depict the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) as an uncontrollable, enigmatic organization populated by James Bonds. The agency's mandate, set out in the National Security Act of 1947, tells a different story that is often overlooked. In essence, the US government designed the CIA as a center of intelligence analysis and not a cloak and dagger outfit. Nevertheless, the CIA did develop a covert action branch and from the Cold War to the War on Terror, the CIA has increasingly relied on this operational component. But where did this branch come from and how and why has it adapted or failed to adapt to changes in the international environment? Through two case studies, this thesis evaluates the efficacy of bureaucratic, organizational cultural, and realist theories for explaining the evolution of covert action within the CIA.

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YOU ARE WHO YOU FIGHT: THE CIA, COVERT ACTION, AND NATIONAL
SECURITY

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) is a generally misunderstood arm of the American national security Apparatus. There are many myths that follow the agency: that the CIA spies on its citizens, that there is no oversight of the organization, that everyone in the agency is a spy. The clandestine and classified nature of the agency has only escalated these various myths and left the agency susceptible to public critique. The secrecy required of the agency to protect national security has opened the door for criticism of its actions. After the 9/11 attacks, for example, political leaders and public figures alike condemned the CIA for not more actively engaging the global terrorism threat. The perception was that the analysts were not adequately threat reporting. In reality, a month before the attack, the President's Daily Briefing (PDB) outlined the inevitability of a large-scale, domestic attack. There is a gap between the perception of the agency and the reality of its activity. It is in the inherent structure of the agency that questions and concern are raised over the type and scope of operations conducted by the CIA, its effectiveness, and its boundaries.

Understanding the agency is the first step in ameliorating the uncertainties and the stigmas attached to the CIA. The CIA today is a foreign intelligence service that is comprised of five directorates: the Directorate of Operations (DO), the Directorate of Analysis (DA), the Directorate of Science and Technology, the Directorate of Support,

and the Directorate of Digital Innovation. For the purpose of this thesis, the focus is on the DO and the DA, in this way dividing the agency between its two primary functions, operations and analysis. Yet even within these two subcultures there is a hierarchy of importance. Departing from its initial design, the analytical branch of the CIA has played an increasingly second-class role to operations. When the CIA was formed under the National Security Act of 1947, it was given the mission of coordinating and disseminating intelligence. The agency was created to be analytical. The question, then, that this thesis seeks to answer is why the CIA has expanded into a largely operational organization with a dependence on covert action.

Covert action is here defined as it is in the Intelligence Authorization Act of 1991, 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.”¹ Covert action includes propaganda, political action, asset development, economic warfare, and paramilitary action.

The use of covert action is neither unique to the CIA nor began with the agency. The history of American intelligence dates back to the Revolutionary War. George Washington used 10 percent of his military budget on intelligence gathering. The Americans had a network of agents and double agents, conducted sabotage and paramilitary campaigns against the British forces, and used propaganda to win support of foreign governments. When America entered into the Civil War, still no formal

¹ Joel T. Meyer, “Supervising the Pentagon”, *Administrative Law Review* 59, no. 2 (2007): 464.

intelligence services existed, but both the Union and Confederacy relied on clandestine agents, intercepted documents, and interrogations as part of their war strategies. In World War I, formal intelligence organizations were put in place and the State, Army, Navy, and Justice Departments were all collecting foreign intelligence. Domestic agencies, such as the New York Police Department, were conducting political, economic, and psychological warfare against German covert operations on American soil.

As the United States entered into World War II, covert action was not a priority of the executive. After the shock of Pearl Harbor, which resulted from analytical failures, collection gaps and interdepartmental confusion, President Franklin D. Roosevelt realized the need for a centralized intelligence service. Under his presidency, the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) was developed. The OSS, which contained analysis and covert action branches, would be the predecessor of the CIA. When the CIA was eventually formed by the National Security Act of 1947, the nation was on the brink of war with the Soviet Union, and was already engage in a Cold War against it.

This thesis considers the question of the CIA's expanding covert role in two case studies. Three theories are applied to the cases to analyze CIA operations: bureaucratic theory, organizational culture theory, and realist theory. To explain the agency's behavior, the first looks at bureaucratic influence, the second looks at the organizations norms, and the last looks at the international structure and threat. The first case applies these theories to the agency during the early Cold War. During this time in the agency's development, there was bureaucratic competition for control over intelligence collection and operations, President Truman was not actively supporting the agency, and the OSS had

only recently been dissolved. As well, the CIA was asked to enter a fight against a Great Power whose intelligence apparatus was developed and already engaging in covert affairs. Thus, this case is one with many internal and external factors present, making it a rigorous test of explanatory power for each theory.

The second case study looks at the CIA following the attacks on 9/11 and the War on Terror. With the rise of al-Qaeda, the CIA faced an enemy unlike any it had encountered before. The threat shifted from the traditional state actor to a terrorist network that operated in multiple countries and continuously changed tactics. The agency shifted into a period of adjusting from fighting the same enemy for more than forty years to a new enemy. Under Director of Central Intelligence (DCI), George Tenet, the DO was beginning to expand capabilities, but still was not as influential as its Cold War peak. In this case, there is reason to believe that the CIA would not or could not adjust operationally to fight al-Qaeda and the Taliban, again, making the choice in case one with explanatory power.

The question of covert operations within the CIA is important because it relates to national security. American foreign policy primarily uses diplomacy, foreign aid, and military force, but when these tools are ineffective or unavailable, “policymakers traditionally have turned to covert action.”² Espionage, propaganda, foreign funding, paramilitary campaigns, and more, all contribute to a larger goal of diffusing threats and protecting the nation, both in times of war and peace. In cases like the Cold War where direct military engagement was seen as too dangerous, covert operations were necessary

² Meyer, *Supervising the Pentagon*, 463.

to fight the enemy. In the War on Terror, traditional military presence would not have adequately extinguished the threat. Covert action, in this sense, is more than a supplement to military engagement; it is a deciding factor in the success of a nation in war. In an anarchic international system, rational states act in order to reduce uncertainty. Gathering intelligence, supporting sympathetic regimes or groups, spreading propaganda, and conducting paramilitary operations all work to the advantage of the state desiring security.

Covert action will be a persisting function of the government and of the CIA. Understanding the reasoning behind expanding and shrinking covert operations gives predictive power for future conflicts. In the following chapters, this thesis explores the spikes in the agency's covert capabilities and offers theoretical explanations for these occurrences.

CHAPTER TWO

Theoretical Framework

The reasons for the formation of the CIA seem obvious based on academic and historical accounts. The US government and military wanted to avoid another Pearl Harbor. The clear solution was to put integrated intelligence analysis under one roof. Yet bureaucratic power struggles, executive ideology, debate over postwar intelligence, and War and Navy Department unification discussions, made the task of establishing a central body for the coordination of intelligence difficult. These circumstances set the creation of the CIA apart from other national security agencies. In fact, its competitors in the intelligence field, who were threatened by its creation, made sure the CIA would be weak. However, this bureaucratic infighting does not explain every aspect of the early development of the CIA.

The CIA as we know it today has two main branches: the intelligence analysis branch and the operations branch. Originally, the US government designed the CIA to

analyze intelligence. Where, then, did the operational branch come from? The central question to be answered here is why the agency developed an extensive operational branch that engages in covert action when its charter outlined a very different organization. What caused the expansion of the agency's function to include covert operations? In this chapter, I outline the possible theoretical explanations for how the agency became a hub of international covert action. I then test the competing explanations in two case studies of the CIA: the early Cold War and the Global War on Terror.

Various theories have attempted to explain organizational behavior, if not specifically the expansion of the CIA's operational branch. These explanations include from rational actor models, organizational processes, agency design, governmental politics, and international relations theory.

Yet, while many responses to this question exist, both scholarly agreement and a sufficient body of academic work are lacking. This is in part because national security organizations have gotten lost in the gray area between the fields of international relations and American politics. Domestic policy agencies and national security agencies operate in vastly different circles in terms of interest group organization or oversight and transparency. One operates in the legislative domain, the other in the executive. National security bureaucracies are much more interconnected and tight-knit than their domestic counterparts, which operate in relatively independent domestic spheres.³ Secondly, there is simply a lack of scholarly attention, substantive and theoretical, on national security

³ Amy B. Zegart, *Flawed By Design* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 41.

agencies.⁴ Political scientists have focused predominantly on empirical aspects of the Cold War, for example, and excluded analysis of the security apparatus. According to Zegart, “we know far more about mobile nuclear missile silos than we do about the original setup of the National Security Council system, the Central Intelligence Agency, or the Joint Chiefs of Staff.”⁵ Thus, theoretically driven research into the field of intelligence operations is important but understudied. This is an oversight that needs correcting if we are to understand the past actions of the American national security apparatus and offer insight into its future.

Here I test three specific theories in the case of the CIA’s covert action expansion: organizational culture, bureaucratic theory, and structural realist international relations theory. The theories have different expectations when it comes to national security organizations’ output and behavior. Bureaucratic theory assumes that internal bureaucratic forces drive agency behavior. Organizational culture maintains that established norms and traditional routines predict an organization’s behavior. Finally, realist theory views organizational behavior as a response to the international environment in which the organization finds itself.

When discussing these theories with respect to intelligence organizations and more specifically the CIA, it is important to make a distinction between the agency’s origin and its evolution. The internal political battle involved in creating the agency was just that, political. The US government initially formed the intelligence organization to

⁴ Zegart, *Flawed By Design*, 41.

⁵ Zegart, *Flawed By Design*, 41.

support the war effort in World War II. It was then left to discern what peacetime intelligence would mean for the nation. Thus, this postwar period of the agency's evolution was marked by bureaucratic infighting, establishing the agency's mission, and protecting and growing this mission. The FBI, Navy, War, and State Departments all collected their own intelligence. A centralized intelligence organization was a threat to their individual interests. The Executive Branch under Truman was not a political proponent of the agency and viewed it rather as an obstacle in consolidating the Department of War and the Department of the Navy. In other words, this period was defined by specific circumstances and constraints that explain the CIA's early development and behavior, but have less relevance in its continued development.

Bureaucratic Theory

Bureaucratic theory says that on an organizational level, organizations' positions come from their missions, their capabilities, and their pursuit of influence. Every organization is charged with a mission to perform and while organizations have significant control in defining their missions, they must still decide whether carrying it out is beneficial to their interests. An organization's primary interest is to expand influence in order to increase funding, increase autonomy, and reduce uncertainty within the organization. Maintenance of the bureaucratic organization's larger mission is also aimed at facilitating and minimizing effort in their daily tasks. This daily maintenance of an agency requires appropriations, personnel, and political support. Often, this

maintenance results in the elimination or “otherwise coping with the threats posed by rivals.”⁶ The reality facing organizations within a bureaucracy, though, include undertaking difficult or unwanted tasks while competing with other agencies doing the same work, often on an inadequate budget, and further under the watch of critics, interest groups, and subcommittees.

In order to combat this state of affairs and run effectively, organizations desire increased resources to fund the agencies’ missions.⁷ Yet, according to Wilson, “the view that all bureaus want larger budgets ignores the fact that there is often a tradeoff between bigger budgets on the one hand and the complexity of tasks, the number of rivals, and the multiplicity of constraints on the other.”⁸ This points to the primary desire of any given agency to obtain autonomy. In fact, while bigger budgets are more welcome than smaller ones, bureaucracies “are often prepared to accept less money with greater control than more money with less control.”⁹ Autonomy within an agency, here defined as relatively undisputed jurisdiction, allows for fewer bureaucratic rivals and maximizes the opportunity to establish a cohesive mission.

The last interest of bureaus, alongside budget and autonomy, is to increase certainty and reduce uncertainty. Security is more or less achieved when bureaucratic competition is reduced, funding is procured, and autonomy secured. There is a widely

⁶ James Q. Wilson, *Bureaucracy* (Basic Books, 1989), 181.

⁷ Morton H. Halperin and Priscilla A. Clapp, *Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2006), 26.

⁸ Wilson, *Bureaucracy*, 182.

⁹ Halperin and Clapp, *Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy*, 51.

believed notion, then, that organizations are imperialistic, seeking to expand and take over functions from other groups. The evidence, however, does not support this and organizations are often resistant to accept roles and duties beyond their missions.

The political climate surrounding the national security apparatus of the early Cold War was volatile. There was political infighting within the military departments, an executive hesitant to establish a peacetime intelligence group, and the growing threat from the Soviet Union. The CIA's mandate made it weak and focused, almost exclusively, on intelligence gathering and analysis. Applying organization theory to the CIA in the early Cold War, the driving force behind its shift to covert action would be its interest in procuring more funds, autonomy, and certainty. The expansion or "mission creep" of the agency into all domains of clandestine operations would thus be attributed to a desire to increase its budget, secure its niche in the bureaucracy, and reduce the uncertainty surrounding the fledgling organization. By increasing the extent of the agency's mission, the CIA's budget would have to be increased. As well, due to the various agencies capable of doing their own intelligence gathering, seeking a role with less competition would be vital to its survival.

In the case of the War on Terror, the CIA was in a position to metaphorically rebuild. The intelligence failure of the 9/11 attacks led to a restructuring of the American intelligence community and a distrust of the CIA. Still, because organizations are driven by a desire for certainty, the standard operating procedures developed during the Cold War would be present in the fight against al-Qaeda. In the early Cold War, precedence was given to operations over analysis, and the most common types of covert action

utilized were ideological, political, and economic. These same tendencies, according to organizational culture, would remain constant in the transition to fighting global terrorism.

In the War on Terror, alongside a large-scale military campaign was an extensive counterterrorism campaign headed by the agency. While analysis was crucial in the Global War on Terror, “it was the operations officers on the other side of CIA headquarters, and in the freezing expanse of Afghanistan, who were leading this fight.”¹⁰ Thus, in accordance with bureaucratic theory, the launch of the large-scale counterterrorism covert program was an opportunity to increase the agency’s budget, to increase and monopolize operational primacy, and to increase the agency’s credibility after the intelligence failures of 9/11.

Organizational Culture Theory

Organizational culture theory states that behavior is shaped by the norms and shared identities of an organization. These norms and assumptions comprise a central paradigm, which comes from the organization’s historical experience and “finest hour.”¹¹ The culture, therefore, results in the formation of preferences towards certain modes of

¹⁰ Philip Mudd, *Takedown: Inside the Hunt for Al Qaeda* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 12.

¹¹ Legro, “Military Culture and Inadvertent Escalation in World War II,” *International Security* 18, no. 4 (1994): 142.

action and mission priorities. Organizational culture can also be traced and attributed to the values and assumptions of key leaders. Applying organizational culture theory to these stipulations, the agency, with decision-makers, personnel, and finest hour all tied to the OSS, would maintain an analytical emphasis regardless of time or threat environment. Covert action would be a mission the CIA should not want to take on.

The CIA was not the first organization of its kind. Components of the World War II intelligence organization, the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), were kept intact and transferred to the CIA upon its formation. The Research and Analysis branch (R&A) became part of the new centralized agency, bringing with it many of the same analysts and personnel from the former OSS. While the Truman Administration dissolved the rest of the organization, it preserved the R&A branch because of its efficacy and importance. When William Donovan, a founding member of the OSS, proposed a centralized intelligence organization to President Roosevelt, he envisioned an “effective service for analyzing, comprehending, and appraising information,” made up of leading scholars from various academic fields.¹² In fact, while R&A eventually found itself marginalized with a diminishing budget, it was not the OSS itself that viewed its analysis branch as lesser, but rather the established government agencies that deemed it superfluous. Thus, R&A was considered by its own agency to be creative, effective, and “the most respected part of the entire OSS operation.”¹³

¹²Heiki Bungart, Jan Heitmann, and Michael Wala, *Secret Intelligence in the Twentieth Century* (London: Routledge, 2003), 57.

¹³ Bungart, Heitmann, and Wala, *Secret Intelligence in the Twentieth Century*, 57.

Aligning with organizational culture theory, the new Central Intelligence Agency would prefer its analytical capabilities following the ideology of its leadership and the norms established during its “finest hour” in World War II. As the norms of the organization do not change with time or threat, the analysis and research branch of the CIA should remain its most important function in both the early Cold War and War on Terror cases. The organizational culture of the CIA should resist the call for it to engage in global covert action.

Realist Theory

Realist theory argues that the behavior of states is largely determined by their location in an anarchic international system, where the intentions of other states are uncertain, and the threat of the use of force is always present. In this condition, according to John Mearsheimer, states are rational actors who will look to “gain power at each other’s expense” to ensure their own survival.¹⁴ The behavior and decisions of the great powers largely determine the condition of the other states in the system. In addition, as states act to gain power, the security competition “drives great powers to imitate the successful practices of their opponents.”¹⁵ This pressure makes the organization highly adaptable, as the driving force behind its action is to match the behavior of its enemy. Existing norms or external pressure do not hinder the organization from restructuring and making necessary changes, as in bureaucratic theory and organizational culture theory.

¹⁴ John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003), 5.

¹⁵ Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 166.

In the case of the early Cold War, the bipolar system between the United States and the Soviet Union was uncertain and the nuclear arms race agitated the security dilemma. Because a nuclear war was unlikely, the Soviet Union launched a massive covert campaign to win the Cold War through subversion, especially in the developing world. Applying realist theory, and specifically imitation, to the early Cold War case, the United States would mirror the covert operations of the Soviet Union because of its highly effective operational capabilities and its proven successes. The CIA would begin to adapt its structure and behavior to counter and imitate that of the Soviets.

In the War on Terror, the threat shifts from state actor to non-state actor. While realist theory hinges upon states being the unit of analysis, imitation theory still holds. States imitate in order to decrease uncertainty and increase security. As al Qaeda became the leading national threat after 9/11, American strategy had to adjust in order to counter the new enemy that was unlike any state threat posed before. The terrorist organization used various covert techniques from covert operations to propaganda to covertly funding other groups. The conflict was not against a traditional military. Thus, against al Qaeda in the War on Terror, imitation theory would see yet another increase in covert action to respond to and mirror the international threat of that time. In responding to Al Qaeda, the CIA should also adopt different SOPs than those employed against a state actor during the Cold War.

CHAPTER THREE

The Early Cold War

The Cold War was a fight for the balance of power in the post-World War II international system. The Soviet Union viewed the world in stark terms: Communism against Capitalism, the East against the West. This ideology, combined with the state's long intelligence history, caused the USSR to undertake aggressive covert operations in North America, Europe, and the Third World. By contrast, the modern American intelligence apparatus was in its infancy and was transitioning from wartime responsibilities to a permanent, peacetime role. This phase did not last long, however, as the rising Soviet threat brought the nations to the brink of war. The United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), specifically the special operations branch, became an integral player in the indirect fight against the Soviets. Both nations' intelligence organizations carried out the actions that make up covert action: propaganda, political covert action, economic covert action, and paramilitary covert action. This chapter argues that these covert functions taken on by the CIA during the early Cold War period were a response to the Soviet threat environment. With an aggressive covert branch, the USSR's intelligence organization, the KGB, operated in various regions and capacities, leaving the CIA with no alternative but to imitate the Soviets' intelligence behavior or jeopardize national security.

Development of the American Intelligence Apparatus

American intelligence dates back as far as the Revolutionary War and the Culper ring, one of the nation's first intelligence groups, but the nation's official intelligence organizations have more modern roots in the War and State Departments.¹⁶ The Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI) and the Military Intelligence Division (MID) were formed in the late nineteenth century. The State Department's Foreign Service Officers had long been providing intelligence to American leaders. Intelligence, under this system, served the ends of each department with no coordinating or analytical agency. An attempt to centralize State and War Department signal intelligence during World War I, known as the Black Chamber, was highly successful in decrypting enemy codes. The organization, however, was dissolved by President Herbert Hoover whose administration found the groups' cryptology activity to be a violation of the mutual trust principle that guided American foreign policy.¹⁷ Thus, the independent and fractured intelligence apparatus was caused, in part, by an unsupportive executive branch, lack of understanding of the scope of other foreign intelligence operations, and American policy makers skepticism about the efficacy of intelligence information.

The lead-up to American intervention in World War II revealed weaknesses in the military and government from a lack of centralized intelligence gathering. The FBI was the leading agency in charge of counterintelligence at the time. The intelligence was not

¹⁶ America's first spy network formed during the Revolutionary War in New York in 1778

¹⁷ Edward Hymoff, *The OSS in World War II* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1972), 24.

useful, though, because of President Hoover's limited vision for intelligence and the organization's sole focus on domestic intelligence gathering.¹⁸ The American people were also unsupportive, viewing covert action as ineffective and a violation of American ideals. The nation's aversion to espionage was largely quieted with the shock of Pearl Harbor, a clear failure of intelligence communication. The attack highlighted the underlying problem of fragmented, autonomous intelligence agencies. All the information about the impending attack existed within the various groups, but the lack of interdepartmental coordination and a disconnect between gathering, assessing, and communicating resulted in destruction.

After Pearl Harbor and the United States' entry into World War II, President Franklin D. Roosevelt sent an envoy, William "Wild Bill" Donovan, to gauge the situation in Europe.¹⁹ It was on this mission that Donovan was introduced to England's revered Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) that was to shape his vision for a similar, centralized, organization within the United States. At the time there were seven federal agencies tasked with gathering intelligence: the FBI, the Army's G2, the ONI, the State Department's diplomatic corps, the Treasury Department's Secret Service, the Labor Department's Immigration and Naturalization Service, and the Federal Communications

¹⁸ Hymoff, *The OSS in World War II*, 28.

¹⁹ Donovan was chosen, in part, to quiet any criticisms of the New Deal's partisanship.

Commission.^{20,21} Roosevelt realized this was a problem, and, alongside Donovan, formed a centralized intelligence body titled the Coordinator of Information (COI).

In 1942, the military gained control of the COI and the name of the organization was changed to the Office of Strategic Services (OSS). Donovan supported the transition into the military apparatus believing that an intelligence unit which reported directly to the military would alleviate bureaucratic divisiveness.²² Yet this transition still caused debate over the nature of the organization; should it be fractured into a departmental intelligence agency, or remain a centralized organization? The formation of the organization led to a “three-way struggle between the army, the navy, and the OSS.”²³ The uncertainty of the new intelligence roles and fears of losing resources engendered by the centralized agency led to the other departments continuing intelligence operations and withholding intelligence from the OSS.

The various intelligence services still operated larger intelligence actions than the OSS. Thus, in an effort to match the broad scope of the departmentalized intelligence system, the OSS was split between the Research and Analysis Branch and the Foreign Information Service (FIS). The two branches had very dissimilar functions. The FIS was tasked with subversion, psychological warfare, and sabotage and eventually was divided into Secret Intelligence (SI) and Counter-Espionage (X-2). The R&A was the lynchpin of

²⁰ The Immigration and Naturalization Service tracked immigrants and refugees from totalitarian states.

²¹ The FCC monitored foreign broadcasts.

²² Richard H. Immerman, *The Hidden Hand: A Brief History of the CIA* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 10.

²³ Maochun Yu, *OSS in China: Prelude to Cold War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 7.

the agency as Donovan formed the agency to address the need for an “effective service for analyzing, comprehending, and appraising information.”²⁴The ranks of R&A filled with Ivy League academics, high-powered lawyers, business executives and others who exhibited unparalleled analytical abilities. Donovan “took up with quick enthusiasm the novel idea that scholars- those dreamy inhabitants of ivory towers-would be ideal for the job.”²⁵ Roger Hilsman attributes this ideal to Donovan’s inclination towards the new and unorthodox, shifting the role of intelligence from the traditional and romanticized operational secret agent towards one of research, theory, and analysis.

Creation of the CIA

After FDR’s death and the end of World War II, President Truman felt no obligation or need to continue the operations of the OSS. The Bureau of the Budget’s plan for liquidating the OSS began immediately and a plan for the reorganization of national intelligence was sent to Truman for approval. The effect of the bureaucratic restructuring was the dissolution of Donovan’s OSS, the integration of its R&A branch with the State Department called the Strategic Services Unit (SSU), and the continuation of the SI and X-2 as ongoing peacetime operations under the War Department. The assets and personnel that were transferred to the SSU eventually resettled as the Central Intelligence Group (CIG) which directly became the CIA after the passage of the National Security Act of 1947. The transition from the OSS to the CIG is especially

²⁴ Bungart, Heitmann, and Wala, *Secret Intelligence in the Twentieth Century*, 56.

²⁵ Roger Hilsman, “Intelligence and Policy-Making in Foreign Affairs,” *World Politics* 5 (1952): 1.

noteworthy because it changed the perceived role of central intelligence from a multitasked organization to one solely focused on intelligence gathering and analysis.

The years following the creation of the CIA were an uncertain and unproductive time for the organization. The agency, following the organizational structure of its predecessor, was divided by its two functions: analysis and operations. The analytical branch immediately focused on short, relevant information that appealed to policymakers. However, this was the typical function of the State Department, the War and Navy departments, and the FBI.²⁶ The operational side faced difficulties resulting from an unspecified charter and unclear lines dividing which department undertook which roles. Thus, in 1948, an evaluation of the CIA called the Dulles-Jackson-Correa report criticized the agency for unorganized intelligence evaluation and for “not coordinating intelligence activities in the Government.”²⁷ Another report by a subgroup of The Commission on Organization of the Executive Branch of the Government, the first Hoover Commission, found that the CIA was not able to “assimilate all information concerning scientific developments abroad, to estimate the significance of these developments, and to give direction to collectors.”²⁸ Essentially, the problem was the agency’s internal structure inhibiting it from performing its function.

²⁶ Phyllis P. McNeil “The Evolution of the U.S. Intelligence Community—an Historical Overview.” In *Intelligence: The Secret World of Spies*, edited by Loch K. Johnson and James J. Wirtz, 30. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015.

²⁷ Allen Dulles, William Jackson, and Matthias Correa were asked by NSC Executive Secretary Sidney Souers to examine the CIA’s structure and activity; McNeil, “The Evolution of the U.S. Intelligence Community”, 30.

²⁸ McNeil, “The Evolution of the U.S. Intelligence Community”, 30.

The government took significant steps in responding to the reports' criticisms by expanding the CIA Director's authority over intelligence activities, creating the Board of National Estimates, and improving the relationships between intelligence consumers and producers.²⁹ These changes were critically important with the rising Soviet threat in the 1950s and contributed to notable achievements in the Cold War. The analytical work during the Korean War by the reorganized Agency secured the CIA's spot as a "key player in the defense and foreign policy areas."³⁰

The National Security Act of 1947: Covert Action Framework

Covert action, or "subversive action abroad" as Donovan referred to it, was not explicitly authorized in the directive of the National Security Act of 1947 that formed the CIA's mission.³¹ The act specified that the CIA would take on all of the responsibilities of the CIG, but the legislation also allowed for the agency to undertake "other functions and duties."³² The language was vague, but widely understood within the government to mean covert activities.³³ The Truman Administration wanted the legislative details brief and vague because it was viewed as less important than matters such as the Navy's autonomy.³⁴ The National Security Act's elastic clause was purposefully cryptic because

²⁹ McNeil, "The Evolution of the U.S. Intelligence Community", 31.

³⁰ McNeil, "The Evolution of the U.S. Intelligence Community", 30.

³¹ This was in part because of bureaucratic sensitivities involving the CIA's increased intelligence role and to avoid language that could be offensive to other governments.

³² The actual clause reads: "such additional services of common concern as the National Security Council determines can be more efficiently accomplished centrally."

³³ Harvey Clifford

³⁴ Grant Harris, "The CIA Mandate and the War on Terror", *Yale Law & Policy Review* 23 (2005): 534.

of controversy over what activities and role the agency should assume and the desire of intelligence proponents to have covert action authorized through Congress, even by deceptive means. Even though members were not naive about the implications of the elastic clause, “evidence suggests that Congress did not appreciate this potential” of a blank check for unlimited paramilitary and clandestine operations.³⁵ Congress also had little incentive to scrutinize the agency’s design as the unification of the military was viewed as the top national security priority.

While covert action was utilized before the formation of the CIA, its primacy and expansion was largely a response to the Cold War environment. The American government needed an organization that could act against the Soviets in covert capacities such as psychological and political warfare.³⁶ Neither the military nor the State Department believed it should be attached to these activities, thus these functions were assigned to the CIA. The CIA became the center for covert action with the drafting of NSC 10/2 which created the Office of Policy Coordination (OPC). The OPC was designed to extend covert operations, take over psychological warfare, and conduct paramilitary activities.

NSC 10/2 was integral in shaping the CIA’s expansive operational branch and identity. Covert operations under this directive were centralized in the Agency to rule out risk of duplicate action or leaks. Thus, the CIA became the sole proprietor of covert

³⁵ Immerman, *The Hidden Hand*, 20; Harris, “The CIA Mandate and the War on Terror”, 534.

³⁶ Covert political warfare, according to George Kennan, included propaganda, economic assistance programs, political alliances, influence through funding officials, leaders, and resistance movements or insurgents.

psychological and political warfare in a time when it was crucial to national security. In fact, the OPC's political warfare programs were so broad and inventive that the effort was referred to as the "Mighty Wurlitzer, the giant organ thought to approximate a one-person orchestra because it could masquerade as so many different instruments."³⁷The final event that prompted unprecedented expansion of covert action was the passage of the CIA Act in 1949 which removed the need for the Agency to disclose "activities, budget, and personnel."³⁸The operational side of the CIA, specifically the OPC, essentially answered to no department or agency. Frank Wisner, a former OSS officer and disciple of Donovan, was appointed head of the new organization and began aggressive and imaginative covert operations. Under Wisner, the organization grew from 302 personnel in 1949 to 2812 in 1952 with an increase in budget from \$4.7 million to \$82 million.³⁹ Eventually, the CIA's operational branch was consolidated into a more unitary service with a "a single overseas clandestine service" and a "single chain of command" under the Director of Central Intelligence (DCI).⁴⁰ The DCI's of the time still saw great utility in covert action and the OPC enjoyed similar free reign. The consequences of this convoluted history was the agency's departure from its intended role of intelligence collection, analysis, and distribution.⁴¹

³⁷ Immerman, *The Hidden Hand*, 28.

³⁸ Immerman, *The Hidden Hand*, 28.

³⁹ David F. Rudgers, "The Origins of Covert Action", *Journal of Contemporary History* 35 (2000): 257.

⁴⁰ Rudgers, "The Origins of Covert Action", 257-259.

⁴¹ Immerman, *The Hidden Hand*, 29.

Proponents of an Operational CIA

After the formation of the new Central Intelligence Agency, despite executive and departmental skepticism towards establishing a peacetime intelligence organization, there were influential proponents for a strong, covert agency. Among the top supporters for a CIA-driven effort against the Soviet Union was George Kennan, a diplomat and head of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff. Kennan believed in the necessity of full-scale covert political operations in order to counter the Kremlin's activity. In 1948, he wrote in a paper to the NSC that the United States was the target of the full power of Kremlin political warfare and not responding in kind would be detrimental to national security.⁴² With support from Secretary of Defense James Forrestal and Secretary of State General George Marshall, Kennan drafted NSC 10/2. The NSC decided "not to create a new agency for covert operations, but in time of peace to place the responsibility for them within the structure of the Central Intelligence Agency and correlate them with espionage and counter-espionage operations."⁴³ Under Kennan's direction, the office of Special Projects, later renamed the OPC, was formed under the CIA and granted new measures of authority to the organization.

Along with Kennan, Allen Dulles pushed for a CIA-led counter-Soviet strategy. Dulles was an infamous spy in the OSS during World War II and eventually was named director of central intelligence during the Cold War. Dulles was also well connected to both the executive and the State Department. His brother, John Foster Dulles would be

⁴² Rudgers, "The Origins of Covert Action", 253.

⁴³ Rudgers, "The Origins of Covert Action", 254.

Secretary of State under Eisenhower, and both of the Dulles' had close proximity to both Truman and Eisenhower themselves. Despite his ties to the presidents and other departments, Allen Dulles still pushed for an expansion of covert authority for the CIA. In fact, Dulles became synonymous with psychological warfare and covert operations and was viewed as a key protagonist in the Cold War CIA.⁴⁴

These two men who pushed for increased CIA authority in the early Cold War both had, according to bureaucratic theory, reason to discourage this shift in the American intelligence bureaucracy. Leading the nation's covert operations meant an increase in budget, an increase in influence, and an increase in certainty that the other departments were vying for. The political climate transitioning into the Cold War was especially tense with inter-bureaucratic competition over control of intelligence operations. Naturally, CIA leadership pushed for increased autonomy and power, but Kennan and Dulles' support reveals a deeper explanation for the agency's operational control. Effectively fighting the enemy was more important to them than protecting their departments' interests, budget, and influence. Kennan worked for the State Department, but supported the bolstering of a bureaucratic rival in the CIA. In Dulles' case, he passed up the interests of his brother's department and the Eisenhower Administration in the name of national security. From this, one can see that the evolution of the CIA was not only shaped by an organizational desire, but a national desire to rise to the threat immediately facing the country.

Covert Action and Soviet Threat Environment

⁴⁴ Bevan Sewell, "The Pragmatic Face of the Covert Idealist: The Role of Allen Dulles in US Policy Discussions on Latin America, 1953-61.", *Intelligence & National Security* 26 (2011): 270.

The question that arises from the legislative and bureaucratic history of the CIA is what caused the agency to emphasize its covert mission? The operations branch and OPC were given enlarged and sole covert responsibility, yet the CIA was intended to be, primarily, an intelligence gathering and analysis organization. Even after gaining covert authority, the agency was cautious in conducting secret operations (SO). It was believed that Congress was primarily interested in an intelligence analysis role for the CIA, and therefore, SO should not be undertaken without congressional approval.⁴⁵ Thus, factors beyond mere legislative permission or tasking to conduct psychological and political warfare contributed to the organization's "mission creep." The expansion of the operational branch was due to a necessity in countering the Soviet threat and the spread of communism. NSC 10/2, which authorized covert warfare, was formulated to support forces combating communism in Soviet-dominated Europe. The OPC was formally known as America's first peacetime covert organization, but "no one in Washington, including the president, thought 1948 was peacetime."⁴⁶

In an expansion of NSC 10/2, the National Security Council produced NSC 10/5 in 1951 whose sole purpose was to extend the OPC and "place the maximum strain on the Soviet structure of power" in order to reduce the threat on American security.⁴⁷ Covert action was seen as a highly effective way to counter widespread psychological attacks by the Soviets. The National Security Council and Truman Administration viewed USSR

⁴⁵ Rudgers, "The Origins of Covert Action", 255.

⁴⁶ Rudgers, "The Origins of Covert Action", 257.

⁴⁷ Rudgers, "The Origins of Covert Action", 257.

and Kremlin activity as a vicious attempt to discredit and defeat the aims and activities of the United States.⁴⁸ American covert operations were an imitation of Soviet secret operations. Moreover, as both nations had nuclear capabilities, covert action enabled the government to combat the USSR without direct and dangerous military engagement. Covert action in this sense was a form of deterrence.

Soviet Intelligence and CIA Imitation

While Josef Stalin had little interest in rapprochement with Great Britain or the United States, the leader did operate under the acceptance of a post-war bipolar system in which the great powers could act freely within their respective spheres of influence. This mindset did not promise a close relationship, but it did ensure conflict prevention. Yet even with the lack of animosity, Maxim Litvinov, Stalin's Deputy Foreign Minister publicly expressed that Stalin was prone to misconceptions of the West. Stalin's insecurities about American and British intentions led the Soviet leader to bolster espionage and intelligence gathering against the two nations.

With certain tensions still remaining over occupation zones, satellite states, and UN trusteeships, Stalin became increasingly skeptical of the United States. Compounding this distrust, intelligence was largely tailored to Stalin's standing views or completely withheld, if feared it would be unacceptable to the leaders. Sources and intelligence officers were incentivized to shape intelligence by the fear of being purged from government service.⁴⁹ The replacement of Litvinov, who represented Western ties and

⁴⁸ Rudgers, "The Origins of Covert Action", 252.

⁴⁹ Raymond L. Garthoff, *Soviet Leaders and Intelligence: Assessing the American Adversary during the Cold War* (Georgetown University Press, 2015), 5.

communication in the Kremlin, as Deputy Foreign Minister, ended hopes of collaborative policy between the USSR and United States.

By 1947, the Soviets had developed a harsh foreign policy against the West and were increasing their military capabilities, justifying these actions with “diplomatic and other analyses consistently [stressing] that America was preparing for a military confrontation.”⁵⁰The USSR’s immense intelligence organization, the KGB, already had hundreds of intelligence stations worldwide from which to draw intelligence and launch operations. The new generation of KGB officers received intensive training in espionage from “coding and cryptography to the use of psychological techniques.”⁵¹Much of Soviet covert action was aimed at Third World countries, which the Kremlin and KGB believed would win the Cold War. The belief of Soviet leadership held that by supporting colonies against imperialism the USSR would advance Communism and cripple the capitalists.⁵²Thus, the KGB undertook covert operations, in the form of espionage, funding, governmental support, and propaganda, in various regions ranging from Asia to the Middle East. The USSR may not have been successful in its Third World policy, but the activities shaped how the CIA fought the Cold War.⁵³The United States then, was acting under the structural realist theory of imitation which contends that states “conform

⁵⁰ Garthoff, *Soviet Leaders and Intelligence*, 11.

⁵¹ Jefferson Adams, *The Making of the Contemporary World: Strategic Intelligence in the Cold War and Beyond* (Routledge, 2014),12.

⁵² Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The World Was Going Our Way: The KGB and the Battle for the Third World* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), 8.

⁵³ Andrew and Mitrokhin attribute the Soviet failure to prevail in the Third World to productive forces, culture and social consciousness, and the decline of the Soviet economy.

to common international practices” in order to survive in the anarchic international system.⁵⁴Further, Waltz ties imitation to balancing behavior where states must counter their opponents, making imitation a way of preserving the status quo.⁵⁵Under this framework, analyzing intelligence organizations’ use of propaganda, political and economic covert activity in the early Cold War leads to the conclusion that the CIA expanded its covert role in an attempt to imitate the KGB.

Propaganda

Propaganda was one of the most lasting features of the Cold War. The strong ideological component of the war led to the attempts, by both sides, to produce, “standardized images that became entrenched in society’s collective consciousness.”⁵⁶The sentiment in Kennan’s Long Telegram that no cooperation between the nations could be reached became integral to the Truman Administration. Thus, with the abandonment of rapprochement efforts, the American intelligence apparatus worked to expand its propaganda capabilities in order to compete with the Marxist-Soviet model. This ideological assumption was the motivation behind American propaganda efforts in restricted areas such as Ukraine and the Baltic states in the early Cold War.⁵⁷The propaganda war became a battle for ideological influence, both domestically, and in other regions. The Americans expanded propaganda in order to counter the Soviet ideological

⁵⁴ Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 166.

⁵⁵ Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 166.

⁵⁶ Bungart, Heitmann, and Wala, *Secret Intelligence in the Twentieth Century*, 66-80.

⁵⁷ Bungart, Heitmann, and Wala, *Secret Intelligence in the Twentieth Century*, 66-80.

foreign policy while the Soviets enlarged propaganda to counteract the increasingly successful American efforts.

The Soviet Union defined its external goals as, firstly, the strengthening of the USSR's continental position and secondly, aiding anti-American elements seeking independence.⁵⁸ Both of these objectives were well served through the use of white and black propaganda. The KGB's propaganda focused on undermining anti-Soviet accusations and turning sentiment against the United States. The Soviet Union believed its propaganda to be a defensive campaign against American and British attacks on the Red Army, its foreign policy, and Soviet domestic affairs. Thus, in the early stages of the Cold War, the Soviet Union spent a portion of its propaganda efforts towards disseminating depictions of a "peace-loving" USSR. This task was relatively easy as the attitude in the Third World and Eastern Europe was anti-imperialist.

Propaganda efforts extended into anti-capitalist and anti-Western campaigns, as well.⁵⁹ For example, in Iran during the early 1950s, the KGB fostered the belief that the CIA was engaging in threatening activity behind the scenes. The Shah, who held on to power due to CIA efforts, even "suspected the Agency of plotting against him."⁶⁰ In 1958, the Soviet intelligence agency went as far as fabricating and forging a letter from Secretary of State, John Dulles, to the ambassador in Tehran, "belittling the Shah's ability

⁵⁸ Andrew and Mitrokhin, *The World Was Going Our Way*, 89.

⁵⁹ V. Pechatnov, "Exercise in Frustration: Soviet Foreign Propaganda in the Early Cold War, 1945-47", *Cold War History* 1 (2001): 4.

⁶⁰ Andrew and Mitrokhin, *The World Was Going Our Way*, 170.

and implying that the United State was plotting his overthrow.”⁶¹ Soviet propaganda strained American relations abroad, thereby reducing the fear of regimes sympathizing with the Soviet Union. It also set the stage for an increase in counter-propaganda by the United States. The success of Soviet propaganda in these regions undermined American containment policy that required amiable foreign relations. The nation had to counter these operations to ensure security and enforce foreign policy.

While the American security apparatus had World War II roots in Iran, its presence remained relatively weak. The covert operation in this area was called TPBEDAMN and was established to carry out propaganda in response to the Soviets.⁶² As Soviet interest in peripheral regimes expanded, so did the CIA’s. By 1953, the CIA increased the TPBEDAMN operation’s budget to \$1 million per year which included salaries for approximately 130 subagents and payments to newspaper editors and publishers.⁶³ The activities carried out included written material describing “poor living conditions that prevailed in the Soviet Union, and Soviet domination over Eastern Europe” and extolling the benefits of Western aid.⁶⁴ Thus, the CIA was imitating the same strategies as its Soviet counterparts: discrediting the enemy and preserving national self-image.

⁶¹ Andrew and Mitrokhin, *The World Was Going Our Way*, 170.

⁶² Mark J. Gasiorowski, “The CIA’s TPBEDAMN Operation and the 1953 Coup in Iran”, *Journal of Cold War Studies* 15 (2013): 11.

⁶³ Gasiorowski, “The CIA’s TPBEDAMN Operation”, 11.

⁶⁴ Gasiorowski, “The CIA’s TPBEDAMN Operation”, 11.

Soviet propaganda was not limited to the Middle East, but was carried out in Asian nations like Japan, as well. In 1960, Communist groups in Japan organized against the ratification of a revised security treaty. Riots and anti-American incidents broke out throughout Tokyo, with the KGB claiming credit. Following these events, President Eisenhower had to cancel a visit because his personal safety could not be ensured.⁶⁵The KGB fortified Communist parties through the spread and support of Marxist ideology. In doing so, the USSR accomplished spreading negative sentiment towards the United States and securing Moscow's continental and power position. The United States from the late 1950s forward, however, were leading propaganda campaigns in Japan along the lines of PSB d-27.⁶⁶The operation was broadly guided by the goals of conveying Soviet hostility and ensuring the temporary nature of the security treaty.⁶⁷The propaganda efforts employed by the United States in Japan were explicitly designed to counter Soviet presence and actions. The increased American covert effort was prompted by the USSR's activity. Once again, imitation played a large role in the covert function of the CIA.

From the beginning the United States was aware that the Kremlin had an organization whose purpose was to maximize Soviet strength and weaken that of the Americans.⁶⁸ The American government knew it needed to develop capabilities to

⁶⁵ Andrew and Mitrokhin, *The World Was Going Our Way*, 297.

⁶⁶ A paper developed by the Psychological Strategy Board which outlined the psychological strategy in Japan. It called for capitalizing propagandistically on developments to benefit Japan.

⁶⁷ Aaron Forsberg, *America and the Japanese Miracle: the Cold War context of Japan's postwar economic revival, 1950-1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 48.

⁶⁸ Kristian Gustafson, "Early Stages in the Evolution of Covert Action in the United States, 1951-1961", *Public Policy and Administration* 28 (2012): 148.

retaliate in the same way. In 1948, “an early success of the CIA in preventing the Communists from taking over the government of Italy” indicated that American propaganda and covert action could rival the Soviets.⁶⁹ Propaganda efforts in other regions soon gained funding and prominence and countered the Communist opponent well. While the USSR enjoyed similar successes throughout the era, the United States responded to their activity by imitating, and in some cases, bettering their practices. The need to counter Soviet propaganda opened the door to expansive US covert action in the name of National Security.

Political and Economic Covert Action

The Cold War, as much as it was an ideological battle, was a competition over the balance of power. The regime type, leadership, and alliances of peripheral states were viewed by both great powers as the decisive factor in the conflict’s overall outcome. Some schools of thought depict Soviet leaders in the Cold War as following a predetermined expansionist foreign policy. Others argue that Soviet policy was a response to American projection of power in Europe.⁷⁰ Either interpretation acknowledges the importance placed on gaining allegiance from and giving support to lesser powers of the time. Thus, the Cold War saw great amounts of money, arms, military, and political support funneled to European, Asian, and Latin American states. The hopes of political and economic covert action were in some instances to support

⁶⁹ Gustafson, “Early Stages in the Evolution of Covert Action”, 148.

⁷⁰ Caroline Kennedy-Pipe, *Stalin’s Cold War: Soviet Strategies in Europe, 1943 to 1956* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1995), 1-2.

leaders in place who sympathized with their great-power sponsors. In other cases, the aim was to support nonstate actors, insurgents, or marginalized political parties in actions against the current regime. The Soviets referred to these covert actions as active measures. This covert strategy largely paralleled that of the Soviet Union's overall foreign policy which, from the beginning of the Cold War, believed the defeat of the United States would come from the Third World. The CIA, in large part, reacted to this strategy and therefore imitated the actions of the USSR.

While Stalin believed in the importance of the Third World and the spread of Communism, Nikita Khrushchev was the leader to deepen investments into liberation movements and foreign economies. Oleg Kalugin, a former KGB general, stated that the active measures campaign “did not discriminate on the basis of race, creed, or color [sic]: we went after everybody.” The goal was simply to cause as much trouble as possible for the United States.⁷¹ Notably, the Castro regime received resources from the Soviets. The USSR had an interest in seeing the pro-American Fulgencio Batista regime in Cuba replaced. In 1948, the Kremlin finally supplied a limited number of arms to the Castro guerrillas' anti-Batista movement.⁷² After Castro took power in 1959, Cuban-Soviet relations continued to grow and Khrushchev sent KGB officers to Cuba to train Cuban intelligence.⁷³ The covert significance of this relationship for the Soviet Union was the procurement of a “bridgehead” in the Western Hemisphere. Thus, in supporting Castro's

⁷¹ Brian Stewart and Samantha Newberry, *Why Spy?: On the Art of Intelligence* (Hurst, 2015), 154.

⁷² Andrew and Mitrokhin, *The World Was Going Our Way*, 33.

⁷³ Andrew and Mitrokhin, *The World Was Going Our Way*, 39.

guerrilla movement and later his regime, the USSR was promoting Communism in Latin America and gaining advantageous positioning against the United States. Many more instances during the Cold War of the KGB promoting Soviet interests abroad through resourcing and support can be pointed to. In the 1960s, the KGB “conceived a remarkable scheme to support a Kurdish rebellion in northern Iraq.” As well during this time, it was the opinion of the USSR’s Middle Eastern experts that Soviet training and arms had transformed the Egyptian military force. Khrushchev and the KGB Chairman Aleksandr Shelepin envisaged the exploitation of “liberal movements as the basis of a forward policy in the Third World” and ultimately, Soviet power.⁷⁴

American foreign strategy was strikingly similar to the Soviet. Covert operations were undertaken to support democratic regimes or rebel groups. By the early 1950s in a concerted effort to increase covert political activity, the CIA made arrangements with tribal leaders in Iran where the officers “established secret caches of weapons, ammunition, gold, and other supplies for use by Qashqai tribesmen and perhaps other guerrilla forces in the event of war.”⁷⁵ Through these arrangements and efforts, the CIA built up a sizeable intelligence and contact network in Iran. These efforts were aimed at weakening the Soviet Union and its allies. As well, the covert political action allowed the CIA to organize the coup against Mosaddeq. The Agency organized demonstrations, mobilized leaders, and bought the votes of members of Iranian parliament to dismiss

⁷⁴ Andrew and Mitrokhin, *The World Was Going Our Way*, 150.

⁷⁵ Gasiorowski, “The CIA’s TPBEDAMN Operation”, 9.

Mosaddeq.⁷⁶ Despite the CIA's covert dominance over the USSR in Iran during the decade, the aggressive action was important for Cold War security purposes. The Middle East was an area of anti-imperialist and anti-Western sentiment and therefore was very susceptible to the ideological charges of the Soviets.

While the two acts of covert political action are not cause and effect, it still inherently shows imitation by the CIA. Firstly, because the American agency was still finding its footing, covert operations were being established in Europe, Asia, and Latin America. The Soviets, on the other hand, were able to utilize existing KGB networks of Comintern in other regions with minimal reorganization and rebuilding. This gave the Soviets an advantage in initiating operations before the CIA had the groundwork to do so. Thus, when the CIA did undertake covert operations, it was often responsive rather than initiative. Secondly, the ideological framework behind the Cold War and the great powers' strategy led to an imitative CIA. The Soviet's foreign policy pushed the expansion of Communism. The United States based their foreign policy on documents like NSC 68 and the Long Telegram which called for containment. Without the active spreading of Communism by the USSR, the increase of American covert action might not have progressed as quickly. The final indicator of CIA imitation was the way the Soviets and Americans viewed the success of the other state's covert operations. The Soviets knew of the problems that riddled the KGB, but saw the achievements of the Americans' propaganda and covert operations. This prompted reorganization and revamping of their

⁷⁶ Gasiorowski, "The CIA's TPBEDAMN Operation", 17.

intelligence service.⁷⁷ Likewise, the Americans saw the successful covert tactics of the Soviets and transitioned into a largely covert agency to fill the necessary roles. Each saw success in the other and worked to emulate it. Mearsheimer argues that states imitate in an act of self-preservation, which the United States and USSR did in a time of looming threats and large uncertainty.⁷⁸

Conclusions

The escalation of U.S-Soviet tensions and America's entrance into the Cold War came almost immediately after the formation of the CIA. The fledgling organization was pushed into a battle with a seasoned intelligence apparatus that was already engaging in global covert operations. The political climate surrounding the agency's beginnings left its position in the intelligence bureaucracy tentative. The CIA was designed to be weak, to rely on the generosity of the departmental intelligence branches, and to operate on very vague enumerated powers. Despite the elastic clauses in the agency's legislative framework, its entrance into expansive covert action is not easily explainable.

According to bureaucratic theory, the CIA was looking to expand its funding, influence, and security by conducting clandestine activity during the early Cold War period. Its behavior was driven by competition within the intelligence bureaucracy where it sought to fill a unique role. Covert action, however, was not a unique role, as the military departments and their respective intelligence agencies had clandestine capabilities along with the authorization to use them. As well, after NSC 10/2 and the

⁷⁷ Pechatnov, "Exercise in Frustration", 7.

⁷⁸ Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 166.

passage of the National Security Act, the agency enjoyed an increased budget and increased freedom; however, both legislative victories came from a sense of urgency to counter the imposing Soviet threat. In December of 1947, the president authorized NSC-4, which instructed the CIA to “conduct, within the limit of available funds, covert psychological operations designed to counteract Soviet and Soviet-inspired activities.”⁷⁹ As the Soviet threat continued to rise, the administration continued to expand upon the CIA’s “blank check” for covert operations.

Additionally, some of the main proponents of charging the CIA with a covert function were not attached to the agency. George Kennan, author of NSC 10/2, was a long-time State Department employee. At the time, the State Department, FBI, and war departments all maintained separate intelligence services, even after the formation of the CIA. Thus, encouraging the growth of one meant losses to the others.

If one accepts an explanation based on organizational culture, the CIA conducted covert action in the Cold War because it aligned with the norms, procedures, and finest hour lessons of the OSS in World War II. Yet history tells us that despite the glamour of the OSS’s clandestine activity, the organization’s true might came from the R&A. The Cold War organization marked by the importance and efficacy of covert operations is countercultural. Further, the only remaining division of the OSS at the time were the analysts who were transferred to the CIA after the organization was dissolved. The persisting norms would have come from the analytical branch, but the CIA was created to do a new function within the intelligence apparatus: to synthesize information and

⁷⁹ Immerman, *The Hidden Hand*, 21.

produce actionable intelligence reports. Thus, even with the presence of employees from the original OSS, the organization's culture looked different, and relied upon a new set of norms.

After World War II, as shown by the disbanding of the OSS, many Americans questioned the need for a peacetime intelligence agency. After the Cold War, questions about the need for intelligence capabilities arose again. This period resulted in reducing personnel, restructuring within the intelligence community, and a focus on new missions.⁸⁰ After the numerous successes the CIA and intelligence bureaucracy won during the Cold War, why were there calls for downsizing the organization? The answer lies in the reasoning for the Agency's expansion, in the first place. The CIA was able to quickly and effectively stretch the legislative framework that legalized covert action because of the threat environment. Government and military leaders were able to rally around the expansion of the covert role because national security was on the line. Thus, the precedent for the future of the CIA had been set: when a threat arises that requires creative or boundary-pushing action, the Agency can and will counter it through secret operations.

CHAPTER FOUR

The War on Terror

⁸⁰ McNeil, "The Evolution of the U.S. Intelligence Community", 38.

Leading up to the 9/11 attacks and the War on Terror, global terrorism was beginning to command the attention of the CIA. In 1986, the agency established the Counterterrorism Center (CTC) to confront this threat to national security. When George Tenet was named director of central intelligence, he was convinced that global terrorism was the gravest threat facing the world. Tenet immediately began shaping the CIA. Morale and funding increased, and rebuilding of the Directorate of Operation's clandestine services became high priority. After terrorists bombed the US embassies in Nairobi, Kenya, and Tanzania, Osama bin Laden, the Taliban, and al-Qaeda became the main concern of the CIA. The CTC, however, assessed the Taliban to be no less dangerous than al-Qaeda and "pursuing both targets placed terrific stresses on the CIA's resources."⁸¹ After President George H.W. Bush took office, the administration considered Clinton's obsession with bin Laden, al-Qaeda, and the Taliban to be misguided in respect to the threat Saddam Hussein's Iraq posed. Tenet continued to impress the threat of al-Qaeda upon the administration.

American sentiment after 9/11 mirrored that of the early Cold War mindset. American leadership and the public considered Al-Qaeda the gravest threat facing the nation and the non-Muslim world. Reminiscent of Soviet anti-capitalist sentiment and aggressive foreign policy in the Cold War, the United States was again the target of anti-Western threats. In both crises, there was a clear enemy and public willingness to counter the threat by necessary means. In 1947-1949, the danger was a nuclear Soviet Union with expansionist ideology and goals. In 2001, the threat was al-Qaeda and the "new Taliban,"

⁸¹ Immerman, *The Hidden Hand*, 163.

organizations committed to establishing a global caliphate. Al-Qaeda sought to push the United States and the apostate leaders it supported out of the Middle East. Al-Qaeda clearly and publicly stated its intention to wage war against and attack the United States.⁸²Beyond the explicit language, the terrorist organization began perpetrating direct attacks on the United States and its allies, such as the assault on the USS Cole in October 2000 or the US Embassy attacks in Tanzania and Kenya in August of 1998. After the 9/11 attacks, the American government began a wide-scale restructuring of political and military strategy to counter the emerging 21st-century danger.

While there were similarities between the Soviet and Al Qaeda threats, there were also important differences. Unlike the state threats of the previous century, Al-Qaeda was a global terrorist organization with no representative nation state and no geopolitical borders. Historical and cultural ties connected Al-Qaeda to parts of the international Muslim population and it had deep roots in Afghanistan's complex society.⁸³This connectivity married with the organization's sophisticated technology made it agile, adaptable, and global. In the words of United States Army General Stanley McChrystal, "Islamist insurgents and terrorists are fundamentally different from any enemy the United States has previously known or faced."⁸⁴

This chapter begins with a discussion of the development of the al-Qaeda threat leading up to and following 9/11. The explanation of the organization's origins helps to

⁸² Michael Morell, *The Great War of Our Time* (New York: Hachette Book Group, 2015), 14.

⁸³ Stanley A. McChrystal, "Becoming the Enemy", *Foreign Policy* 185 (2011): 67.

⁸⁴ McChrystal, "Becoming the Enemy", 67.

connect the group's history to its goals, structure, and methodology. Next, the chapter outlines the strategy of al-Qaeda against its enemy, the West and the United States. The strategy of the terrorist organization is used as a point of reference for the evolution of the CIA and its operations in response to this new threat. Finally, the concluding remarks show the theoretical implications of the CIA's expansive covert action campaigns during the War on Terror.

The al-Qaeda Threat

With the end of the Cold War, the international threat transformed from dyadic state conflict to a battle against stateless terrorism. The CIA conducted its Cold War era intelligence battle against a great power with an extensive intelligence apparatus culminating in the highly effective KGB. The Soviet Union possessed a fully functioning government, a seasoned national security structure, and conventional military, all centralized within national borders. Al Qaeda, in 1984, had a network of offices in thirty-five countries and thirty offices alone in US cities.⁸⁵ These offices called the Maktab al Khidmat (MAK, or Afghan Service Bureau) "disseminated propaganda, raised funds, and recruited new members."⁸⁶ MAK's goal was to sustain and support the anti-Soviet Afghan Jihad against the Soviet Union and its ally in Afghanistan. After the war ended, Abdullah Azzam, a mujahedeen himself and considered one of the founders of al-Qaeda, wanted to refocus the fighters towards safeguarding Middle Eastern security. Azzam, the spiritual leader of international Islamists of the time, and mentor of Osama bin Laden,

⁸⁵ Rohan Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaeda: Global Network of Terror* (Columbia University Press, 2002): 4.

⁸⁶ Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaeda*, 4.

created a set of training guidelines in al-Qaeda's founding document which taught pan-Islamic ideology. From this, Osama bin Ladin and al-Qaeda built a worldwide organization.⁸⁷ Essentially, Azzam's legacy was the "establishment of an infrastructure for the recruitment of volunteers"⁸⁸ in the continued fight for Afghanistan. Azzam's fight was nationalistic, though, and following his assassination in 1989, al-Qaeda was free to develop a global agenda.⁸⁹

As the mujahidin returned to their home countries after defeating the "evil empire," they began to seek radical social and political change elsewhere. Often they did so through inciting or escalating violent campaigns. Many governments imprisoned, exiled, and denied entry to these religious warriors. MAK offered a haven and place to go. Around 1989, "MAK's socio-economic, political and military infrastructure had steadfastly begun evolving into Al Qaeda" and it was funneling its resources to Islamic guerrillas involved in regional conflicts.⁹⁰ Al Qaeda wanted to extend the success won against the communists to other conflict areas around the world. Azzam wanted to reconquer the Muslim world that had been lost to infidels.⁹¹ The organization's willingness to intervene and aid these radical campaigns was connected to its ideology that "Islamic governments have never been and will never be, established through

⁸⁷ Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaeda*, 4.

⁸⁸ Christina Hellmich, *Rebels : Al-Qaeda : From Global Network to Local Franchise* (London: Zed Books, 2011): 32.

⁸⁹ Michael W. S. Ryan, *Decoding Al-Qaeda's Strategy: The Deep Battle Against America* (Columbia University Press, 2013): 53.

⁹⁰ Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaeda*, 5.

⁹¹ Hellmich, *Rebels: Al-Qaeda*, 37.

peaceful solutions and cooperative councils. They are established as they [always] have been by pen and gun by word and bullet by tongue and teeth.”⁹² Al-Qaeda allied with multiple Islamist terrorist groups to ensure success in the ongoing regional conflicts. They grew their network and began expanding training bases beyond Afghanistan and into Sudan, Yemen, Chechnya, Tajikistan, Somalia, and the Philippines.⁹³ The structure of the organization at the time was abnormal as “the constituent parts were far more powerful than the center” meaning the center’s predominant role was more ideological than active.⁹⁴

There are two theories that evolved from the unknown structure of al Qaeda. The first argues that al Qaeda began with a highly organized and tight-knit structure. Within the organization there was clear division of labor among its different operations and known points of entry. Others hold that the initial structure was much less clear, with a loose network of members from various Islamist groups. The terrorist organization then profited from the ambiguity by touting its seemingly powerful and organized structure, causing fear among governments.⁹⁵ According to the 9/11 Commission Report, al Qaeda’s “structure included as its operating arms an intelligence component, a military committee, a financial committee, a political committee, and a committee in charge of

⁹² Hellmich, *Rebels: Al-Qaeda*, 37.

⁹³ Hellmich, *Rebels: Al-Qaeda*, 37.

⁹⁴ Kevin McGrath, *Confronting Al-Qaeda: New Strategies to Combat Terrorism* (New York: Naval Institution Press, 2011): 33.

⁹⁵ Hellmich, *Rebels: Al-Qaeda*, 28.

media affairs and propaganda.”⁹⁶ Thus, the official United States perspective resembled more closely the doctrine of the first school of thought, that al Qaeda was a highly effective and structured network.

al Qaeda, however, is best described as “neither a single group nor a coalition of groups,” but rather a core base in Afghanistan with international terrorist cells, certain Islamist political parties, and other independent, but still cooperating terrorist organizations.⁹⁷

One of the primary difficulties the United States faced in countering Al Qaeda was its unclear structure. When the United States strategists began to create a counter strategy, they began by mapping out a hierarchical organization with traditional military tiers and rows. However, in Al Qaeda decisions were much more lateral and decentralized. Al Qaeda exchanged communication, weapons, money, and propaganda fluidly across the organization allowing for deadly attacks with various tactics in diverse locations.⁹⁸ The organization was shifting, adaptable, and increasingly difficult to counter by traditional methods.

Not only did the government need to adjust to combatting a non-state actor, a much different fight than the twentieth century state conflicts, al Qaeda also had considerable capabilities and resources. According to Gunaratna, “unlike the rag-tag terrorist groups of the Cold War period, sophisticated terrorist groups of the post-Cold

⁹⁶ 9/11 Commission Report

⁹⁷ Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaeda*, 54.

⁹⁸ McChrystal, *Becoming the Enemy*, 68.

War period have developed intelligence wings comparable with government intelligence agencies.”⁹⁹While covert action can be thought of as a tool for national governments intelligence operations, organizations like terrorist groups are highly associated with this style of indirect, clandestine operations. The strategy of non-state groups often focuses on clandestine campaigns that reduce the likelihood of direct military engagement.

Al-Qaeda’s Strategy

Prior to 9/11, al-Qaeda’s strategy had a regional focus. Its hard-power capabilities were limited, thus limiting its ability to conduct larger campaigns. Rather than the central leadership organizing full-scale attacks, focus was placed on the small-scale attacks of the affiliated jihadist groups and independent cells. As well, national-level Islamist resistance movements were the priority before international enemies. In this way, al-Qaeda was combatting the “symptom” of United States’ proxies in a United States-controlled international system, instead of “the root disease, U.S. power and influence.”¹⁰⁰

Throughout the 1990s, Al Qaeda’s leadership sought to refocus its efforts on the global jihad against the United States. Various attacks took place throughout the decade: on the CIA, American embassies, the World Trade Center, and the USS Cole, culminating in the 9/11 attacks.¹⁰¹

After 9/11, al-Qaeda divided into three distinct parts: the leadership, the affiliates or franchises, and the clandestine cells and individual terrorists. The leadership served as

⁹⁹ McChrystal, *Becoming the Enemy*, 78.

¹⁰⁰ McGrath, *Confronting Al-Qaeda*, 33.

¹⁰¹ McGrath, *Confronting Al-Qaeda*, 34.

the ideological head, spreading guidance and propaganda, and the affiliates fought regional enemies in guerrilla warfare campaigns.¹⁰² However, the leadership had to reevaluate their jihadist strategy after they were caught off guard by the ferocity and effectiveness of the United States response to 9/11. Initially, success seemed to lie in instigating direct military engagement with the U.S. in Afghanistan, the strategy that had been so successful against the Soviets. But the American success in targeting the Taliban and attacking al-Qaeda was disastrous for the terrorist organization.¹⁰³ Guerrilla tactics became the centerpiece of military action against the United States. Small, surprise attacks in various locations to exhaust the enemy were preferred to a larger war that Al Qaeda could not win. The strategy recognized the need for both remote camps and an urban presence, citing Che Guevara, Carlos Marighella, and Mao on the necessity of both urban and rural campaigns to maintain a political and ideological superiority.¹⁰⁴

While hard-power and violent campaigns occupied an important part of the al-Qaeda organization, it was also heavily dependent on the diffusion of propaganda. The terrorist organization profited from the unifying power of fighting a common evil: the West and the United States. Thus when the group suffered military defeat, the anti-Western narrative that had identified America as the great enemy actually bolstered morale and mobilization.¹⁰⁵ Al-Qaeda has also extensively turned to technology to spread

¹⁰² Ryan, *Decoding Al-Qaeda's Strategy*, 52.

¹⁰³ Ryan, *Decoding Al-Qaeda's Strategy*, 57.

¹⁰⁴ Ryan, *Decoding Al-Qaeda's Strategy*, 90.

¹⁰⁵ Audrey K. Cronin, *Adelphi series: Ending Terrorism: Lessons for defeating al-Qaeda* (Florence: Routledge, 2008): 52.

its message and further its goals. The use of the internet to recruit, communicate, and increase operational security has proven extremely effective for the organization, especially as a largely decentralized group.¹⁰⁶

After 9/11, al-Qaeda began plotting attacks on an unprecedented scale.¹⁰⁷ From a tactical perspective, there had seemingly been a shift in al-Qaeda's method of attack, moving from large-scale 9/11 attacks to a "low-intensity urban warfare, as embodied in the 2005 London subway bombings."¹⁰⁸ By conducting a long-term, low-intensity urban campaign against Western forces in the region, casualties were still ensured, but on a more frequent and immediate basis.¹⁰⁹ Thus, the immediate post-9/11 period was marked by numerous, covert campaigns against the United States and its allies.

Many examples exist to support the progressive strategy of smaller, but more frequent attacks, one case being the Bali bombings in 2002 committed by an al-Qaeda linked extremist group Jemaah Islamiyah (JI). The attack consisted of multiple explosions, targeting crowded places known for the presence of foreign visitors. The organization has seen a shift towards "increasing reliance post-9/11 upon local cells to run low-cost yet effective operations."¹¹⁰ The small-scale operations, the decrease in funding, and the decentralization of the organization created a system of covert, frequent, and global bombing attacks. This method of combatting the West proved extremely

¹⁰⁶ McGrath, *Confronting Al-Qaeda*, 71.

¹⁰⁷ Morell, *The Great War of our Time*, 112.

¹⁰⁸ Morell, *The Great War of our Time*, 69.

¹⁰⁹ Morell, *The Great War of our Time*, 70.

¹¹⁰ Morell, *The Great War of our Time*, 80.

difficult to defend against as there was not a centralized leadership cohort on which to gather intelligence, gauge the threat, and appropriately respond. Conventional military tactics were not the best way to counter global terrorism.

The CIA and the American Response to 9/11

For the CIA, the 9/11 attacks caused a massive restructuring. One of the most vocal leaders in pushing al-Qaeda as the nation and world's largest threat was the CIA director, George Tenet. In 1998, he declared that the CIA and American intelligence were at war with the terrorist organization.¹¹¹ After the 9/11 attacks, the CIA conceded that its monitoring and detection programs and strategy were not adequate to contain the threat. The organization underwent a large-scale reorganization and refocusing.

According to former CIA Deputy Director Michael Morell, "9/11 would also take the Agency in some ways back to its roots—back to the paramilitary days of the Office of Strategic Services," using its new authority to conduct aggressive paramilitary operations.¹¹² The terrorist attacks stimulated the covert action budget and saw a reliance on CIA paramilitary operations in Afghanistan, ushering the country into an unprecedented era of covert dependence¹¹³. The number of officers working on terrorism increased exponentially. Responding to the pressure to adjust quickly and effectively,

¹¹¹ Immerman, *The Hidden Hand*, 172.

¹¹² Morell, *The Great War of Our Time*, 73.

¹¹³ Loch K. Johnson and James J. Wirtz, *Intelligence: A Secret World of Spies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015): 238.

Winston Wiley, the then Deputy Director for Intelligence, immediately transferred around 200 analysts to work on counterterrorism as the agency transitioned into war.¹¹⁴ The offensive and active approach mirrored the significant plotting and numerous attacks of al-Qaeda post 9/11 and began an extremely tireless period of combatting the terrorist organization.¹¹⁵

When the United States declared war on al-Qaeda in October of 2001, its objective was to target al-Qaeda's camps in Afghanistan, which at the time were under the protection of the Taliban. Within four days of the 9/11 attacks, the CIA under Tenet had readied a plan titled the "Blue Sky" memo, the Counterterrorism Center's strategy to dismantle al-Qaeda.¹¹⁶ The extremely detailed memo became the centerpiece of the American war plan. The plan called for a military force made up of a group of Afghan tribes called the Northern Alliance who had resisted Taliban rule.¹¹⁷ Within two weeks of the plan's approval, a team of CIA officers entered Afghanistan to organize local forces. US Special Forces eventually joined the operations officers, but CIA covert operations were the driving force underlying the American response to al-Qaeda.

A month after the attack, the agency had also readied Operation Enduring Freedom, a project then-President Bush instructed the CIA to head. Cofer Black, the head of the Counterterrorism Center promised the terrorists would have "flies walking across

¹¹⁴ Mudd, *Takedown*, 29.

¹¹⁵ Mudd, *Takedown*, 113.

¹¹⁶ the "Blue Sky" memo was initially created in October 2000 to systematically counter al-Qaeda after the terrorist attack on the USS *Cole*.

¹¹⁷ Morell, *The Great War of Our Time*, 64.

their eyeballs.”¹¹⁸ Alongside supporting the Northern Alliance, the CIA launched Predator drones on surveillance missions and sent out field agents to collect actionable intelligence, which would eventually guide American bombs to their intended targets. The agency also began implementing expansive covert operations throughout Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Iraq, and other Middle Eastern states.

The United States’ initial operational approach to the War on Terror resembled how its enemy was fighting. In the immediate post 9/11 period, al-Qaeda central was more of an ideological figurehead than a headquarters passing down attack orders. Its coopted other Islamist terrorist organizations under its name, supported guerrilla groups, and trained mass numbers of recruits. Al-Qaeda produced a network of people and organizations capable of initiating attacks without their direct involvement. American government, military, and intelligence leaders began to realize that “to defeat a networked enemy we had to become a network ourselves” essentially retaining traditional capabilities while developing “knowledge, speed, precision, and unity of effort that only a network could provide.”¹¹⁹

In the months following 9/11, the existing Counterterrorism Center (CTC) was expanded and transformed into the Office of Terrorism Analysis. This was more than a new name. The existing analytical office was significantly expanded, putting it on par with the nation’s largest threats. After the attacks, Director George Tenet increased its staff to 1,500 analysts who could handle around “2,500 classified electronic

¹¹⁸ Morell, *The Great War of Our Time*, 174.

¹¹⁹ McChrystal, *Becoming the Enemy*, 67.

communications a day, and it could produce 500 terrorist reports a month.”¹²⁰The Directorate of Intelligence (DI), the analytical arm of the CIA, also looked vastly different after 9/11. Within a matter of weeks, the agency underwent one of its largest analytical restructurings ever in response to the demands for intelligence reports on al-Qaeda and answers to questions from policymakers and CIA executives.

The intelligence threat posed by al-Qaeda was new to many of the analysts in the CTC and there was a constant push towards reducing the learning curve. Intelligence gathering began covering an unprecedented range of issues. Analysts monitored anywhere from al-Qaeda leadership, money flows, the development of global terrorist cells, and terrorist targets, to advancement towards weapons of mass destruction.¹²¹ With intelligence data flooding the agency, the culture shifted from emphasizing analytical thoroughness to quickness of disseminating information. In order to organize the amount of intelligence reporting coming into the CIA, the CTC developed the threat matrix. The matrix consisted of a chart that listed the threats themselves, intelligence sources, and follow-up from experts in the U.S. intelligence community. The CTC developed the matrix specifically to counter the al-Qaeda threat and it became an integral part of Washington’s war on terror.¹²²

The CTC also developed a subunit called Alec Station designed to concentrate solely on Osama bin Laden. The organization was originally founded in 1996 with an

¹²⁰ Stephen E. Atkins, “Counterterrorism Center”, in *The 9/11 Encyclopedia*, ed. Stephen E. Atkins (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2011).

¹²¹ Mudd, *Takedown*, 41.

¹²² Mudd, *Takedown*, 43.

intended expiration date of a few years, but operated for more than a decade as bin Laden declared war against the United States. Alec Station, a coordinated effort between the CIA and the FBI, was designed to merge all intelligence disciplines into a single office “including operations, analysis, signals intercepts, overhead photography, and covert action.”¹²³ Integrating operations, intelligence, and key players from both was key to acting efficiently, effectively, and flexibly. During the War on Terror, the various organizational boundaries and cultures were set aside in the name of national security. The cost of not developing successful joint task forces was captured information not “exploited, analyzed, or reacted to quickly enough—giving enemy targets time to flee.”¹²⁴

Alec Station was most known and respected for its analytical power. The unit represented a larger effort by the CIA to respond to the specific threat environment. The combination of analysis and tactical operations within the unit towards a goal of targeting a single leader veered from the agency’s existing procedure for handling national threats. The organization was evolving as bin Laden, al Qaeda, and global terrorism did.

Conclusion

Although the analytical and operational branches of the CIA diverge in culture and mission, the restructuring of DI is significant in the application of theory to the case. The creation and expansion of a separate counterterrorism office within a matter of weeks following 9/11 shows an agility and adaptability within the organization. According to

¹²³ Stephen E. Atkins, “Alec Station”, in *The 9/11 Encyclopedia*, ed. Stephen E. Atkins (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2011).

¹²⁴ McChrystal, *Becoming the Enemy*, 70.

organizational culture theory, this response to global terrorism is a large breach in cultural norms. The organization had been formed for more than 50 years at the time of 9/11 and was accustomed to fighting a singular superpower. The standard operating procedures, the internal organizational structure, and intelligence cycle should have been deeply entrenched and largely immovable in an agency driven by historical experiences and finest hour lessons. Yet, during the war on terror, the CIA adjusted to the new threat and did so quickly. Analysts with deep regional or issue-based expertise were moved to counterterrorism without extensive training. Intelligence reports asked and responded to a new series of questions and issues unfamiliar to the other analytical divisions. Meetings with other departments and policymakers increased in frequency. In short, the CIA evolved to fight the threat in front of it, rather than trying to use the existing structure because of its previous success. Ease, norms, and procedure were significantly less important in post 9/11 decisions than the goal of developing an infrastructure to fight a new form of warfare.

Similarly, throughout the fight against al-Qaeda, the CTC relied heavily on inter-organizational communication and expertise. Tactical threat information came from the CIA, National Security Agency, FBI, and Defense Department intelligence. The matrix developed by the CTC centralized information coming from any of the given agencies. The need to fight the enemy overshadowed any inter-bureaucratic race for autonomy, power, and resources.

The reorganization of the CIA after 9/11, if not due to an ingrained culture or to bureaucratic influences, can then be thought of as an imitation of enemy behavior.

Traditional warfare would not defeat a terrorist organization that operated across numerous countries, was integrated into the society, and utilized tactics ranging anywhere from rocket attacks to suicide bombings. The structure that was composed of individuals, cells, and allied terrorist groups allowed al-Qaeda to be extremely flexible and sustainable. This type of threat was difficult to counter with new personalities, new alliances, and new tactics continuously emerging.¹²⁵ The CIA was, in this way, more suited to fight this new enemy than the traditional military. High volumes of information were being gathered daily and required almost immediate analysis and intelligence reporting. It was this actionable intelligence that allowed for the CIA to begin extensive covert operations against al-Qaeda.

Covert operations from bombing campaigns to capturing and killing enemy leaders all became critical components of a successful counterterrorism strategy. The CIA began political, economic, and paramilitary covert campaigns. Operations officers worked to persuade foreign governments and leaders to be sympathetic with the United States and not engage the al-Qaeda network. The Northern Alliance fighters were directly supported by the CIA under Operation Enduring Freedom. The agency supplied them with intelligence and \$70 million in money and supplies. The CIA's Special Operations Group used unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) to eliminate enemy forces and also used these in assassination plots against al-Qaeda and Taliban leaders.¹²⁶ The United States shifted its strategy to one of indirect warfare, hitting the enemy with surprise attacks in

¹²⁵ McChrystal, *Becoming the Enemy*, 68.

¹²⁶ Johnson and Wirtz, *Intelligence*, 240-243.

order to cripple the organization as severely as possible. By March 2002, following the successful defeat of al-Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan, American bombers had dropped an estimated 700,000 pounds of ordinance in Tora Bora.¹²⁷ The strategy was not coincidentally similar to that of al-Qaeda's, but rather, as noted by Stanley McChrystal, commander of the Joint Special Operations Command in Iraq, "it takes a network to defeat a network."¹²⁸ The 9/11 attacks spurred a mindset of defeating the enemy by all means necessary. Thus, the implication of the CIA's behavior against al-Qaeda holds that expanding covert operations and imitating the terrorist network's shadow warfare were the necessary means towards American Security.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusions

In looking at the expansion of the CIA's operational branch since its formation in 1947, it is important to recognize the increase and development of covert capabilities. When the agency was first established, it was weak with an analytic bent and no standing within the intelligence bureaucracy. Former Deputy Director Ray Cline wrote, "The one thing that Army, Navy, State, and the FBI agreed on was that they did not want a strong central agency controlling their collection programs."¹²⁹ It seemed that the only

¹²⁷ Immerman, *The Hidden Hand*, 175.

¹²⁸ McChrystal, *Becoming the Enemy*, 69.

¹²⁹ Ray S. Cline, *The CIA under Reagan, Bush & Casey: the evolution of the agency from Roosevelt to Reagan* (Washington D.C.: Acropolis Books, 1981): 112.

organization fighting for a powerful centralized intelligence agency was the Central Intelligence Group, the CIA's predecessor, itself. When the CIA was written into law under the National Security Act of 1947, it was given no explicit authority to collect intelligence of its own or engage in covert operations.¹³⁰ The CIA's directive included two broad clauses that granted authority for "other functions and duties related to intelligence affecting the national security as the National Security Council may from time to time direct."¹³¹ Thus, because the legislation only designated a weak coordinating organization, the development of covert operations was a product of external factors and not agency design. Excluding agency design implies that the bureaucratic politics and interests that led to the formation of a powerless CIA are not sufficient explanations. Essentially, organizational culture, even from the agency's origins, does not sufficiently resolve the spike in covert action. The initial rise in covert capabilities can be attributed to presidential orders. Covert action first "flourished because presidents wanted it to."¹³² As early as 1947, Truman and the NSC were developing alternative ways of engaging communist powers in Eastern Europe. From the beginning of CIA history, presidential desire to protect the nation from a threat is inextricably linked to covert operations. The critical point, the point of change, in the CIA's evolution then corresponds with Truman's desire to counter the threat of the Soviet Union. This is not an isolated action: As threats rise, the president utilizes the tools at his disposal to increase certainty and security. As

¹³⁰ Zegart, *Flawed by Design*, 182.

¹³¹ Zegart, *Flawed by Design*, 182.

¹³² Zegart, *Flawed by Design*, 186.

the United States has fought two powers with extensive covert capabilities, the Soviet Union and the al-Qaeda network, the covert branch of the CIA has inevitably expanded.

At the start of the Cold War, there was obvious need for an intelligence organization that could both supply actionable intelligence and carry out extensive covert operations. The Soviet Union's KGB was active, seasoned and practicing expansive espionage, propaganda, and paramilitary campaigns. Both the Soviet Union and the United States recognized the threat of nuclear warfare and pursued indirect engagement of the enemy.

Bureaucratic Theory and the Early Cold War

What occurred within the CIA during the early-Cold War period was a shift in priority towards covert operations. Still, the development of the analytical branch carries weight in explaining the agency's overall behavior. According to bureaucratic theory, the agency would want to find a niche that reduced competition, as well as increase its budget, autonomy, and certainty. The agency, however, was already designed to be in a niche market with its coordinating role, different from that of departmental intelligence collection and analysis. The agency was met with such departmental resistance that the analytical branch began producing its own intelligence from its own sources. Essentially, the CIA entered the intelligence-producer market, counterintuitively increasing its bureaucratic competition in order to secure a position in the intelligence community.

As the analytical and covert branches are rather independent, it is necessary to apply the bureaucratic niche argument to the operational side as well. Similar to intelligence collection, the military departments all retained covert and paramilitary

capabilities of their own. Yet, in the fight against the Soviet Union, the CIA became the leading espionage and counter-espionage authority under NSC 10/2. By 1952, the covert office had almost 6,000 agents, spanned 47 countries, and had an annual budget \$82 million.¹³³ The difference in success between the analytical and covert branches must lie outside of agency design, outside of bureaucratic influence, leaving the explanation of CIA covert behavior to the actions of the enemy.

In the first days of the CIA, some of the key players who supported and fought for a strong covert organization did not even come from within the agency. George Kennan, a Foreign Service veteran in the State Department, and Allen Dulles, with stronger ties to the executive than the intelligence bureaucracy at the time of the CIA's formation, both advocated for a CIA-driven effort against the Soviet Union. Pushing for CIA influence was a zero sum game, an increase in resources and autonomy for the agency meant a decrease for the department's intelligence agency. The State Department, War and Navy Departments, and the FBI all would be affected by a strong CIA. Kennan and Dulles promoted covert operations in the CIA, not for the traditional bureaucratic reasons, but because it was in America's best interest during the early Cold War.

Budget, autonomy, and certainty do play a large role in bureaucratic theory's explanation of covert action. Yet, while these benefits all followed the success and growth of covert operations, it did not drive them. The agency began psychological activities in Eastern Europe years before the Office of Policy Coordination saw a budget of \$4.7 million, before it was charged with espionage operations, and before it became an integral

¹³³ Zegart, *Flawed By Design*, 189.

part of the national security apparatus.¹³⁴ In the beginning, “with budgetary and management authority vested in the Departments” the CIA was left powerless in conducting its mission.¹³⁵ It was after the agency was entrenched in covert operations that resources, influence, and security followed.

Bureaucratic Theory and the War on Terror

Following the 9/11 attacks, the CIA had reassessed, restructured, and was initiating operations in Afghanistan within the first couple of weeks. The agency was asked to lead the charge of the counter-terrorism strategy against al-Qaeda, but there was widespread interdepartmental and interagency collaboration. Much of the covert action conducted by the operations branch, from human intelligence to paramilitary campaigns, was aided by military Special Forces operators. While the CIA was asked to head the war plan against the Taliban and al-Qaeda, there was coordinated effort from the military. From the analytical standpoint, there was also widespread collaboration among the intelligence community. The Threat Matrix, created by the CIA to organize threat reporting, contained intelligence from all departments and was utilized in interdepartmental meetings. In the initial push against al-Qaeda after 9/11, there was less competition between the intelligence organizations and more collaboration. There was a pervasive sense of national unity in the months following the attacks.

Naturally, as the organization readied to fight the enemy, more funding was allocated to the terrorism center. The number of officers assigned to terrorism tripled,

¹³⁴ Zegart, *Flawed by Design*, 189.

¹³⁵ Zegart, *Flawed by Design*, 190.

while the budget increased more than that. The overall number of personnel and budget, however, were only slightly larger than in 1991, despite spikes after 9/11. The increase in funding and addition of analysts were essentially a significant increase in resources for the counterterrorism center, but not the agency as a whole. Procuring funding, specifically by competing for it against other departments, was not, in this case, a driver for covert action. Instead, the agency itself shifted to allocate resources towards the counterterrorism war plan.

As well, while the counterterrorism center grew after 9/11, there was a “cost to the Agency’s ability to be a global intelligence service.”¹³⁶ Analysts were transferred from other geopolitical offices to the CTC to aid in the war against the Taliban and al-Qaeda. Resources were also diverted to the CTC. The agency, according to bureaucratic theory, should have been wary about adopting a new role, or in this case, expanding a previously inconsequential one. The rise of the CTC and the increase in covert action were seemingly against the organizational interest of the CIA in general.

Organizational Culture and the Early Cold War

The early Cold War CIA, according to organizational culture theory, would look very similar to the OSS of World War II. While the OSS engaged in cloak-and-dagger type operations, it was most respected and known for its effective intelligence analysis. When Truman dissolved the organization World War II, the Research and Analysis

¹³⁶ Morell, *The Great War of our Time*, 73.

Branch was the only division transferred to a peacetime organization. When the CIA transitioned into fighting the Soviet Union, it was the intelligence and analysis offices that struggled while the covert offices flourished. The various departmental intelligence services withheld information causing the CIA to become an intelligence producer itself rather than an intelligence coordinator. This breach from mission caused duplicates in intelligence reporting, excessive volumes of papers reaching policy makers, and no coordinated analysis of the war.¹³⁷ Covert operations were superior to their analytical counterparts, thus breaking the culture and finest hour lessons of the OSS. Engaging in widespread covert operations from propaganda to paramilitary campaigns resisted the culture of its predecessor, from whom it should be modeling its action, according to organizational culture theory.

Organizational Culture and the War on Terror

During the early Cold War, the new CIA had a blank slate to form its structure and standard operating procedures. Certain leaders desired a replica of the OSS, others feared it would be a similar “rogue” organization. Yet in both cases, the agency had little historical precedent to shape its responses towards the Soviet Union. At the turn of the century, the agency was no longer a young organization. Entering the period of the 9/11 attacks, the CIA had fought the same super power for over 40 years, developing an entrenched series of norms and protocols. Within weeks after the attacks in 2001, the agency underwent massive restructuring. Hundreds of employees were transferred, new roles were created, new methods of analysis were developed. The agency adapted to the

¹³⁷ Morell, *The Great War of our Time*, 191.

threat in an immediate and agile manner. According to a theory that bases action on historical precedent and organizational procedure, this behavior was antithetical to its culture.

The CIA also realized that it was engaging in a type of warfare that it had not encountered before. The enemy shifted from a state actor to a global terrorist network that was elusive, unpredictable, and resilient. Traditional warfare methods were not considered a highly effective means of stopping terrorism. Thus, the agency had to shift procedure away from what it had known in either the Second World War or the Cold War. The enemy required new strategy.

Realism in the Early Cold War

The Soviet Union under Stalin was prone to misconceptions about the West, specifically England and the United States. Going into the Cold War, the USSR was already gathering intelligence and conducting espionage against the two nations. Stalin's skepticism towards the United States continued to grow and by 1947 he launched an aggressive anti-Western foreign policy. The KGB developed an extensive espionage network throughout the world, specifically in America. The Soviets believed that the Cold War would be won in the third world and began large-scale propaganda campaigns, funneled money to sympathetic states, and offered political support to communist regimes. Specifically, the Soviet Union focused its efforts on nationalist independence movements and communist revolutions. The success of the Soviet covert action was partly due to the long history of clandestine operations in the state. The KGB had roots dating back to the Bolshevik Revolution where it was created to suppress

counterrevolutionary movements. After its formation, the intelligence service remained under direct control of the Kremlin and constructed its mission around the interests of the Soviet leaders. Thus, the organization saw a push towards espionage, propaganda, and other covert behaviors that secured Stalin and the USSR's power and rule. The KGB was shaped to be a covert institution. Before the Cold War even began, Comintern had been formed to fight for world communism by covert means.

As America entered the fight against the Soviet Union, there was already an intelligence gap between the two states. An effort on the part of the CIA was required simply to match the existing operations and intelligence collection of the KGB. Much of the CIA's action in the Cold War was responsive rather than offensive. American response was therefore driven by the threat of the Soviet Union, and its clandestine behavior bore an unmistakable resemblance to the activities of the KGB. The Cold War intelligence strategy focused on propaganda as well as political and economic covert warfare. In the beginning of the conflict, the U.S. budget for propaganda expanded to approximately \$1 million per year, adding journalists and newspaper editors to the payroll. The United States was image building in the Eastern European states. As well, the agency supported democratic regimes and rebellions throughout Latin America, Asia, Europe, and the Middle East. The CIA funneled money, weapons, and support to nationalist movements against communist governments and to democratic governments to help stabilize their political position.

Both the Soviet Union and the United States viewed the Cold War as a race against the other in terms of nuclear capabilities and ideological influence. The

intelligence organizations were no different. Successful propaganda campaigns from the CIA spurred retaliatory efforts by the KGB. Successful mobilization of anti-Western nationalist movements by the KGB spurred political and economic covert warfare by the CIA. The two intelligence agencies acknowledged the effective tactics of the other and sought to emulate it with their own policy. The escalation effect drove the CIA to a level of covert capabilities and operations that might not have existed without the Soviet threat.

Realism in the War on Terror

The al-Qaeda terrorist network ushered the United States intelligence apparatus into a new era of warfare. The CIA's structures and procedures that were in place before the 9/11 attacks suited a traditional state enemy, like the Soviet Union. The global terrorist network proved to be a completely new threat. The network's structure was lateral, made up of individual cells and allied terrorist groups. The organization had powerful recruiting tools, internal funding, and was often assimilated into the societies. By nature, the organization was clandestine. Attacks incorporated an element of surprise, relied on intelligence for direction, and utilized covert economic, political, and paramilitary techniques. The range of tactics, members, and locations that al-Qaeda used raised a new set of questions for the CIA that it was only able to answer after restructuring.

The CIA elevated the influence of the CTC to that of the major geopolitical issues that held power within the agency. Analysts were transferred to the department and funding was increased. Special task forces like Alec Station were formed to pinpoint individuals. The agency proved itself to be agile and adaptable, responsive to its enemy.

Al-Qaeda operated the same way. When guerrilla campaigns were unsuccessful, the organization retreated, regrouped, and focused on its successful tactics. In order to engage an enemy that is highly flexible and resilient, it would be difficult to respond with immovable structure and procedure. The CIA realized that if it wanted to defeat a network, it must come become one itself.

The War on Terror also increased covert operations. Within two weeks of the 9/11 attacks, the CIA had agents on the ground to begin training local forces to fight al-Qaeda. Not unlike the terrorist training camps, the CIA equipped local forces with the ability to engage in combat themselves. The agency funded these resistance movements and sought support of neighboring governments. Small-scale, frequent bombing attacks became an integral part of the war strategy. The CIA's counterterrorism strategy resembled that of al-Qaeda's strategy. Both supported local and regional efforts, without directly engaging themselves and preferred regular, small attacks to direct combat. The American intelligence effort formed its response because of the enemy it was facing.

Implications

In both case studies, the political climate of the time, the bureaucratic tensions, the pursuit of resources, and the agency's culture were all subordinate to the threat environment and general national security interests. The agency proved to be more flexible than expected from an organization with a great deal to lose. In the Cold War, the future of the CIA in the intelligence apparatus was at stake. Before the War on Terror, public opinion was that the agency was uncontrollable and, after the 9/11 attacks, ineffective. National security trumped the agency's own interests.

As well, the CIA quickly responded to the learning curves that both enemies caused. With the Soviet Union, the agency was forced to raise its capabilities and operations to the level already achieved by the threat. With al-Qaeda, the agency had to develop a new strategy that could defeat an enemy not previously faced. Intelligence and operations both shaped their missions with respect to the enemy, rather than an offensive strategy.

The lessons learned from the CIA's involvement in two different wars show that covert operations will increase in tense threat environments and war time. Covert action will, to some degree, mirror the activity conducted by the enemy. Finally, the CIA, when given appropriate resources, has the ability to respond to a multitude of threats, even those previously unencountered by the agency.

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