



# UNITED STATES FOREIGN INTERVENTIONS IN ITALY AND KOREA

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## Abstract

The Communist victory in the Italian elections of April 1948, prompted fear to the American administration and U.S. foreign policy makers. The first numbered document issued by the National Security Council, NSC 1/1 of November 14th, 1947 warned that "The Italian Government, ideologically inclined toward Western democracy, is weak and is being subjected to continuous attack by a strong Communist Party." The NSC recommended, in addition to public support for the beleaguered Italian government, a programme to "actively combat Communist propaganda in Italy by an effective U.S. information programme and by all other practicable means, including the use of undeclared funds." President Truman approved NSC 1/1 on November 24th. On December 14th, the President signed NSC 4/A giving responsibility for "psychological warfare" to the CIA. A week later, the agency set up the Special Procedures Group (SPG), which laundered over \$10 million from captured Axis funds for use in the Italian election campaign. This paper examines the United States foreign interventions in Italy and Korea dictated by the fear of the spread of Communism in Italy and Korea during the cold war.

**Keywords:** United States, Foreign Policy, U.S. President, CIA, Italy, Korea, Cold War.

## Introduction

Some of the Special Procedures Group's laundered millions, over \$10 million from captured Axis funds for use in the Italian election campaign, were secretly handed over to the Italian Prime Minister, Alcide de Gasperi, to help finance the campaign of his Christian Democratic party. Other millions went on media campaigns to spread black propaganda against the Communists and extol the virtues of their opponents. Truman took a personal interest in both overt and covert attempts to support the Christian Democrats and defeat the Communists. Despite equally active Soviet involvement in the elections, the Christian Democrats won 307 of the 574 seats. The defeat of the Communists at the polls is historically viewed by the CIA not only as their first bust also as one of their most outstandingly successful covert operations.



The apparent success of covert action against the Communists in Italy led to its rapid expansion. In May 1948, George F. Kennan, head of the State Department planning staff and the leading apostle of containment, proposed the creation of a permanent covert action group able to engage in far more than psychological warfare. A month later Truman signed NSC 10/2, ordering the creation within the CIA of the Office of Policy Co-ordination (OPC) to plan and engage in covert action.<sup>1</sup> Later on however, it should be noted that Kennan became sceptical about such operations and the role of the intelligence in Soviet-American relations when he wrote "I myself have had the occasion to see instance after instance in which American intelligence authorities have mounted, or have attempted to mount, operations which have constituted, or would have constituted, a direct abuse not just of Soviet-American diplomatic relations in the formal sense but of the very possibilities for reaching a better understanding between the two governments."<sup>2</sup> Proceeding from the premise that the Soviet Union and its satellite countries were embarked on a programme of 'vicious' covert activities 'to discredit and defeat the aims and activities of the United States and other Western powers,'<sup>3</sup> NSC 10/2 gave the highest sanction of the government to a plethora of covert operations: 'propaganda, economic warfare, preventative direct action including sabotage, anti-sabotage, demolition and evacuation measures; subversion against hostile states including assistance to underground resistance movements, guerrillas and refugee liberation groups'.<sup>4</sup> The acquisition of these missions had a profound impact on the direction of the Agency and on its relative stature within the government. The initiation of covert operations did not originate within the CIA, but with senior U.S. officials, among them Secretary of War, Secretary of Defence, Secretary of State, and George Kennan, Director of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff.<sup>5</sup>

NSC 10/2 also formally adopted the principle of "plausible deniability". Contrary to the maxim prominently displayed on Truman's desk, the buck, as far as covert action was concerned, was not to reach the Oval Office. Covert operations, Truman ordered, were to be "so planned and executed that any U.S. Government responsibility for them is not evident to unauthorised persons and that if uncovered the U.S. Government can plausibly disclaim any responsibility for them."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> NSC 10/2. June 18<sup>th</sup>, 1948. National Security Council Directive on Office of Special Projects. Section 1-3. Source: Thomas H. Etzold and John Lewis Gaddis. Containment: Documents on American Policy and Strategy, 1945-1950 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978) pp. 125-128.

<sup>2</sup> George F. Kennan. The Cloud of Danger: Some Current Problems of American Foreign Policy, (London: Hutchinson & Co Ltd, 1978) p. 210.

<sup>3</sup> NSC 10/2, Section 1.

<sup>4</sup> Frances Stonor Saunders. Who Paid the Piper? The CIA and the Cultural Cold War (London: Granta Books, 2000) p. 39.

<sup>5</sup> United States Senate. Final Report of the Select Committee to Study Governmental Operation with Respect to Intelligence Activities, 1976, p. 105.

<sup>6</sup> NSC 10/2, section 5.



Yet, according to Gregory F. Treverton, plausible deniability had not protected presidents; what it had done was permit looseness in the chain of command.<sup>7</sup> On many occasions one of the means of protecting the President from embarrassment was not to tell him about certain covert operations, at least formally. According to Bromely Smith, a former official in the National Security Council, the concept of “plausible denial” was taken in an almost literal sense: “The government was authorised to do certain things that the President was not advised of.”<sup>8</sup> Truman was the first president to found a peacetime covert action agency. In August 1948 he approved NSC 20, authorising guerrilla operations behind the Iron Curtain using Soviet émigrés recruited in the West. The preface to NSC 20, drafted by Kennan, claimed optimistically that, though “it is not our peacetime aim to overthrow the Soviet Government,” covert action could create “circumstances and situations” that would make it difficult for the “present Soviet leaders ... to retain their power in Russia.”<sup>9</sup>

On January 31<sup>st</sup>, 1950, Truman directed his secretaries of state and defence to conduct a wide-ranging re-examination of objectives in peace and war. The result of that review was the NSC 68 of April 7<sup>th</sup>. NSC 68 interpreted the Cold War as an elemental struggle between the forces of Western light and Eastern darkness, between freedom and slavery. NSC 68 restated the doctrine of “containment” of the Soviet expansion and foresaw a major role of covert action within the Soviet bloc. Though it did not spell out this role in detail, it called for “intensification of ... operations by covert means in the fields of economic warfare and political and psychological warfare.”<sup>10</sup> According to John Lewis Gaddis, the world crisis, as dangerous in its potential as anything confronted in World Wars I or II, rendered all American interests vital, all means affordable, all methods justifiable.<sup>11</sup> According to Senator Church, the roots of the covert operations grew out of the obsession with the Cold War. Every upheaval was likened to a pawn on a global chessboard, to be moved this way or that, by the two principal players. This led the CIA to plunge into a full range of covert activities, designed to counteract the competitive efforts of the KGB.<sup>12</sup>

During 1949, covert operations within the Soviet bloc had started to take place in Poland, the Ukraine and Albania. The details of some of these operations and the

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<sup>7</sup> Gregory F. Treverton. Covert Action. The CIA and the Limits of American Intervention in the Postwar World (London: I.B.TAURIS & CO Ltd, Publishers, 1987) p. 5.

<sup>8</sup> United States Senate. Final Report of the Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, 1976, p. 46.

<sup>9</sup> NSC 20. August 18<sup>th</sup>, 1948. U.S. Objectives with Respect to Russia. Section 3 “Specific Aims”. Thomas H. Etzold and John Lewis Gaddis. Containment, p. 190.

<sup>10</sup> NSC 68. April 14<sup>th</sup>, 1950. United States Objectives and Programs for National Security. Section 9, D 2, (7). Ibid, pp. 435-436.

<sup>11</sup> John Lewis Gaddis. Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982) p. 95.

<sup>12</sup> Frank Church. The Intelligence Community, p. xxi.



work of the CIA with the émigrés are mentioned by Kim Philby in his autobiography *My Silent War*<sup>13</sup> and well described by Nicholas Bethel in *The Great Betrayal*.<sup>14</sup>

An important event in the CIA's transformation was the Korean War. When the war broke out, the CIA came under attack at once, accused by the Truman administration of having failed to provide sufficient or proper warnings that the Soviet-backed North Koreans would consider open hostilities. According to Lauren Paine, the CIA's hard intelligence, gathered through its considerable Asiatic intelligence network, had been keeping US Commander General Douglas MacArthur and others, including President Truman, informed concerning a Communist Chinese troop accumulation along the Manchurian-Korean border for months before the Red Chinese struck.<sup>15</sup>

With the outbreak of the war there was an immediate upheaval. The most important was the appointment of the new CIA director, General Walter Bedell Smith, who replaced Admiral Hillenkoetter. Bedell Smith was to establish three main directorates - Plans, Intelligence, and Administration.<sup>16</sup> He headed the CIA at a crucial period in its history. The Korean War was the final blow needed to force the US to revitalise its defence establishment and to build a modern intelligence system.<sup>17</sup>

The Korean War, which had generated the criticism and reorganisation of the CIA, also aided the Agency. During the Korean War (1950-1953), the CIA personnel and budget increased spectacularly. OPC's personnel grew from 302 in 1949 to 2,812 (plus 3,142 overseas contact agents), operating from forty-seven foreign stations in 1952. Its budget skyrocketed during the same period from \$4.7 million to \$82 million. As the Korean battlefield stabilised in mid-1951, OPC moved increasingly into guerrilla warfare. Between April and December 1951 it trained and dispatched forty-four groups of Korean guerrillas behind enemy lines to harass Communist communication and supply lines from China.<sup>18</sup>

The CIA hired spies, saboteurs, infiltrators, and in some instances, it also bought politicians, educators, North Korean defectors, and highly positioned professional people, all of whom aided the United Nations' war effort. With the end of the Korean War, the CIA's value as a competent agency was established. The Korean War not only

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<sup>13</sup> Kim Philby. *Soviet spy*. In 1949, Philby was the SIS representative in Washington, as top British officer working in liaison with the CIA and FBI. He sat on Special Policy Committee directing the ill-fated Anglo-US attempts to infiltrate anti-Communist agents into Albania to topple the Enver Hoxha regime. He wrote about the operations in Albania and Ukraine in; *My Silent War. The Autobiography of a Spy* (London: Arrow Books, 2003) pp. 153-159.

<sup>14</sup> Nicholas Bethel. *The Great Betrayal. The Untold Story of Kim Philby's Biggest Coup* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1984.) Describes CIA involvement with the émigrés, giving them military training and financial support, for the purpose of overthrowing the regime of Enver Hoxha. Chapter 7. CIA prepares its men, p. 127-150, financial support, Chapter 8, p. 170.

<sup>15</sup> Lauren Paine, p. 24..

<sup>16</sup> Brian Freemantle. *CIA* (London: Michael Joseph/Rainbird, 1983) p. 31.

<sup>17</sup> Lyman B. Kirkpatrick, Jr, p. 121.

<sup>18</sup> Christopher Andrew, p. 193.



had an impact in the field of intelligence but also brought into being a new perception of the Cold War. It paved the way for future covert operations to take place over a wider geographical area. As Richard J. Aldrich wrote, "The wider impact of the Korean War cannot be overestimated. It sped up the militarisation of the Cold War and extended it from a largely European-Mediterranean conflict to a global confrontation. It threatened to turn the Cold War into a "hot" war."<sup>19</sup> It was the Truman presidency which shaped the United States' intelligence community. In 1946, he ordered the inauguration of the daily summary, forerunner of the president's daily brief, the first document seen each day by most of his successors. He promoted the National Security Act, which founded the CIA. He authorised the beginning, and during his second term, the rapid expansion of peacetime covert action by U.S. intelligence agencies. In addition, in 1952, as one of his final acts as president, he founded the National Security Agency. Although Truman did not intend the CIA to be more than an intelligence agency, the Agency was empowered to challenge the KGB and use all its methods to prevent Soviet expansion and the spread of Communism. The loss of the nuclear monopoly and the infiltration of Soviet spies such as Kim Philby, Donald Maclean and Guy Burgess at high levels of intelligence made the U.S. realise that, in the new epoch, the intelligence function and covert action could be successfully utilised to achieve goals, which armed invasion or intervention were unlikely to achieve as successfully.<sup>20</sup> As mentioned in this chapter, the CIA was established as a result of the need for a strong intelligence agency to coordinate and gather intelligence. The National Security Act was ambiguous in determining the real nature of the CIA, which was under the command of the President and the NSC. Truman may not have wanted the Agency to get involved in covert action but the facts show that he was responsible for its transformation by signing NSC 4/A encouraging the CIA into psychological warfare. Subsequently he was to add his signature endorsing NSC 10/2 and NSC 20/2 which established the OPC, designed to plan and engage in covert action and guerrilla operations behind the Iron Curtain. NSC 68, composed and signed by the highest level of the government, including the President, demanded the intensification of covert action. It can therefore be established from the research presented in this first chapter that the transformation of the CIA from intelligence gathering to covert action was inevitable and emanated from the policymakers and not from within the Agency. During this period the CIA had special exemption from any Congressional reviewing process. Its operations in themselves were remarkably successful therefore the Agency did its job well. According to Ray S. Cline, 'the CIA got a lot of credit, which it only partly deserved, and much later was to get most of the blame when covert action programmes got out of hand,' as will be discussed in the next chapters 'blame that also largely belonged to the policymakers, not only to the instrument of covert action, the CIA.'<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Richard J. Aldrich. The Hidden Hand: Britain, America and Cold War Secret Intelligence (Woodstock & New York: The Overlook Press, 2002) p. 289.

<sup>20</sup> Lauren Paine, CIA at Work. (London: Robert Hale, 1977) p. 26.

<sup>21</sup> Ray S. Cline. The CIA Under Reagan, Bush and Casey: The Evolution of the Agency from Roosevelt to Reagan (Washington: Acropolis Books, 1981) p. 126.



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