

Intelligence and US Foreign Policy since WWII: A Review of Current History^{*}

งานข่าวกรอง กับ นโยบายต่างประเทศสหรัฐอเมริกาหลังสงครามโลกครั้งที่สอง :
บทปริทัศน์ประวัติศาสตร์ปัจจุบัน

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Abstract

When the Obama administration took office in 2009, International Relations (IR) scholars had high expectations for the new government. Many scholars took Obama's campaign slogan - "change we can believe in" - to mean that the new president will initiate reforms that bring US foreign policies into line with international laws. However, Obama soon authorized covert operations on sovereign state's soil, which violate the norm of state sovereignty. This continuing trend in the use of intelligence and other exceptional means, regardless of party affiliation, suggests that a complete analysis of U.S foreign policy cannot be done without taking these measures into account. For this reason, this article aims to review the roles of intelligence in US foreign policy since the end of the Second World War in order to reiterate the importance of intelligence in analysing the policies of the US.

Keywords: intelligence; Central Intelligence Agency; US foreign policy

บทคัดย่อ

เมื่อรัฐบาลโอบามาเข้าดำรงตำแหน่งในปี 2009 นักวิชาการด้านความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างประเทศมีความคาดหวังอย่างสูงต่อรัฐบาลใหม่ นักวิชาการจำนวนมากเข้าใจคำโฆษณาหาเสียง “เราเชื่อในความเปลี่ยนแปลง” ของโอบามาว่าหมายถึงประธานาธิบดีคนใหม่จะริเริ่มการปฏิรูปซึ่งทำให้นโยบายต่างประเทศสหรัฐอเมริกาสอดคล้องกับกฎหมายระหว่างประเทศ อย่างไรก็ตามหลังจากนั้นโอบามาได้ลงนามในคำสั่งปฏิบัติการลับเหนือดินแดนของรัฐอธิปไตยอื่นซึ่งเป็นการละเมิดต่อบรรทัดฐานว่าด้วยอำนาจอธิปไตยของรัฐ แนวโน้มที่ต่อเนื่องในการใช้งานข่าวกรองและวิธีการข้อยกเว้นต่าง ๆ ไม่ว่ารัฐบาลจะมาจากพรรคการเมืองใด ชี้ให้เห็นว่าการวิเคราะห์นโยบายต่างประเทศสหรัฐอเมริกาอย่างสมบูรณ์นั้นไม่อาจทำได้หากปราศจากการพิจารณาวิธีต่าง ๆ เหล่านี้ ด้วยเหตุนี้บทความจึงมีเป้าประสงค์เพื่อทบทวนบทบาทของงานข่าวกรองในนโยบายต่างประเทศสหรัฐนับตั้งแต่การสิ้นสุดของสงครามโลกครั้งที่สองเพื่อที่จะย้ำเตือนให้เห็นถึงความสำคัญของงานข่าวกรองในการวิเคราะห์นโยบายต่างประเทศสหรัฐ

คำสำคัญ: งานข่าวกรอง; หน่วยข่าวกรองกลางสหรัฐอเมริกา; นโยบายต่างประเทศสหรัฐอเมริกา

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Back to the future: Operation Neptune Spear

Armed intervention and warfare also have been and remain a large part of the American foreign-policy experience. Naval, ground, and air forces operate both from home and from overseas bases that sustain the American interests or purposes policy makers identify. The agenda is substantial: dealing with threats from states, terrorist and criminal groups... and other humanitarian needs.

Paul R. Viotti (2010: 128-129)

Today, at my direction, the United States launched a targeted operation against that compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan. A small team of Americans carried out the operation with extraordinary courage and capability. No Americans were harmed. They took care to avoid civilian casualties. After a firefight, they killed Osama bin Laden and took custody of his body.

President Barack H. Obama (Cable News Network 2011)

The clandestine mission led by the US special forces to kill Osama bin Laden, the leader of al-Qaeda, on Pakistani soil rapidly became a controversial issue particularly among the public outside the US who questioned whether Washington was legitimately taking military action over other territories or not. In terms of International Relations (IR), the mission led to theoretical debates not only over the applicability of IR theory to explaining the dynamics of international politics but also, more importantly, over the pattern of US foreign policy owing to the fact that the latter has always affected the former. The application of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in general and nuclear weapons in particular by the US during the height of the Cold War, for example, contributed to the formation of neo-realist theory – a concept of nuclear deterrence as well as a concept of capabilities distribution – describing an international system with the US as the dominant nation. To some extent, the domination of realist and neo-realist schools of thought over the discipline of IR has created the myth of US foreign policy in which the armed forces becomes a one-sided picture of American foreign policy instruments. The military instrument, as the mission in Pakistan manifests, is not a particular feature of US foreign policy, notwithstanding the obvious and frequent implementation during war. The use of clandestine action through an intelligence community has also been an instrument of Washington, and as a result, is another feature of American foreign policy. Therefore, the aim of this article is to answer the question of why the military instrument – conventionally referred to armed forces – and the clandestine action or intervention have been parallel instruments of US foreign policy by examining the policy-

making process and analysing the turning points in foreign policy, in addition several historical cases will be exemplified. To achieve this objective, first the US policy-making process and timing contexts will be examined, and then the usage of both instruments and the cases will be analysed in accordance with the timeline.

To understand the US foreign policy, a contextualization of foreign policy is a necessity since the study of foreign policy and the study of IR or IR theory are dissimilar especially in terms of objective. While the latter aims to generalize the patterns of interaction among actors in the international system, therefore building a universal law of international relations, the former, according to Schmidt (2008: 10), ‘seeks to explain why *a particular state pursued a specific policy at a certain point in time*. A theory of foreign policy is dedicated to answering the question of what causes a state to adopt a specific type of foreign policy. Thus, for example, rather than trying to explain the general, underlying the cause of war, a theory of American foreign policy attempts to explain why the United States chose to wage war against Iraq in March 2003 (emphasis by the author)’, hence the importance of context. To study the US instruments of foreign policy, a starting point, the article argues, should be World War II – specifically the attack on Pearl Harbor – due to the fact that the incident was a significant motive for Washington to forsake the Monroe Doctrine – enshrined isolationism – and the subsequent reengagement in world affairs including the total war and series of limited wars.

Pearl Harbor: A painful beginning

The 1941 incident of Pearl Harbor led to major criticism of the errors of US foreign policy particularly the deficiency of intelligence gathering and analysis since, for American elites in the early years of the twentieth century, the usage of an intelligence agency and clandestine action was a cult of Britain or Europe not America – the land of democracy, rights and freedom. According to Wittkopf et al. (2008: 108), ‘prior to World War II, covert activities by the United States were very limited, usually involving efforts to collect information. During World War I, intercepting and decoding enemy cable and radio messages – cryptanalysis – brought the application of modern technology to intelligence work. The “Black Chamber”, a small U.S. military intelligence unit responsible for this activity, continued to function after the war, only to be terminated by President Herbert Hoover’s secretary of state in 1929, who found the Black Chamber’s activities abhorrent to America’s idealist values. During the 1930s, President Franklin D. Roosevelt and his advisers received specialized intelligence briefings about Japan and Germany from a broad array of information sources... but the United States did not have secret agents operating abroad. Consequently, it could not practice counterintelligence, “operations undertaken against foreign intelligence services.... directed

specifically against the espionage efforts of such services”.’ Thus, it led to a failure in foreign policy process and implementation.

Despite the mighty military instrument, particularly naval and air powers, the surprise attack happened due to the lack of an intelligence agency – a blind spot in US foreign policy. Great anxieties manifested throughout the congress, for instance, a statement from Ralph E. Church, a congressman from Illinois, portrayed a sharp concern: ‘there is no better proof that we have been extremely backward in our intelligence work than the fact that we were so completely surprised at Pearl Harbor. It is somewhat reassuring to have this emphasis placed on intelligence as part of our national security. Not only is intelligence necessary for the proper functioning of our military machinery, it is indeed of primary importance for the proper conduct of our foreign relations’ (as cited in Jeffreys-Jones 1997: 26).

Apart from the tragedy of Pearl Harbor, to some extent, the fear of communism – the Soviet Union and its satellite states – was also the *raison d’être* of the intelligence agency; thus, the establishment of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), a civilian intelligence agency, in 1947 as well as the founding of the National Security Council (NSC) in nearly the same period. The significance of the intelligence agency to foreign policy could be seen through the National Security Council Report number 4-A (NSC-4-A): ‘The National Security Council, taking cognizance of the vicious psychological efforts of the USSR, its satellite countries and Communist groups to discredit and defeat the aims and activities of the United States and other Western powers, has determined that, in the interests of world peace and national security, the foreign information activities of the US Government must be supplemented by covert psychological operations’ (as cited in Jeffreys-Jones 1997: 25). In addition, the Soviet acquisition of nuclear weapons in 1949 became another impetus to Washington realizing that even though military power, the conventional tool of foreign policy, was more or less the most important instrument; it was insufficient for reacting vis-à-vis to changing international circumstances.

The classified report number 68 issued by the National Security Council (NSC) in 1950 known as NSC-68 also emphasized a necessity for an intelligence agency and covert actions: ‘a comprehensive and decisive program to win the peace and frustrate the Kremlin design... would probably involve: ...*Intensification of affirmative and timely measures and operations by covert means in the fields of economic warfare and political and psychological warfare with a view to fomenting and supporting unrest and revolt in selected strategic satellite countries* (emphasis by the author)’ (National Security Council 1950). From this perspective, NSC-68 did not call for merely the militarization of US foreign policy but also the

intelligentization of it. Thus, US foreign policy after World War II, as Wittkopf et al. demonstrates, has been ‘become highly dependent on a range of powerful – but often controversial – military, paramilitary, and related instruments to pursue fundamental goals’ (Wittkopf et al. 2008: 75).

The aftermath of the total war and the emerging threat of the Soviet Union and its ideology brought about the reform of the bureaucratic system associated with foreign affairs. The NSC and CIA did not become two important actors in the US foreign policy process until the beginning of the twentieth-first century; thus, the role of these two organs should be clarified. The NSC is the organization under the presidential system which has been the centre for foreign policy making for many administrations, and the head of NSC – simply known as the National Security Advisor – is always influential to the president and American foreign policy, Henry Kissinger and Condoleezza Rice, for instance (Wittkopf et al. 2008).

The role and responsibility of the CIA is no less important, as detailed in the cases below: the CIA according to Wittkopf et al. (2008), ‘was assigned responsibilities for (1) advising the National Security Council (NSC) on intelligence matters relating to national security; (2) making recommendations to the NSC for coordinating the intelligence activities of the various federal executive departments and agencies; (3) correlating and evaluating intelligence and providing for its dissemination; and (4) carrying out such additional services, functions, and duties relating to national security intelligence as the NSC might direct. Before long, covert psychological, political, paramilitary, and economic activities were added to the CIA’s charge’ (Wittkopf et al. 2008: 398), and the cases at the height of the Cold War were verified evidence of the use of the CIA as an instrument of foreign policy along with conventional armed forces.

In the 1950s, the North Korean invasion of South Korea supported by the Soviet Union and Communist China reassured the notion of the communist threat not only to geopolitical interests but also to American values. Moreover, the spread of McCarthyism – the anti-communist hysteria – which had occurred since the late 1940s became an incentive interventionist foreign policy of the US. As the NSC-68 suggested, while protecting the so-called ‘Free World’, the US increased its military capacities in order to cope with the communist expansion on a global scale, and could react instantly wherever conflict took place. This resulted in the establishment of American military bases in strategic geographic locations as well as the formation of military alliances through the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in Europe and the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) in Southeast Asia. Nevertheless, these conventional military actions, as the article already mentioned, were not only large-scale, but covert actions and interventions also occurred around the world.

Why did the US need the CIA during the Cold War?

Notwithstanding being powerful, the conventional military instruments from tanks to nuclear weapons, in many circumstances, may not be efficient to serve the goal of the US, as Calvert (2010: 45) points out, ‘highly specialized forces, and even more such ferociously powerful weapons, are of little or no use in the traditional alternative role of armed forces, namely counterinsurgency. A government cannot put down a rebellion with thermonuclear weapons, even the use of heavy conventional weapons such as tanks, artillery shells, and bombs may prove counterproductive’. Despite referring to a different context, Calvert’s statement, the article argues, shows the limitations of conventional military instruments. Furthermore, an armed invasion was not an available option in the normal circumstances of the Cold War owing to the fact that it would lead to a direct confrontation between two great powers that may have resulted in a nuclear war. In this situation, the use of covert actions through the intelligence community became the weapon of choice.

The decade of 1950, the article argues, was the rising era of the CIA in foreign affairs which could be seen through the wave of covert actions in many states with motives that were mainly associated with the fear that the Third World would fall into communism as well as preserving American interests. During the Eisenhower administration, the US performed two successful covert interventions. The first one was the covert action to overthrow Mosaddegh’s regime in Iran in 1953 since the regime was regarded as a threat to American interests due to its nationalist policy especially the policy of the nationalization of foreign companies as well as its propaganda to align with the Soviet Union. Subsequently, the Shah’s regime, supported by the US, was restored until the Iranian revolution in 1979 (Crockatt 1995). The second action occurred in 1954 to support the coup toppling down the leftist Arbenz’s regime in Guatemala through, according to Blakeley, ‘organising, arming and training the Arbenz government’s military opposition in Honduras’ by the CIA (Blakeley 2010: 92). In spite of the two successful covert interventions, there were unsuccessful actions that attempted to overthrow two other regimes – Indonesia in 1958 and Cuba in 1960-1961 (Gaddis 1982), which cost Allen Dulles, the director of the CIA, his job (Wittkopf et al. 2008).

The American war in Vietnam was another explicit example of the parallel usage of the conventional military instrument – armed forces – and covert actions through the intelligence agencies – the CIA. During the period of the Vietnam War, the CIA initiated paramilitary operations in Southeast Asia (Wittkopf et al., 2008), including covert escalating and expanding wars in Laos and Cambodia during the Nixon administration (Viotti 2010). The most notorious case during the war was the CIA’s operation Phoenix. Under the operation Phoenix,

according to Blakeley, there was ‘the effect not simply of destroying the VCI [Vietcong infrastructure], but also of instilling terror among Vietnamese civilians, and killing thousands. Civilians, often not even members of the VCI, simply family members or neighbours of suspected members, were frequently killed in their sleep by US and South Vietnamese military personnel... as well as murder, torture was widespread under Phoenix’ (Blakeley 2010: 50). Another CIA covert mission that should be mentioned here since it has affected the US until the present time was supporting the anti-Soviet mujahedeen after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. This action brought about negative backlash that became a nightmare for the US twenty years later during tragedy of 11 September 2001 that led to the long war.

Intelligence’s as dead as the dodo?

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the death of communism led to the myth of a peaceful period because of the absence of conventional threat, notwithstanding the series of terrorist attacks both on American soil and outside the US. This failure of the intelligence community, the shocked attack on the American symbol, led to the experience of *déjà vu* for the year 1941. No different from the attack on Pearl Harbor, the US declared the War on Terror – the international scope of eradicating terrorist groups as well as rogue states defined by Washington, as can be seen through the Bush Doctrine (Office of the Press Secretary 2002):

We cannot defend America and our friends by hoping for the best. We cannot put our faith in the word of tyrants, who solemnly sign non-proliferation treaties, and then systemically break them. If we wait for threats to fully materialize, we will have waited too long — Our security will require transforming the military you will lead — a military that must be ready to strike at a moment's notice in any dark corner of the world. And our security will require all Americans to be forward-looking and resolute, to be ready for preemptive action when necessary to defend our liberty and to defend our lives.

The incident of 11 September 2001 not only led to the first two wars of the twentieth-first century, but also the reform of the US intelligence community. Despite the easy toppling of the regimes in Afghanistan and Iraq, there was a period of ten years where the US could not arrest Osama bin Laden, America’s most wanted terrorist, and there were ten years where the new Vietnam nightmare haunted Americans. In addition, the scandals of the CIA operations brutality, which explicitly violated international norms defined by the American New World Order, led to the question, the article argues, not about the morality, but rather about the challenging circumstances – the rise of information technology particularly the

internet which manifested through the case of Wikileaks – for the foreign policy instruments to be efficient. Thus, the successful covert action of killing bin Laden did not mean the foreign policy instruments were effective. Students of IR should not presuppose the period of peace and neglect the brutal and unlawful instrument of the state to pursue its political goal as history has manifested that not only powerful armed forces, but also covert actions, has made the great power great.

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