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Why does the US government decide to utilize covert operations instead of public operations?

Abstract

The United States has been deeply involved in covert intervention for decades. It is also well known for getting involved in other countries and conducting public operations due to its vast military strength and size. Covert intervention is conducted behind-the-scenes of American leadership's doors, where decisions are made and political issues are discussed in great length. This paper will dive deeper into why the US government decides to conduct covert operations instead of public operations, what goes into that decision, and provide evidence for this question. It provides information and evidence that previous research has not covered, and will add value to the covert operations topic.

Introduction

Covert operations have been used for many years by different countries in order to conduct operations that are secret. There are many reasons for this. Some of these reasons include wanting an advantage on an enemy and keeping the operation out of the public eye. There has not been much research conducted regarding how the decision to conduct covert

operations rather than public operations gets made. This paper analyzes the research question: why does the US government decide to utilize covert operations instead of public operations? Understanding the answer to this question is crucial in order to get a better understanding of how US leadership works, and why covert operations is extremely important for countries like the US. The answer to this question, which I will address later in this paper, provides an insight and better understanding to the question at hand.

Importance of Research Question

Why My Question is Better than Others

This research question is important in regards to being able to understand why the US government decides to use covert operations. Since covert operations have been used for many years, there has been lots of research conducted in regards to the impact of covert operations. There has been some research that tackles the idea of why the US decides to use covert operations. For example, some previous research conducted shows that the US decides to conduct covert operations because it wants to have the ability to deny the operation occurred. It also shows that the US wants to be ambiguous and not have to answer questions in relation to covert operations. I think that previous research has not been able to come up with a complete, cohesive answer to why the US conducts covert operations. It may seem as though the answer to this question is obvious. However, this is not the case. There are many intricate details that need to be examined prior to coming up with the best answer to this question. My answer to this question is better and different from previous research because I'm arguing that the US decides to conduct covert operations due to negative political blowback. I am also arguing that this is the most important reason for covert intervention. This research will help broaden the horizons of

previous research that has been conducted in regards to covert operations and bring a new idea to the table. This research has broader implications that will positively impact covert operations and add to the knowledge of this topic as well.

Background

Historical Context

The United States has been actively involved in covert operations for many years. In compliance with the *Foreign Relations* of the United States statute to include in the *Foreign Relations* series comprehensive documentation on major foreign policy decisions and actions, the editors have sought to present essential documents regarding major covert actions and intelligence activities. (history.state.gov). The Truman administration's concern over Soviet "psychological warfare" prompted the new National Security Council to authorize, in NSC 4–A of December 1947, the launching of peacetime covert action operations. NSC 4–A made the Director of Central Intelligence responsible for psychological warfare, establishing at the same time the principle that covert action was an exclusively Executive Branch function (history.state.gov). NSC 10/2 directed CIA to conduct "covert" rather than merely "psychological" operations, defining them as all activities "which are conducted or sponsored by this Government against hostile foreign states or groups or in support of friendly foreign states or groups but which are so planned and executed that any US Government responsibility for them is not evident to unauthorized persons and that if uncovered the US Government can plausibly disclaim any responsibility for them. The type of clandestine activities enumerated under the new directive included: "propaganda; economic warfare; preventive direct action, including sabotage, demolition and evacuation measures; subversion against hostile states, including assistance to underground resistance

movements, guerrillas and refugee liberations [sic] groups, and support of indigenous anti-Communist elements in threatened countries of the free world. Such operations should not include armed conflict by recognized military forces, espionage, counter-espionage, and cover and deception for military operations. As the Truman administration ended, the CIA was near the peak of its independence and authority in the field of covert action. Although the CIA continued to seek and receive advice on specific projects from the NSC, the PSB, and the departmental representatives originally delegated to advise OPC, no group or officer outside of the DCI and the President himself had authority to order, approve, manage, or curtail operations (history.state.gov). President Kennedy also established a Special Group (Counter-Insurgency) on January 18, 1962, when he signed NSAM No. 124. The Special Group (CI), set up to coordinate counter-insurgency activities separate from the mechanism for implementing NSC 5412/2, was to confine itself to establishing broad policies aimed at preventing and resisting subversive insurgency and other forms of indirect aggression in friendly countries. (history.state.gov).

Covert action is one of many foreign policy tools used by policymakers to advance national interests. Used in select international efforts, covert action encompasses a broad range of activities outside the operations of traditional intelligence collection. Sanctioned by the White House and overseen by Congress, covert action can provide results and otherwise unavailable information (belfer center). According to National Security Act Sec. 503 (e), covert action is, "An activity or activities of the United States Government to influence political, economic, or military conditions abroad, where it is intended that the role of the United States Government will not be apparent or acknowledged publicly." Proper covert actions are undertaken because policymakers—*not the intelligence agencies*—believe that secret means are the best way to achieve a desired end or a specific policy goal (belfer center). Policymakers still use this foreign

policy tool today. For example, covert action was an important device for U.S. national security interests soon after 9/11, as CIA paramilitary groups, U.S. Special Forces and indigenous Northern Alliance forces in 2001-2002 removed the Taliban from power in Afghanistan (belfer center).

Literature Review

Current Gaps in Research in Regards to Covert Operations

There are a few articles that provide evidence for this research paper. One article, James G. Hershberg and Peter Kornbluh, "Brazil Marks 50th Anniversary of Military Coup," provides insight into the coup that happened in Brazil, which had US involvement. This article helps to show that previous presidents made decisions such as conducting coups and helping other countries overthrow their leaders with the intention of helping them covertly. There is information that provides evidence for previous research and that can be used for one aspect of my research. However, this article does not explore the answer to my research question. Another article, President John F. Kennedy, "Meetings: Tape 114/A50. Meeting on Brazil, Meeting on Vietnam, October 1963: 7-8," is a tape from a meeting with President Kennedy, where he openly denies a covert operation taking place. This tape is good evidence to help show how the US wants to be ambiguous and not answer any questions in relation to covert operations that are being conducted without the US public's knowledge. Another article, Ronald Reagan, "The President's News Conference," also shows how US leadership blatantly denies covert operations in a public setting, even when information about a covert operation that is occurring has been leaked and has become public knowledge. Also, an article by James P. Rowles, "U.S. Covert Operations Against Nicaragua and Their Legality under Conventional and Customary

International Law” discusses US covert involvement and how the US utilizes the deniability they are entitled to due to their operation being covert and not public. Another example is how “In his retirement President Truman denied any responsibility for "cloak and dagger operations" but it was during his Presidency that covert intelligence operations in support of foreign policy objectives was undertaken on an ever broadening scale” (Clintonwhitehouse). This example shows how a US leader used covert operations in order to have the deniability factor. One distinction between covert action and other overt activities, such as traditional diplomatic or military operations, is that U.S. officials could plausibly deny involvement in the activity. This "plausible deniability," however, is predicated upon the covert action remaining secret. Example: American involvement in the 1961 Bay of Pigs operation could not be kept secret once the results became public, so President Kennedy publicly admitted responsibility afterwards at a White House press conference (belfer center). All of the previous research conducted utilizes the ambiguity or the deniability factors, which don't address the bigger reason behind why the US decides to use covert operations.

As more research is explored, there will be more articles included in the literature review. However, previous research I have found does not explore more than the ambiguity and deniability the US has when it comes to the topic of covert intervention. Previous research does not fully address the reason why the US decides to conduct covert operations instead of public operations, which means that there is a gap in this research. It is imperative to fill this gap in order to create a deeper understanding of why the US decides to utilize covert operations. My research aims to fill this gap with an answer that is cohesive and informative.

Thesis

An Explanation of Why My Thesis is Important

My thesis for this paper is that the reason why the US decides to utilize covert operations instead of public operations is because of the fear of negative political blowback. This thesis is imperative to understanding why the US conducts covert operations instead of public operations. Previous research has not explored this answer and I will provide evidence and a strong argument as to why my thesis is a better answer that fills a gap in what previous research findings have found. I will explain my definition of political blowback and differentiate it from the current CIA definition that exists. I will then go into my case study analysis and provide evidence for why my argument is better than what previous research argues.

Research Design

Negative Blowback Definition

First, it's important to distinguish between the CIA's definition of blowback and my definition of political blowback. The CIA's definition of blowback is "a metaphor for the unintended consequences of the US government's international activities that have been kept secret from the American people" ("Blowback"). The definition of political blowback that is pertinent to this research is the negative political consequences that occur as a result of covert operations. Negative political consequences include how leadership decisions are impacted by the fear of negative political consequences from conducting a public operation. This shows that a US leader will decide to conduct a covert operation because of the fear of negative political consequences which means that their decision to go public changes to a covert operation in order to avoid these negative consequences. A leader is worried about negative political blowback because they are scared of things such as audience costs, perceptions of the public, perceptions

of leaders from other countries, legitimization, loss of power, strength, relationships and money. The decisions that a US leader makes in regards to their operations can affect their relationships with the public and other leadership as well. Nowadays, it is very hard to take back what is said and actions that have been conducted, so leaders have to be more careful about how they go about conducting operations. So, with social media and the ripple effect that occurs when a country takes an action, leaders are deciding to utilize covert operations instead of public operations which keeps them in a position that is more favorable for themselves and in the eyes of others. The relationship that US leaders have with their enemies, allies and the public is increasingly important due to globalization. Today, news can be spread extremely quickly and can be found at the touch of a button, which means that people can find out anything they want. This poses a challenge when a country wants to conduct an operation in one country, but if it's public, news will spread quickly, so many leaders decide to utilize the covert route in order to ensure that the operation stays as they need to know. Many times, covert operations don't become public even years after they have been conducted due to the influence they can have on the perception of the United States and the leader who authorized the covert operations. Many leaders decide to use covert operations when infiltrating an enemy's camp so that they can have an advantage. Utilizing a public operation and documenting casualties publicly would be bad for the US because it would give the public a negative attitude towards the US leader, enemies would band together and allies would be angry if regulations were disregarded. This falls under negative political blowback, which is my answer to the reasons why the US decides to utilize covert operations instead of public operations. The US usually decides to conduct an operation publicly to gain support, and when they know the outcome is favorable. The US won't use a

covert operation for the deniability and ambiguity factors because those factors do not provide a full, cohesive explanation as to why the US goes covert as my definition does.

Impacts of Negative Political Blowback

To further explain my definition, negative political consequences includes impacts on relationships with allies, enemies, and the public. So, in order to maintain these relationships, avoid conflict, and negative perceptions from the public, a US leader will decide to utilize a covert operation due to the fear of these relationships being negatively affected. A leader is worried about these negative political consequences due to the fact that they have an impact on audience costs, bilateral relationships, perceptions about the leader as well as perceptions of the nation on a global scale. There are more reasons why negative political consequences have an impact on a leader's decision to utilize covert intervention instead of public intervention, which will be considered. Covert action is a necessary—yet sometimes controversial—instrument of U.S. foreign policy. As the challenge of Soviet hegemony emerged as the principal threat to national security, the U.S. used covert action on a wide scale with the goal of combating the threat of worldwide Soviet domination (belfer center). One example of negative political blowback is US covert intervention in Nicaragua. There are articles on Nicaragua in 1983 that backup the thesis statement of this research paper. From the national archives, there is President Reagan's conference from November 1983, where he denies the occurrence of covert intervention in Nicaragua. When asked about the covert funding of 10,000 rebels, he says, "Well, I have told you, we have no military plans for intervention of any kind" (The President's News Conference). This statement from a previous US President, helps to show that the US will deny covert intervention that's occurring because of fear of negative political blowback. In this case, President Reagan denied the use of covert intervention because it would reflect negatively on

him and his administration, if word got out that they were funding a military coup against Nicaragua's government. This would also negatively impact the US's relations with Nicaragua and their relationships with their allies, who may not agree with the decision to fund rebels in the attempt to overthrow the leadership in Nicaragua. This shows how negative political blowback affects what US leadership shares with the public, because of fear of repercussions, and a change in perception of his leadership by the public, enemies, and allies as well.

The Case Study Method

In regards to the research design, this paper will utilize the case study method. It will look into the time period of the sixties and nineties, while also looking into the Democratic Republic of the Congo (where the current capital was formerly known as Zaire) and South America regions. Specifically, this paper will be looking into two case studies. The first one is US covert intervention in Brazil in 1964 and the second case study will be US covert intervention in Zaire in 1996. One of the articles from the national archive is in regards to the military coup that occurred in Brazil in 1964. Since Brazil is one of my case studies, this is a relevant article and provides evidence of US covert intervention to help the resistance conduct a military coup. While discussing how to dispose of Goulart, Brazil's leader, "Ambassador Gordon urged the President to prepare contingency plans for providing ammunition or fuel to pro-U.S. factions of the military if fighting broke out. 'I would not want us to close our minds to the possibility of some kind of discreet intervention,' Gordon told President Kennedy, 'which would help see the right side win'" ("Brazil Marks 50th Anniversary of Military Coup"). There was also a commander named Walters brought in "who eventually became the key covert actor in the preparations for the coup" ("Brazil Marks 50th Anniversary of Military Coup"). These pieces of evidence help prove that a covert operation occurred with the involvement of the US and that it

was secret to avoid negative political consequences. In order for the US to avoid negative political consequences, many times US leaders will choose to make a previously public operation covert, or conduct a covert operation. There are many operations that have been conducted covertly that are still unknown to the public and other allies today. Sometimes documents can become public, but most of the information is redacted to keep certain information secret. This backs up the argument with evidence outside of the case study itself. Showing leaders' conversations helps make the argument that the reason for the conduction of covert operations is because of negative political blowback stronger.

Case Study: Brazil 1964

The first case study I decided to include for my research is the US's covert intervention in Brazil in 1964. The support of the US government for the coup d'état in Brazil in 1964 remains a controversial topic. Documents recently declassified by the United States have enabled scholars to re-evaluate the US role in this pivotal event in the history of Brazil. A particularly contested issue is when the US decided to support the overthrow of the elected President João Goulart, and why (Wiley). The clash between the US and the Goulart government was inevitable and driven by the increasing lack of complementarity between the two national economies, once Brazil began to industrialise in the mid-twentieth century. There is little independence for political leaders in such an analysis, nor is there much recognition of variation in US foreign policy towards the various Latin American countries, or for change in US policy over time. Two books published on the 50th anniversary of the coup, by Netto (2014) and Tavares (2014) make similar arguments to Bandeira's. For Netto, as for Bandeira, the economic interests of imperialistic US corporations made the US government's opposition to Goulart inevitable. Netto argues that the

US turned definitively against Goulart in early 1962, because of the Brazilian position in the Organisation of American States' Punta del Este meeting in January of that year, refusing to completely endorse the US position on Cuba (Netto, 2014: 38). For Netto, as for Bandeira, the US was engaged in 'a process of preventive counter-revolution on a world scale' that made a clash with Goulart inevitable (Netto, 2014: 74). Tavares, drawing heavily on recently declassified documents, comes to a similar conclusion. He traces the events of 1964 to a meeting in the White House on 30 July 1962, which 'definitively opened the road to the coup in Brazil' (Tavares, 2014: 111). Tavares sees US Ambassador to Brazil Lincoln Gordon as the key figure in devising and implementing US policy, and believes that all aspects of that policy, even the deployment of the Peace Corps, were directed towards the removal of Goulart. The US considered many options and engaged in different types of actions in 1961 and 1962, but only began to move to overthrow Goulart in 1963 (Fico, 2014: 31). The US Federal government at the time of the 1964 military coup in Brazil was controlled by the Democratic Party and led by the Democratic President Lyndon B. Johnson, who had succeeded John F. Kennedy after the latter's assassination in 1963. Kennedy narrowly won the 1960 presidential election after two terms of a Republican President, Dwight D. Eisenhower. Overall, changes in the United States in the 1950s and early 1960s made it less likely that there could be peaceful relations between governments of the left or centre-left in Latin America and the US government. The intensification of the Cold War, US paranoia about Communism, and the dribbling away of the New Deal progressivism of the 1930s and 1940s in US domestic politics made such a rapprochement difficult. Instead, a national security state, high defence spending, militarisation and social conformism were characteristics of the United States in this period (wiley).

In addition to this, a Memorandum from the director of Brazilian Affairs, Burton from January 1964 shares some insights into the clash between Brazil and the US. He says” I believe that it is reasonably clear that a substantial proportion well in excess of a majority among the military officers in Brazil are heavily oriented toward the maintenance of orderly democratic processes. However, I do not think that there has been up to now any really substantial capability or will to mount a coup to overthrow Goulart. The military already had one unhappy and unsuccessful experience in attempting to disrupt orderly democratic processes when they unsuccessfully tried to block Goulart’s succession to the presidency in 1961 and had to settle for a parliamentary arrangement which was subsequently discredited and abandoned. In this sense, I think that there has been a lot of confused thinking on the subject of a deteriorating military capability to overthrow Goulart. I submit that this capability has been deteriorated and ineffective since the ill-fated fiasco of 1961, even before Goulart understandably started making appointments and promotions to protect himself against similar future actions” (<https://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/johnsonlb/xxxi/36291.htm>). There is also evidence of Ambassador Gordon and Assistant Secretary of State Mann's opinions on Goulart which provide evidence that they didn’t like him and were in support of getting rid of him. For example, “Goulart-Childish and erratic. Apparently tries to keep an inch or two windward. Does not believe he is a commie. Very tolerant of commies because they are useful to him. More a follower of Vargas and Peron. Personable demagogue. Possibility of a Goulart coup followed by an eventual commie takeover. Brizola is Goulart’s brother-in-law, has a radio station, former Gov. of Rio Grande do Sul. Now a Congressman from Rio where he got a big vote. Demagogue more than an intellectual type. Has said he would like to be the Fidel Castro of Brazil. Schilling is his chief advisor who is a member of Communist Party” (wiley).

The John F. Kennedy administration took a bet on the incoming president of Brazil, João Goulart, as he took office on September 8, 1961. Goulart was not a radical socialist, but his opponents portrayed him as an unpredictable nationalist who might unadvisedly fuel the flames of social upheaval and radical revolution, turning Brazil into a second Cuba. Yet, the White House estimated that Goulart was someone they could do business with and sympathized with the idea of Reformas de Base (Goulart's program of "basic reforms"), which included the extension of labor protections to rural workers, redistributive agrarian reform, and universal suffrage. United States support for Goulart materialized in the form of economic aid, financial assistance via the IMF, and development assistance via the Alliance for Progress partnership. Within a year, however, the tide turned as Goulart failed to comply with American demands that he ban leftists from his cabinet. In a matter of months in 1962, the White House abandoned any hopes of engagement with the Brazilian president. While the crisis that led to Goulart's fall in March 1964 was the making of domestic political actors within Brazil—as was the military coup to unseat the president—the likelihood and success rate of the golpe grew as the United States rolled out successive rounds of targeted actions against Goulart, including diplomatic and financial pressure, threats of abandonment, support for opposition politicians, collusion with coup plotters, signaling future military support for the plotters in the eventuality of civil war, and the granting of immediate diplomatic recognition for the incoming authoritarian military leaders after the coup (edisciplinas). The problem with the US wanting to conduct a coup against a country, is that this will cause negative political blowback if it is public knowledge. Therefore, the US conducted this coup covertly to avoid negative political blowback.

Case Study: Zaire 1996

Another case where the US conducted covert intervention, but in a different time period is in Zaire in 1996. Zaire is in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and after the Cold War, the US increased their covert operations to different regions in the world. Some background into this conflict is important in order to fully comprehend why the US decided to conduct covert operations in Zaire. A useful starting point is 1 October 1990, when a Tutsi army in exile invaded northern Rwanda from Uganda. The small central African lake countries of Rwanda and Burundi, Belgian mandate colonies until the early 1960s, each have seen profound violence resulting from caste conflict between the Hutu majority and the historically dominant Tutsi minority. By the time of Rwanda's independence in 1962, the Hutu majority had established its political dominance. The October 1990 invasion set in motion a sequence of events that led to the proxy warfare that ultimately resulted in President Mobutu's defeat six and one half years later. The Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) and its military wing, the Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA), was largely composed of Rwandan Tutsis who fled ethnic violence in their homeland in 1959 and became known as the "59ers." Many established themselves in Uganda, and later helped Yoweri Museveni win his war against the Ugandan government of Milton Obote in 1986. Many of these ethnic Tutsis subsequently participated in the transition of Museveni's rebel army into the regular Ugandan Army, some rising to very high positions. Among these children of Rwandan exiles was Fred Rwigyema, the second-in-command of Museveni's army, who planned the RPA's advance into northern Rwanda in 1990. General Rwigyema, however, was killed on the first day of the campaign. According to one account, he was allegedly murdered by fellow RPA officers, but the circumstances of his death remain shrouded in mystery. As a result, another Tutsi officer of the Ugandan Army, who had been attending the US Army's Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, was recalled to take over the leadership

of the RPA. This man was Major Paul Kagame, once the chief of intelligence for Museveni's army, and currently the Vice President and Minister of Defense of Rwanda. Kagame is generally regarded by the media and other observers of the political scene in central Africa as the mastermind of the 1996-97 campaign in Zaire (journals.lib.unb.ca). The RPA's 1990 advance into Rwanda was blocked by the largely French-trained, Hutu-dominated Rwandan Armed Forces (known by the French acronym FAR) and troops of Mobutu's Zairian Armed Forces (or FAZ) sent to support the regime of Hutu President Juvenal Habyarimana. After bitter fighting that degenerated into trench warfare in some locations, a stalemate ensued until the tragic events of 6 April 1994. On that day the Presidents of Rwanda and Burundi, returning from peace talks in Tanzania, were killed in a suspicious plane crash near Kigali. Their aircraft was apparently shot down by Hutu extremists opposed to a negotiated peace that they saw as selling out Hutu interests. This incident set off the infamous, nearly instantaneous, mass killing of Tutsis and moderate Hutus by Hutu extremists throughout Rwanda, i.e., the Rwandan genocide of 1994 that killed at least half a million people. It also re-ignited the civil war in which the RPA finally drove the FAR out of the Rwandan capital on 4 July of that year. French forces intervened unilaterally in southwestern Rwanda in June 1994 under the banner of OPERATION TURQUOISE, a belated effort to stop the slaughter and provide protection for both Hutus and Tutsis. The effect, however, was to interpose French military forces between the advancing RPA under Major General Kagame, and that part of Rwanda still under the nominal control of the FAR and allied Hutu militia known as the Interahamwe ("one together"). By July, however, Hutus began fleeing Rwanda into eastern Zaire in large numbers; ultimately an estimated 1.2 million Hutus took up residence in Zairian refugee camps. Among these Hutu refugees were armed members of the FAR (by now referred to as the "ex-FAR") and the Interahamwe

consisting of organized militia groups. These two organizations almost immediately melded together to form one insurgent force.² (I will subsequently refer to members of these two elements as Hutu militants to distinguish them from true refugees.) The ex-FAR surrendered their heavy weapons (i.e., about 40 pieces of equipment including armored vehicles and artillery) to Zairian authorities, but were allowed to keep small arms and light infantry weapons (i.e., automatic rifles, machine guns, mortars, rocket-propelled grenades [RPGs], hand grenades, etc). Once more, the Hutu militants not only established separate military camps, but they also controlled the refugee camps. Hutu gunman distributed UN-provided food and other assistance. The militants wanted to run the camps and keep control over the Hutu refugees to achieve their own ends: building a base from which to launch an eventual counter-attack into Rwanda.³ At the same time, they began launching guerrilla raids into western Rwanda (journals.lib.unb.ca).

During the cold war, the US viewed Mobutu Sese Seko as a valued anticommunist ally. Despite the country's vast resources, Mobutu's rule by theft impoverished most Congolese, forcing many to engage in corrupt practices. Mobutu's departure has raised Congolese hopes for a better future, but many are concerned about reported rebel human rights abuses and an ambiguous commitment to democracy (ips-dc.org). In September 1996, an ethnic revolt against human rights abuses erupted in eastern Zaire. This rapidly developed into a nationwide rebellion against Zairean President Mobutu Sese Seko's 32-year dictatorship. On May 17, 1997, a rebel alliance supported by Rwanda, Uganda, and Angola seized Kinshasa, the capital city, barely a day after Mobutu fled. It quickly reinstated the country's pre-1971 name, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and appointed a new government. Mobutu's departure closed the chapter on Washington's last remaining cold war client in Africa. Recruited by the CIA in the late 1950s when his country was still a Belgian colony, Mobutu helped overthrow Patrice Lumumba, the

Congo's first and only democratically elected prime minister. Wary of Lumumba's populism and willingness to accept Soviet aid, the U.S. and other Western powers encouraged Mobutu and others to contrive Lumumba's death. Thousands of Congolese lost their lives in the bitter five-year civil war that followed. In 1965 Mobutu, with CIA help, seized power in a coup. Perfecting a system of rule by theft (called kleptocracy), Mobutu pillaged the public sector, harassing or jailing those who objected. In some years he and his cronies siphoned off up to 50% of Zaire's capital budget as well as hundreds of millions in mineral export revenues, foreign aid and loans, and private investment (some guaranteed by the U.S. Eximbank). The effects were catastrophic. Despite vast mineral wealth (diamonds, cobalt, copper), oil deposits, and immense hydroelectric and agricultural potential, Zaire's per capita income has dropped almost two-thirds since independence in 1960 and is listed as the lowest of all 174 countries in the UNDP's 1996 Human Development Report. Mobutu's impact on people's daily lives was devastating. Extensive corruption crippled public services, from repairing roads to running schools and hospitals. Workers, their salaries stolen, were forced into the system of corruption just to survive. Nurses sometimes demanded payment before giving shots, while soldiers and police routinely extorted bribes from passersby. Nevertheless, the U.S. continued to view Mobutu as a useful ally against both global communism and radical African movements. He was vital to the U.S.-backed UNITA rebels' efforts to overthrow the leftist MPLA government in neighboring Angola. Popular protest exploded in 1990, forcing Mobutu to agree to end his one-party rule. During this period, Zaire's emerging civil society—a lively mix of grassroots women's, human rights, and development groups—initiated many projects to provide basic services (schools, clinics, community radio stations) and to nurture a new politics of accountability. But Mobutu continued to delay Zaire's transition to democracy, maneuvering to ensure his own election. In 1994 over 1

million Hutu refugees, some of them armed, fled to eastern Zaire following the genocide in Rwanda. Rather than disarming these exiles, Mobutu's military ignored refugee raids back into Rwanda and even sold the Hutus arms. When Mobutu's forces in eastern Zaire began seizing property and deporting Zairean Tutsis (known as the Banyamulenge), this ethnic minority rebelled. In mid-October 1996 the Banyamulenge joined three other anti-Mobutu rebel groups in an Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Zaire/Congo. The ADFL is headed by Laurent Kabila, a follower of Lumumba who had waged a bush war in eastern Zaire against Mobutu since the mid-1960s. Many Congolese initially praised the well-disciplined ADFL rebels for forcing rapacious government soldiers to flee and banning most bribe taking and intimidation, all of which improved people's daily security. Congolese widely celebrated Mobutu's exit and welcomed Kabila's promise to organize national elections by April 1999. But some remain concerned over the ADFL's ban on all political activities and parties, continued blocking of access to Hutu Rwandan refugees and possible involvement in refugee massacres. Still others from Kinshasa's traditional political parties have condemned his large number of Tutsi advisers, controversial among the many Congolese who view all ethnic Tutsis as foreigners without citizenship rights (ips-dc.org).

US leadership got covertly involved in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which shows the fear of negative political blowback. The overthrow of Mobutu was caused with the help of US covert intervention. The war in Zaire then grew out of Zairian inability to maintain central governmental authority in remote regions exacerbated by ethnic conflict in the east, Mobutu's historical support for the Hutu in Rwanda and the weakness of his forces to effectively control the militants. The ex-FAR and its allies posed a threat to the new masters of Rwanda, one that would not be looked upon casually by a regime in Kigali that saw at least half a million

Tutsis murdered. The threat of an armed Hutu insurgency launched into Rwanda from eastern Zaire behind a screen of refugees, many of whom were seen as perpetrators of genocide, was taken with deadly seriousness in Kigali. Further, Rwanda would not stand by and allow genocidal acts to be perpetrated against Tutsi communities in Zaire. This issue became the focus of all Rwandan decision-making. As early as December 1994, Kagame was warning the international community that if it could not attenuate this problem, he would

(journals.lib.unb.ca). The Congo was colonized by King Leopold II of Belgium in 1885, and known as Belgian Congo Until independence in 1960. In recent decades, the CIA has been involved in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, especially in relation to the CIA's considerations and plans to assassinate former Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba (and accusations of CIA involvement in his eventual assassination). Patrice Lumumba was the legally elected first prime minister of the independent country.^[2] Lumumba was killed on January 17, 1961, at the age of thirty-five near Élisabethville, Katanga Even before the independence of the Congo, the U.S. government attempted to facilitate the election of a pro-western government by identifying and supporting individual pro-U.S. leaders.^[3] The CIA was also notably involved in a campaign against Lumumba's successor, which led to his eventual imprisonment and long exile from the Democratic Republic of the Congo.^[4] The CIA was also a vital part of the United States' efforts to aid Joseph Mobutu, who took control of the Congo in 1965 and renamed the country Zaire and his name Mobutu Sese Seko (wikipedia). US intervention in Zaire would have received negative political blowback if it was made public at the time, especially with all of the deaths of the people in Zaire that occurred. Both case studies show how the US decided to conduct these operations covertly in order to avoid negative political blowback.

Some Considerations

There are several items to consider in regards to this research paper and making sure that all considerations are taken into account. This should be mentioned to avoid critiques and show that I have chosen the most relevant evidence and information for this research. One consideration I looked into, which I need to mention, was to consider a case where the US conducts a public operation where there was no fear of blowback in order to strengthen the argument. This would help to alleviate any concerns regarding a one-sided argument and provide further evidence to back up the thesis. However, I've found that further research needs to be conducted first to see if there are examples such as this one. While this may have helped my paper in some regard, I found that it would make more sense to include two in-depth case studies which add strength to the argument. I decided not to include a case like this one because I didn't want to add a case which would make my argument confusing. My argument is straightforward and the evidence that I have included backs up the thesis in the most effective way. In addition to this, another consideration that needs to be addressed is whether or not to add an example of when the US government decides to go public after a discussion about the situation. After conducting research, I have decided to not include this because it is more relevant to the research to include conversations with US leadership that discuss keeping an operation covert or not addressing the covert operation in a public manner. This is more effective in strengthening my argument and adding this consideration would add extra information that is not immediately relevant to the answer to the research question. I am still providing insight into US leadership conversations which add immense value to my thesis. All of the examples included in this paper as evidence have come from primary and secondary sources of evidence. I am able to overcome these considerations because of the fact that I am including relevant evidence that is strong and

not perplexing to the audience. I am mentioning these considerations purely for the purpose of expelling these critiques from the audience and because I want the audience to know that I have thought about these components when conducting my research.

Another consideration I took into account was the use of quality sources. In order to ensure a strong research paper, I have looked into data from the US archives, news articles, conversations with US leaders regarding covert intervention, previous research on covert intervention, the CIA website, as well as the Wilson Center archive and other history archives as well. I decided to utilize sources from these places because they will help legitimize my argument and to avoid finding false information. Using these sources will help in regards to finding direct evidence and supplemental evidence to support the thesis. One example of a piece of supplemental evidence is how President Truman has also denied utilizing covert operations during his Presidency. So, “In his retirement President Truman denied any responsibility for “cloak and dagger operations” but it was during his Presidency that covert intelligence operations in support of foreign policy objectives was undertaken on an ever broadening scale” (“History of the National Security Council”). This is one example of secondary evidence that can be used to support the fact that fear of negative political blowback is why US leadership decides to utilize covert operations. In this case, if President Truman wasn’t afraid of negative political blowback then he would have conducted public operations and admitted to using them. Since he decided to increase the US’s involvement in covert operations during his presidency, utilize covert operations and not public operations, through his actions it can be seen how he was afraid of negative political blowback that would occur from conducting covert operations. This research design will help this paper have strong evidence to back up the answer to the research question.

In addition to these considerations, the decision to choose Zaire and Brazil was to avoid utilization of evidence and case studies from the same time period and region. Originally I had chosen case studies from Central and South America. However, because they were very similar. For example, each operation occurred during different time periods, under different Presidents, however, a possible critique that would have needed to be addressed if I had utilized Nicaragua and Brazil would have been the similarity of these regions. To address this critique, I decided to utilize Brazil as one of my case studies and entertained the possibility of utilizing a different case study of US intervention in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. This specific case study from Zaire is utilized to replace Nicaragua. So, the Nicaragua case study has been used as supplemental evidence in another part of the research paper. In addition to addressing the critique of using the same region, utilizing a case from the Democratic Republic of Congo will also address the critique of this research not being applicable to other parts of the world. I was able to find one case study of US covert intervention that occurred during the Cold War and after the Cold War. This has helped spread the time period out further, so that both cases utilized as evidence would be from different time periods, which would eliminate the critique of both case studies being from the Cold War period. I believe that I have chosen the best possible case studies from different time periods and regions, which add immense value to the argument in this paper.

Broader Implications

Ethics, legality and more

There are broader implications to this research paper's argument. The argument is that fear of negative political blowback is the reason why the US government conducts covert

operations rather than public operations. This has implications for covert operations in the future as well as for the relationships between the US and its allies, enemies, and the public. Some of these broader implications include political, ethical, legal, and future implications. In regards to political implications, the manner in which the US decides to conduct covert operations has an impact on leadership decisions which influences politics. An example is “With the recent passage of the U.N. Charter’s 75th anniversary, it is a good time to take stock of its effect on world politics. The persistence of militarized interventions in particular has left many observers skeptical of the relevance of the charter’s flagship provision. According to Erik Voeten, “there is no record of the UN actively restricting states from using force, let alone the United States” (lawfare). Another example is a US President may decide to utilize covert operations instead of public operations in the attempt to resolve a conflict quietly which would allow the public and allies to view him favorably, which would improve chances of reelection and other regulations being passed in Congress. There could also be a negative public perception of the US President, which could lead to the President not being re-elected. Many times Presidents and other US leaders decide to do certain things based on the fact that there’s political pressure such as reelection and many decisions ride on the fear of not having support from others. In addition to this, there could be irreparable relationships between the US and other countries. This would occur in a situation where the US thinks about conducting a public operation against one of their allies' ally which causes an issue with their ally and makes the US decide to conduct this operation overtly to avoid this situation from happening. The ethical implications tie into the relationship between US leadership and the public. Covert intervention isn’t always ethical and due to the fact that the ethics aren’t always taken into consideration, this can aid in turning the public against US leadership. **“Covert action is interventionary in a broad sense: in almost**

every case, it aims at influencing the course of political life in the target state by inducing or preventing a change in government or policy. Interference typically risks several kinds of harm, which are reflected in the three most prominent general arguments against intervention: that it offends the political sovereignty of the state being interfered in; that it disrupts a people's common life; and that it upsets the international order” (The Ethics of Covert Operations 12).

Also, “Morally dubious as it may sometimes be, Presidents rely on covert action as a vital means by which to implement identifiable foreign policy objectives in support of U.S. national security. Students identified, in no particular order and among others, concerns with lying, stealing, targeted assassination and drones, torture of detainees, interference with other nations, putting an asset in danger in order to accomplish mission, exploiting weakness in others, the involvement of healthcare professionals in interrogation, honey traps, misrepresentation, coercion, using money to buy influence, blackmail, treason, manipulation, ballot box stuffing, and so on. While the whiteboard now contained potentially objectionable issues, the listing also represented, perhaps uncomfortably, a menu of potentially effective techniques. In certain situations, some if not all of these techniques might be considered “appropriate.” They certainly have all been utilized (and likely continue to be) by intelligence services around the world with varying degrees of success” (Breen). This shows how even students are able to identify how the ethics of covert intervention are not always ethical, which help a US leader decide to utilize it when they need results and to avoid negative political blowback.

In addition to this, there are legal implications for conducting covert operations. Covert operations can violate international law, so if they are exposed this can cause issues for the US on an international scale. Other implications that occur from this research is improved international security, insight into US leadership decision making, and an informed public.

“Many also harbor a perception that such operations are conducted covertly because the government **knows** they would be rightly condemned if made public and a corresponding belief that secrecy per *se* is somehow incompatible with American democratic traditions. ’

Nevertheless, secrecy is often required to protect sensitive foreign sources of intelligence information," to conceal particularly effective methods of intelligence gathering, 3 or even to promote a peaceful resolution of a potentially explosive great-power confrontation **by** allowing an adversary to make policy concessions without "losing face" before the entire world” (Turner 429-430). International security is able to be improved through the fact that US leaders can see responses to covert operations versus public operations and change their decisions. There is also insight into US leadership decision making through documents and evidence that I have provided in my paper. Through this research, the public is able to gain insight into why the US conducts covert operations instead of public operations, which helps them understand what these leaders take into consideration and what they think about when making this decision. The US public is also able to be better informed as to why the US decides to utilize covert intervention and can formulate their own opinions about it.

Conclusion

Wrapping up the argument with final thoughts

The US conducts covert operations rather than public operations because of the fear of negative political blowback. This outcome to the research question has not been addressed previously, and is holistically addressing the question while providing evidence that this reason is the premier reason for why the US conducts covert operations. This research paper is important because it addresses the answer to why the US decides to use covert operations in a

different manner than what previous research has addressed. Previous research has shown that the US utilizes covert operations for deniability, while this research will show that deniability is not the main reason why the US conducts covert operations. Another answer to why the US conducts covert operations from previous research is ambiguity. This research will state that negative political consequences is the main reason why the US utilizes covert operations.

Negative political consequences, which I coin as “negative political blowback” is my answer for why the US chooses covert operations instead of public operations. Negative political blowback includes information such as what causes leaders to change their decisions, as well as other variables that should be included when discussing possible outcomes to the research question in its definition. The utilization of two different case studies from different time periods and areas is also a very integral part of this research. I decided to utilize case studies from different regions and time periods to avoid the critique of not being applicable elsewhere. It is extremely important to show that this research can be relevant in other situations because this is what will make my argument stronger than what previous research suggests. This also helps make my argument a viable option in the wider covert intervention sphere. My research is important because the research, outcomes, case studies, and evidence all point to a new answer to the research question and will help add value to international relations research. It will also provide strong evidence and a clear, concise argument to back up the thesis.

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