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# Corporatization of Covert Infrastructure: Public- Private Partnerships in Covert Action

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## **Abstract**

In the years following WWII, the CIA adopted a new model of covert infrastructure with which to carry out covert intervention — the corporatized model. Covert infrastructure refers to the logistical, human, and material support needed for covert action missions. This can include safehouses, letter drop locations, relationships with political dissidents, intelligence sources, weapons caches, and transportation. Under more traditional approaches, this infrastructure was painstakingly built and maintained over months and years at great financial cost and political risk. Under the corporatized model, intelligence services leverage the strengths of private contractors, front companies, organized crime syndicates, smugglers, and mercenaries to replicate this covert infrastructure in a way that provides intelligence services with plausible deniability, lower costs, and greater flexibility.

In this thesis, by examining several case studies, I set out to answer the questions of why a state would choose to adopt this corporatized model — what its strengths are — and how widespread this practice is.

I examine one case study very closely: the US, French, and Belgian intervention in Congo in the early 1960s, and show that all three states employed some variation of this model. I then briefly examine several other case studies on the surface level to show that this was not isolated to a single event.

I then conclude by illustrating that it appears these same strategies are being employed by a variety of states today still and call for greater research into how corporatization is employed in covert intervention strategies today.

In the years following WWII, the United States' CIA adopted a new strategy for covert interventions and espionage. The new strategy relied on network of front companies — called proprietaries — which were nominally private companies covertly owned by the CIA, legitimately private contractors, and other private actors. I refer to this strategy or model as “corporatization.”

In this thesis, I will demonstrate that this shift in strategy took place, examine the strategy itself, and begin to answer the questions of why this corporatized strategy of covert infrastructure was adopted, and how widespread the corporatization strategy was and is. To illustrate these points, I will examine the case study of US, French, and Belgian intervention in Congo in the early 1960s, as well as some brief anecdotes from other interventions. Lastly, I will conclude by looking at what appear to be contemporary implementations of this strategy and call for further research to understand the state of corporatization of covert infrastructure today.

## Literature Review

To this point, no other scholars deal with this question directly. Political scientists and international relations scholars have discussed at length the reasons *why* states intervene and under what circumstances states will choose to intervene covertly versus overtly, but as for the exact modalities used *to intervene*, scholars in our field are relatively silent. Austin Carson sees covert action as a means of signaling a desire for cooperation and shared secrecy to prevent conflict escalation.<sup>1</sup> Lindsey O'Rourke sees covert intervention as simply a means of intervention to avoid backlash — if a state has chosen to intervene but domestic public support is low, they will simply choose to do so

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<sup>1</sup> Austin Carson, *Secret Wars: Covert Conflict in International Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018).

covertly rather than choose to not intervene.<sup>2</sup> Michael Poznansky, the third main scholar in our field working on the topic, sees things similarly to O'Rourke, though from a legal perspective. Poznansky argues that when a state has chosen to intervene and they cannot construct a reasonably convincing legal justification for intervening, they will still intervene, but simply use covert means.<sup>3</sup>

Some historians have dealt with the topic in small snippets, documenting how a *specific instance* of covert intervention was carried out, but again, no systematic comparison between different case studies exists. There is no broader analysis of how the specific modalities of covert intervention have changed and evolved over time and to fit different situations.<sup>4</sup> To quote political scientist Melissa Willard-Foster from her 2019 book *Toppling Foreign Governments*, “almost no research addresses how states pursue regime-change operations.”<sup>5</sup>

International relations scholar Andrew Thomson seems to come the closest to analyzing this question in his book *Outsourced Empire*. Thomson documents what he sees as a general shift toward the outsourcing of state power by the United States to various non-state actors: proxy forces, private contractors, and local militias. He deals with the question of CIA covert intervention as only a small part of his larger analysis and, I believe, misses some important nuance and distinction because of that.

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<sup>2</sup> Lindsey O'Rourke, *Covert Regime Change: America's Secret Cold War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018).

<sup>3</sup> Michael Poznansky, “Feigning Compliance: Covert Action and International Law,” *International Studies Quarterly* no. 63 (2019), 72-84.

<sup>4</sup> Loch Johnson, *Secret Agencies: U.S. Intelligence in a Hostile World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), John Prados, *Presidents' Secret Wars: CIA and Pentagon Covert Operations from World War II Through the Persian Gulf* (Chicago: Elephant Paperbacks, 1996), Gregory Trevorton, *Covert Action: The Limits of Intervention in the Postwar World* (New York: Basic Book Publishers, 1987), Charles Ameringer, *U.S. Foreign Intelligence: The Secret Side of American History* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1990), and Mark M. Lowenthal, *Intelligence: From Secrets to Policy* (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2006).

<sup>5</sup> Melissa Willard-Foster, *Toppling Foreign Governments: The Logic of Regime Change* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), 50.

Thomson posits that while other states in other times have and still use the corporatized model of covert infrastructure which I have identified, the United States' implementation is somehow unique.<sup>6</sup> The US in the post-war era first, intervene on a larger scale and second, inhabits a fundamentally different role than other states according to Thomson. In support of the former point, Thomson says that the US intervenes far more than any other state, so it should be treated as unique on that basis. In support of the latter point, Thomson sees the US as the sole arbiter of the so-called liberal world. Thomson sees the US as a sort of lord protector of capitalism, ensuring that markets, labor, and resources in the global south remain open to exploitation by Western corporations.<sup>7</sup>

Instead, however, in the empirical analysis we see a much messier and complex reality in which all major powers seem to employ some variation on this strategy. It appears then that as many states employ this strategy and conduct covert interventions, the number and scale of both interventions and corporatization of interventions seems to be roughly proportional to the given state's relative power. Put simply, great powers tend to use covert intervention. The greater their relative power, the more they intervene. Thus, as the United States is by far the most powerful state, we should expect them to intervene the most simply because they are the most powerful, not because they are uniquely interventionist.

As to Thomson's theory that the United States occupies a fundamentally different role than other states, once again, my empirical analysis shows that that is an oversimplification. In the case study of intervention in Congo for example, we see the United States, Belgium, and France, all intervening independently. At times their goals aligned, and they cooperated. At other times however, their goals

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<sup>6</sup> Andrew Thomson, *Outsourced Empire: How Militias, Mercenaries, and Contractors Support US Statecraft* (London: Pluto Press, 2018), 8.

<sup>7</sup> Andrew Thomson, *Outsourced Empire: How Militias, Mercenaries, and Contractors Support US Statecraft* (London: Pluto Press, 2018), 9-10, 165.

were in conflict, and they worked against each other. Each state was pursuing their own interests and acted accordingly.

A second scholar whose work has proved invaluable to my analysis is Mark Lowenthal, a former CIA official turned historian. In his excellent book *Intelligence*, Lowenthal discusses covert intervention in depth, though mostly in the abstract. This discussion provides valuable insights and a framework from which to approach the question of “why corporatize?”

Lowenthal outlines the major pre-requisites for any covert intervention mission, giving us four major problems that must be addressed before a mission can take shape. To understand these costs, we must first understand a term that he introduces: plumbing. Lowenthal describes plumbing as the necessary infrastructure for covert operations — equipment, false documents, foreign assets, prearranged meeting places, safe houses, and transportation, to name just a few. Plumbing is expensive, time-consuming, and politically sensitive to both set up and to maintain. Plumbing accounts for three of the four main problems. The final problem that must be addressed is connections back to the aggressor state. So according to Lowenthal, the four common problems that all covert intervention plans must address are as follows.<sup>8</sup>

1. Plausible Deniability
2. Financial Cost
3. Political Cost
4. Flexibility

The corporatization strategy addresses each of these four problems, which I believe, is exactly why it was adopted by both the United States and many other states around the world.

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<sup>8</sup> Mark Lowenthal, *Intelligence: From Secrets to Policy*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2004), 158.

Corporatization addresses plausible deniability by providing at least one layer of separation between uniformed or acknowledged state actors, and the covert action. This could mean that the actors themselves are employed by a private contractor or front company, are independent mercenaries or smugglers, or are part of an organized crime syndicate that has an agreement with the aggressor state. In any case however, they have no clear or direct connection to the state and can thus be denied.<sup>9</sup>

Corporatization addresses financial costs by providing a subsidy to plumbing. It acts as a budgetary force multiplier. Airlines covertly owned by the CIA for example, ran legitimate commercial traffic to avoid suspicion, and private contractors or criminal organizations conduct far more operations than just those contracted to states. In those cases then, the state intelligence service is only paying for a small fraction of the overhead. In most cases, it is far cheaper for a state to use a front company, contractor, or illicit actor than it is for them to keep skilled pilots, mechanics, and technicians on retainer, and to keep airplanes, spare parts, trucks, and equipment warehoused until they are needed. Any time those assets are generating any revenue *not* as part of a state's covert action mission, it is a subsidy for the state's plumbing.<sup>10</sup>

Corporatization addresses the issue of political costs in much the same way as financial costs. Thomson addresses this perfectly in *Outsourced Empire*, when he discusses the value of a "light footprint," as it allows states to conduct operations at a much lower cost of political capital by simply having fewer identifiable state personnel and assets directly involved.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Andrew Thomson, *Outsourced Empire: How Militias, Mercenaries, and Contractors Support US Statecraft* (London: Pluto Press, 2018), 164-167.

<sup>10</sup> Loch K. Johnson, *Secret Agencies: U.S. Intelligence in a Hostile World*, 161-162, and Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, 1975-76 (Church Committee), 94<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2d Sess., 1976, S. Rep. No. 94-755, 208, 248-251.

<sup>11</sup> Andrew Thomson, *Outsourced Empire: How Militias, Mercenaries, and Contractors Support US Statecraft* (London: Pluto Press, 2018), 4, and Leonard Mosely, *Dulles: A Biography of Eleanor, Allen, and John Foster Dulles and Their Family Network* (New York: The Dial Press, 1978), 296.

Lastly, the problem of inflexibility is also addressed by corporatization. Rather than skilled agents embedded in a target country for months or years, building ties with political dissidents, acquiring safehouses, stockpiling weapons, and arranging meeting places or letter drops, a front company or contractor has plausible reasoning to do so overnight. A legitimate airline starting service in a new city for example, would raise little suspicion by leasing hangars, buying trucks and housing, training radio operators, pilots, and mechanics, importing personnel from their home country, and building relationships with public figures. Orvis Nelson, an airline entrepreneur who helped create and manage several CIA-owned airlines, explained this perfectly in an interview with *The Washington Post* in 1976.

If I were sitting in a position where I was curious about what was going on in troubled areas, there are two things I would be damned well interested in. The first is information. The second is transportation to get in and out, to get any information and, perhaps, to do some other air activities. You have mobility. You know who and what are going in and out. You know who people's associates are. You are in a position to move your people about.<sup>12</sup>

From that quote, it is little wonder why covertly owned airlines were a favorite tool of the CIA during the Cold War era.

## Empirical Evidence

To understand the corporatization of CIA covert infrastructure of course, the first step is to understand what it looked like before corporatization. In the first decade or so of its existence, from the late 1940s to the late 1950s, the CIA strained to meet policymakers' demands. Presidents were ordering the CIA to intervene more frequently and more aggressively as the Cold War ramped up and the Truman

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<sup>12</sup> John Marks, "The CIA's Corporate Shell Game: Airline Connection," *The Washington Post*, July 11, 1976, <https://www.proquest.com/hnpwashingtonpost/docview/146588671/C2F25D4ECE884F11PQ/1?accountid=14657>.



Doctrine came into effect, expecting results quickly. An investigative committee in the House of Representatives (the Pike Committee) found that during this period, CIA covert action missions were “[approved in an] irregular [manner], sloppily implemented, and at times have been forced on a reluctant CIA by the President and his National Security Advisor.”<sup>13</sup> Due to the difficulties and costs of plumbing outlined by Lowenthal, and based on the CIA’s budget and available political capital, they could not possibly create and maintain adequate plumbing in all countries that the executive branch might ask them to intervene in, so they had to shift strategies.

Initially, they appear to have largely relied on their counterparts in the US military for logistical support. In Indonesia and Tibet, the CIA was supporting rebel paramilitary forces against their respective governments. In Indonesia, the CIA relied on the US Navy to keep their rebels armed and supplied. As pressure increased, the Navy feared exposure and escalation of the conflict, and stopped supplying CIA clients. Similarly in Tibet, Air Force cargo planes were flying arms and equipment over the Himalayas to rebel forces arrayed against the Peoples Republic of China. In 1960 when the USSR shot down an American U2 spy plane however, all US flights over communist controlled airspace were grounded. This included the Air Force resupply flights into China. Once again, the CIA client force was left unsupported.<sup>14</sup>

Perhaps most dramatically, this lack of expected military support was felt during the Bay of Pigs invasion attempt of 1961. The plan was that the intervention would use only CIA assets. The force had been recruited and trained by the CIA and the CIA provided logistical and limited combat air support via proprietaries. Then CIA Director Allen Dulles however, understood that there was a distinct possibility that the plan would fail and that overt intervention from the US Air Force or Navy would be needed to

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<sup>13</sup> House Select Committee on Intelligence, 1976., as published in *The Village Voice*, <https://archive.org/details/Village-Voice-Pike-Report-CIA>, 83-84.

<sup>14</sup> John Prados, *Presidents’ Secret Wars: CIA and Pentagon Covert Operations from World War II Through the Persian Gulf* (Chicago: Elephant Paperbacks, 1996), 137, 166.

ultimately secure success. Dulles was convinced that “when the chips were down – when the crisis arose in reality, any action required for success would be authorized rather than permit the enterprise to fail.”<sup>15</sup> Of course, no help came from the military, and the invasion attempt ended in failure and embarrassment.

I believe the Bay of Pigs represented a final straw of sorts. This was not only embarrassing for the CIA, but the very public failure very nearly resulted in the CIA being dissolved.<sup>16</sup> After that point, I believe the CIA was determined to manage their own support, and proprietaries, contractors, and illicit partners were potentially far more reliable.

The shift to more complete corporatization was initially incidental. During the Chinese Civil War, one of the very earliest CIA missions was supporting Chiang Kai-Shek’s Nationalist forces. In pursuit of this mission, they employed Civil Air Transport (CAT), a commercial cargo airline based in China, but privately owned by American citizens. The CIA hired CAT planes to fly agents, assets, and equipment around the country. As the situation worsened for the Nationalists and their forces were cut off from one another, CAT planes became the only way they could move at all.

In 1949, CAT was facing bankruptcy and unable to pay their pilots and crews or buy fuel or spare parts, so the CIA secretly injected cash into CAT to keep it afloat. The next year, 1950, the situation was still worse, so the CIA purchased CAT outright, making it the first CIA proprietary. Initially this was just to maintain the vital airlift capability and to prevent the assets of CAT from falling into the hands of the Communist forces.<sup>17</sup>

For several years, CAT was the only proprietary and the Agency still planned to liquidate it. However, as more occasions to use CAT arose, the more indispensable it appeared. It was soon deemed

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<sup>15</sup> Lucien S. Vandenbroucke, “The ‘Confessions’ of Allen Dulles: New Evidence on the Bay of Pigs,” in *Diplomatic History* <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44363812>

<sup>16</sup> Lucien S. Vandenbroucke, “The ‘Confessions’ of Allen Dulles: New Evidence on the Bay of Pigs,” in *Diplomatic History* <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44363812>

<sup>17</sup> CIA, *Clandestine Services History, Civil Air Transport (CAT): A Proprietary Airline 1946-1955*, Volume II, 15-23.

a good choice to have purchased and to keep CAT and a playbook of sorts was developed from CAT experience on how to create and run proprietaries, called the “Proprietary Management System.”<sup>18</sup>

In the mid-1960s, the CIA commissioned an internal history of CAT to be written. It is four volumes long and has since been declassified. In this history, not only are the successes of CAT documented extensively, but it is explicitly praised as having been a good choice to purchase and keep CAT, but also to purchase and create more proprietaries modeled after CAT and using the Proprietary Management System, which is exactly what the CIA did.<sup>19</sup>

From that same history, we get a glimpse of the vast network of proprietary airlines that was subsequently created, largely by one man — George Doole.<sup>20</sup> Doole took to the task with enthusiasm, creating a complex web of shell companies, and shells within shells, constantly shuffling assets between them all to obfuscate their clandestine activities. The web was so big and so complex that reportedly, nobody at the CIA besides Doole knew all the proprietaries, how many employees they had, or how many planes they had. Former CIA Director Richard Helms claims that he once asked one of his staffers to account for all of Doole’s planes and companies. After three months of work, the staffer returned saying that “he could never be more than 90% certain” that a particular plane or airline was part of the proprietary network.<sup>21</sup> Part of this difficulty is the structure of the empire, and part is that in order to obfuscate their true mission, all of Doole’s airlines ran legitimate commercial traffic so as to not raise suspicion. They were the gold standard of plausible deniability.

Addressing one of the other big difficulties of covert intervention, Doole’s proprietaries were excellent budgetary force multipliers as well. Sources disagree on whether proprietaries were ever

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<sup>18</sup> Church Committee, Book I, 222-226.

<sup>19</sup> CIA, Clandestine Services History, *Civil Air Transport (CAT): A Proprietary Airline 1946-1955, Volume II*, 12, 38, 68.

<sup>20</sup> Charles D. Ameringer, *U.S. Foreign Intelligence: The Secret Side of American History* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1990), 235, and CAT history, Volume III, 202-203.

<sup>21</sup> In Arizona: A Spymaster Remembered, April 7, 1986, CIA CREST Archive, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp90-00965r000706680001-7>.

profitable or not, and if they were, exactly how profitable. If the proprietaries were ever profitable, sources then dutifully disagree on what exactly would happen to those profits. According to former CIA directors from this period William Colby<sup>22</sup> and Richard Helms,<sup>23</sup> profits from proprietary CIA front companies would be returned to the US Treasury rather than being used by the Agency.

However, the Church Committee found that at least between 1958 and 1975, if a proprietary company was profitable, they would keep the profits to cover future operating expenses, or if “funds [are] in excess of its current or foreseeable needs, [it] is required to return such funds to the Agency.” The ultimate disposition of the profits from proprietaries was then to be determined by internal CIA project reviews. Of those internal project reviews though, a former CIA employee familiar with the program “suggested strongly that these provisions were inadequate.”<sup>24</sup>

Assuming the Church Committee’s report is more accurate than the Helms and Colby interviews, the common pro-CIA defense, is that the profits of proprietaries — when they existed — were very small when compared to the entire budget of the CIA. The insinuation of that defense is that the sums are so small as to not be worrisome. While they likely were not enough money for large operations that involved years of preparation, such as the Bay of Pigs invasion, the Church Committee worried that it would be enough money for ‘a small-scale, high-risk covert project,’ that, if public funds did not have to be appropriated for, would not be subject to oversight.<sup>25</sup>

This concern seems particularly relevant as the Pike Committee found that during this time period, the CIA Director could unilaterally approve and conduct some covert operations without National Security Council (NSC) approval. The CIA Director (DCI) only needed to take plans for covert

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<sup>22</sup> Loch Johnson, “A Conversation with Former DCI William E. Colby: Spymaster During the ‘Year of the Intelligence Wars’” in *Intelligence and National Security*, 258.

<sup>23</sup> Loch Johnson, “Spymaster Richard Helms: An Interview With the Former US Director of Central Intelligence,” in *Intelligence and National Security*, 31.

<sup>24</sup> Church Committee, Book I, 235-6, and 253.

<sup>25</sup> Church Committee, Book I, 254.

operations that he deemed “politically sensitive” to the NSC. If he deemed them to not be politically sensitive and had the funds to support an operation from proprietary profits, theoretically, a CIA Director could carry out a covert operation, albeit relatively small, completely on his own.<sup>26</sup> The Church Committee then found that between 1961 and 1975, only 14% of CIA covert action projects were “considered on a case-by-case basis” by the NSC. Covert actions not reviewed by the NSC were to be “low-risk, low-cost” actions, such as placing a propaganda piece in a foreign newspaper; however, there was no mechanism to ensure that was always the case.<sup>27</sup>

Alternatively, if we assume that Helms and Colby are correct, rather than the Church Committee, which is to say, that profits from proprietaries could stay within the proprietary, that was still a net benefit to the CIA. If money stays in Air America’s account rather than going back to the CIA, Air America can use that money to pay pilots and crews, and to repair and fuel their airplanes which fly in support of CIA covert action missions. The airline still flies at the behest of the CIA, so whether the CIA wrote them a check or not, Air America will fly CIA missions. In that sense, it matters little if funds remained with a proprietary or were returned to the CIA. According to historian Charles Ameringer, not only were many of the larger air proprietaries (Civil Air Transport, Air America, and Air Asia) profitable throughout most of the 1960s, but thanks to those profits, “the CIA was largely spared having to pay in any new money for specific projects.”<sup>28</sup>

In the cases when air proprietaries were not profitable, despite requiring subsidies from the CIA budget, they still served as budgetary force multipliers for CIA covert action. The CIA was willing to maintain capabilities that were not in use in order to be better prepared for future covert action

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<sup>26</sup> Pike Committee as published in *The Village Voice*, 84.

<sup>27</sup> Church Committee, Book I, 56-57, and Johnson, *Reflections*, 9.

<sup>28</sup> Charles D. Ameringer, *U.S. Foreign Intelligence: The Secret Side of American History*, 235.

missions.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, any income air proprietaries could generate would help offset those sunk costs, and effectively boost the overall CIA budget.<sup>30</sup>

As a rule, air proprietaries conducted some regular commercial operations in order to maintain their cover.<sup>31</sup> In order to further maintain that cover and defray their operating costs, the CIA also pressured other government agencies to sign contracts with their air proprietaries.<sup>32</sup> The proprietaries also appear to have, largely, been investing their cash on hand to profit from the interest.<sup>33</sup> Once again, even if they were not profitable, they were bringing some money in from commercial contracts and investments that the CIA would not have had otherwise. They were offsetting the already accepted sunk costs.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Select Committee To Study Governmental Operations, 94th Cong., 2d sess., 1976, Book I, 208, and Andrew Thomson, *Outsourced Empire: How Militias, Mercenaries, and Contractors Support US Statecraft* (London: Pluto Press, 2018), 55.

<sup>30</sup> Charles D. Ameringer, *U.S. Foreign Intelligence: The Secret Side of American History*, 234-235.

<sup>31</sup> Church Committee, Book I, 208, 251, and Loch K. Johnson, *Secret Agencies: U.S. Intelligence in a Hostile World*, 161-162.

<sup>32</sup> Church Committee Book I, 248. This includes contracts with the US Air Force to perform aircraft maintenance, airlift of US military supplies and personnel, and firefighting aircraft services to the US Forest Service.

<sup>33</sup> Church Committee, Book I, 207, 218.

<sup>34</sup> Church Committee, Book I, 208, 251.

	<b>Not Profitable</b>	<b>Profitable</b>
<b>CIA Keeps Profits</b>	Proprietaries partially subsidize CIA budget for covert action.	Best case scenario for CIA. Proprietaries are a net positive line item. Proprietaries can provide funding for new operations independent of Congress.
<b>CIA Does Not Keep Profits</b>	See above. Proprietaries are subsidizing covert action budget, but nothing more.	Proprietaries are heavily subsidizing covert action budget, covering nearly all operating costs of individual operations, effectively costing the CIA nothing from their budget.

## Case Study: Congo

In the summer of 1960, Congo was hurriedly granted independence from Belgium. The pro-European state of Katanga — where most of Congo’s mineral wealth is — seceded immediately with the approval of Belgium and France, sparking a civil war known as the Congo Crisis. As Congo is rich with lucrative and strategically important minerals,<sup>35</sup> it quickly became a Cold War battleground with the UN sending in peacekeepers and the USSR, United States, France, and Belgium all supporting client forces in the region.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> K. D. Nichols, *The Road to Trinity* (New York: Morrow, 1987), 44-47, RG 59 General Records of the Department of State, Records Relating to the Congo and the Congo Working Group, 1960-1964. Correspondence/Individuals and Private Organizations, and USGS National Minerals Information Center. “Cobalt Statistics and Information.”

<sup>36</sup> United Nations Archive, United Nations Operation in the Congo (ONUC) (1960-1964), <https://search.archives.un.org/united-nations-operation-in-the-congo-onuc-1960-1964>.

I believe that covert intervention in Congo in the early 1960s served as a prototypical implementation of this new fully corporatized intervention strategy for the United States most of all, but also for France and Belgium.

The CIA Chief of Station for Congo from 1960-63 — commander of all CIA operations within the country — was a man named Larry Devlin. Former CIA insider John Stockwell said that Devlin became famous within the Agency for his performance in Congo. After Congo, Devlin was assigned as Chief of Station for Laos and next as Division Chief — putting him in charge of several Station Chiefs — of East Asia which included countries the CIA was extremely active in such as Laos and Vietnam.<sup>37</sup> Stockwell went so far as to say that Devlin was known internally as “one of the CIA’s historically great covert operators.”<sup>38</sup> Based on the reputation and promotions he earned for his performance in Congo, we can safely assume that Devlin’s actions were approved of and endorsed by CIA leadership. So, what were those actions and how did he address the four difficulties of covert action that Lowenthal lays out?

In Congo, the CIA relied extensively on their airline front companies, in particular, Seven Seas Airlines. Nominally, they were a small privately held charter cargo airline headquartered in New York. They held airlift contracts to move equipment and personnel into and within Congo for the United Nations, the Congolese government, and the rebel Katangese government. As a CIA front, they were also flying missions for the Agency.<sup>39</sup>

In February of 1961, a Seven Seas Airlines cargo plane landed in Katanga with three French-made Fouga Magister jet fighter training aircraft. The planes were bound for the Katangan military and

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<sup>37</sup> John Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies: A CIA Story* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1978), 71.

<sup>38</sup> John Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies: A CIA Story* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1978), 136.

<sup>39</sup> For more on Seven Seas Airlines and confirmatory evidence of their status as a CIA proprietary, see RG 59 General Records of the Department of State, Records Relating to the Congo and the Congo Working Group, 1960-1964. Seven Seas and CIA, *Clandestine Services History, Civil Air Transport (CAT): A Proprietary Airline 1946-1955*, Volume III, 205. Several sources allude to Seven Seas as a CIA proprietary, but with little evidence. The strongest direct evidence I have found to date, is that Seven Seas’ attorney was John Mason, who is mentioned in the CAT history as having been a CIA agent specifically charged with managing proprietary airlines.



though initially designed as training aircraft, had been outfitted with guns and rocket racks. Clearly these were intended as offensive weapons.<sup>40</sup> The Magisters were hurried away, but the cargo plane and its crew were seized by UN peacekeepers. Exposed as an illicit arms trafficker, Seven Seas Airlines soon lost their contracts to supply and support the UN mission and went bankrupt.<sup>41</sup>

The next move again, illustrates the utility of the corporatized model of covert infrastructure. Less than two months after Seven Seas dissolved, a new company, Foreign Air Transport Development (FATD), showed up in Congo. They made several suspicious aircraft purchases and sales, including some that were purposely hidden from other branches of the US government to create a new airline, International Airlines, which has all the hallmarks of a CIA proprietary.<sup>42</sup>

The following month, FATD brokered a deal for Iranian Airways — who had significant CIA ties and may have been a proprietary company themselves as they were setup with the help of Orvis Nelson, an aviation entrepreneur who helped the CIA create several proprietaries<sup>43</sup> — to sell cargo planes to the Congolese government so they could create their own flag carrying airline. The deal was that Congo would put up the money and FATD would hold it in escrow until Iranian Airways demonstrated the airworthiness of the aircraft and delivered them.

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<sup>40</sup> RG 59 Central Decimal Files (CDF), 1960-1963. Box 1027. This was not the standard configuration, these aircraft had been purposefully modified, presumably specifically for Katanga. The aircraft came from the Fouga-Potez plant in France, rather than from a national arsenal as has been postulated by some, indicating that when the order for the aircraft was placed, the machine gun and rocket rack additions were included as part of the order.

<sup>41</sup> Johnson v. Drew, 218 Cal. App. 2d, (1963), <https://law.justia.com/cases/california/court-of-appeal/2d/218/614.html>, and RG 59 General Records of the Department of State, Records Relating to the Congo and the Congo Working Group, 1960-1964. Seven Seas.

<sup>42</sup> RG 59 General Records of the Department of State, Records Relating to the Congo and the Congo Working Group, 1960-1964. Air Jordan, Plane Logger "Registration Details For N90702 (Foreign Air Transport Development) DC-6-" <https://www.planelogger.com/Aircraft/Registration/N90702/631195>, and Plane Logger "Registration Details For N90703 (Foreign Air Transport Development) DC-6-" <https://www.planelogger.com/Aircraft/Registration/N90703/631211>.

<sup>43</sup> Abbas Atrvash "The History of Iranian Air Transportation Industry," Iran Chamber Society, July 27, 2020, [http://www.iranchamber.com/history/articles/history\\_iranian\\_air\\_transportation\\_industry.php](http://www.iranchamber.com/history/articles/history_iranian_air_transportation_industry.php) and Jeff McConnell, "A 36 Year History: The CIA and Airlines." COUNTERSPY: Women Speak Out. [http://altgov2.org/wp-content/uploads/CounterSpy\\_8-2.pdf](http://altgov2.org/wp-content/uploads/CounterSpy_8-2.pdf), and John Marks, "The CIA's Corporate Shell Game: Airline Connection," *The Washington Post*, July 11, 1976, <https://www.proquest.com/hnpwashingtonpost/docview/146588671/C2F25D4ECE884F11PQ/1?accountid=14657>.

This matched a pattern of creating new proprietary airlines as outlined in the above mentioned “Proprietary Management System,” the CIA’s playbook of how to create and run front companies. The CIA would offer to make the initial cash investment to start a flag carrying airline for a developing country. The deal was that the new airline would be a CIA proprietary for a period of time and once it was established and profitable, they would sell it to the state or investors from the state. This was done in at least Cambodia and South Vietnam as well.<sup>44</sup> This deal in Congo looks like an obvious case of the CIA creating new proprietaries for long-term use in the region. These would be tied into the local government and economy and would likely be at least profit-neutral very soon, costing the CIA little-to-nothing to maintain their plumbing. Of note here in particular, this deal was upsetting to Belgium whose flag carrier Sabena would be supplanted by a Congolese flag carrier, demonstrating that the US and Belgium were independent states looking out for their own best interests, not part of a great unitary system.<sup>45</sup>

In Congo, the CIA had no help from the military for logistics, training, or combat support. CIA covert intervention was almost exclusively carried out by proprietaries. When Devlin was promoted to Laos and East Asia next, he took this corporatized model with him, relying almost exclusively on Agency proprietaries to carry out and support covert action missions there. This model was also adopted agency-wide. John Stockwell describes the 1970s intervention in Angola as following this same pattern.<sup>46</sup>

In short, the CIA’s complete corporatization in Congo solved all four difficulties of covert intervention. It provided plausible deniability as evidenced by the complete lack of real fallout when

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<sup>44</sup> CIA, *Clandestine Services History, Civil Air Transport (CAT): A Proprietary Airline 1946-1955, Volume III*, 205, Joe Baugher, “1942 USAAF Serial Numbers,” [http://www.joebaugher.com/usaf\\_serials/1942\\_1.html](http://www.joebaugher.com/usaf_serials/1942_1.html), RG 59 Central Decimal Files (CDF), 1960-1963. Box 1980, Plane Logger “International Airlines - Fleet” [https://www.planelogger.com/Airline/Fleet/International\\_Airlines/129598](https://www.planelogger.com/Airline/Fleet/International_Airlines/129598), and “Cable to Nice from Director RE Censorship from Cuba,” September 12, 1962, <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/document/0005640614>.

<sup>45</sup> RG 59 Central Decimal Files (CDF), 1960-1963. Box 1980.

<sup>46</sup> John Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies: A CIA Story* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1978), 265-268 and RG 59 Central Decimal Files (CDF), 1960-1963. Box 1027

Seven Seas was caught illicitly trafficking arms. It provided a financial subsidy to CIA plumbing as evidenced by Devlin's reference to "unorthodox funding methods,"<sup>47</sup> likely referencing the fact that Seven Seas was flying cargo for the UN and local governments, and that FATD brokered several shady airplane deals. Solving the political cost problem is closely related to deniability and financial costs, but it also allowed the CIA to take a "light footprint" approach that Andrew Thomson mentions as one of the main reasons for outsourcing.<sup>48</sup>

Lastly, relying on proprietaries and contractors allowed the CIA to be flexible and act quickly. This is made clear as when Seven Seas went bankrupt and dissolved, new front companies were operating in Congo almost immediately. Perhaps the best illustration of the flexibility and agility that front companies gave the CIA in Congo though is a from a *New York Times* article from the time, which stated that the "little CIA office in Leopoldville [the capital of Congo] mushroomed overnight into a virtual embassy and miniature war department."<sup>49</sup> This "war department" included an air force. Their American surplus WWII B-26s were serviced by European contract mechanics and flown by Cuban exile pilots that had been recruited for the Bay of Pigs invasion, then kept on as proprietary employees.<sup>50</sup>

To this point, we understand perhaps why the United States adopted a corporatized model and what it looked like in practice, but in looking at the behavior of France and Belgium in Congo, it becomes clear that Andrew Thomson is incorrect, that the United States is not uniquely interventionist, uniquely corporatized, nor is there the neat division of labor in the so-called liberal world order with the United States acting as arbiter of free trade while other states sit idly by. Instead, we see French and Belgian corporatized interventions that at times conflict with the US and with each other.

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<sup>47</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Volume XXIII, Congo, 1960-1968*, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2010), Document 117.

<sup>48</sup> Andrew Thomson, *Outsourced Empire: How Militias, Mercenaries, and Contractors Support US Statecraft* (London: Pluto Press, 2018), 4.

<sup>49</sup> "How CIA Put 'Instant Air Force' Into Congo" *New York Times*, April 26, 1966.

<sup>50</sup> David N. Gibbs, *The Political Economy of Third World Intervention: Mines, Money, and U.S. Policy in the Congo Crisis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 95.

France and Belgium did not have the same network of proprietary front companies for their intelligence services, but they employed a variation on the same corporatized strategy nonetheless. Instead, they relied more on legitimately private companies, mercenaries, smugglers, and arms dealers. Despite the differences in partners and execution, France and Belgium both saw similar results as the US, and both effectively addressed the four common issues with covert intervention.

France appears to have used a cadre of high-profile mercenaries who were nominally retired from the French military. In 1961, the Katangese government invited several high-profile French army officers to come form, train, and command the Katangese military. Most notable of these was Colonel Roger Trinquier. Trinquier was granted leave to assess the situation in Katanga, then when he decided to take the job, was granted immediate early retirement from the French army.<sup>51</sup>

Some scholars have argued that the fact that Trinquier was granted leave and early retirement is indicative of support from the French government for his taking the role.<sup>52</sup> Trinquier and the others were also part of OAS though, a right-wing conspiracy within the French military who had attempted to overthrow the French government over President De Gaulle's intended decolonization of Algeria.<sup>53</sup> Some scholars and analysts from the time, believed that France was thrilled to have Trinquier and company go to Katanga merely to get them out of France as OAS were still dangerous enemies of the state.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Central Intelligence Bulletin, 1961/02/08, CIA CREST Archive, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/02000190>.

<sup>52</sup> Current Intelligence Weekly Summary, 9 February 1961, CIA CREST Archive, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp79-00927a003100010001-7>, Jules Gerard-Libois, *Katanga Secession*, trans. Rebecca Young (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1966), 166, and Williams 164-165.

<sup>53</sup> Central Intelligence Bulletin, 1960/10/14, CIA CREST Archive, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/02977791>, and Central Intelligence Bulletin, 1961/02/02, CIA CREST Archive, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/06788696>.

<sup>54</sup> Central Intelligence Bulletin, 1961/01/25, CIA CREST Archive, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/02000180>, Susan Williams, *Who Killed Hammarskjold? The UN, the Cold War and White Supremacy in Africa* (London: Hurst & Company, 2011), 167, Ernest W. Lefevre and Wynfred Joshua, *United Nations Peacekeeping in the Congo: 1960-1964: An Analysis of Political, Executive and Military Control Volume 2* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1966), 191-195.

CIA Station Chief Larry Devlin, however, was reportedly told that Trinquier and company were encouraged to take the Katanga jobs because the French government wanted to support Katanga. The French government then used Trinquier and company's status as failed coup plotters as leverage, offering that if they took the jobs in Katanga in service of French interests, that they would be offered clemency for their treason and eventually allowed to move back to France in peace.<sup>55</sup> Though there is still clearly some disagreement on whether Trinquier and company were acting as agents of the French state in this capacity, it seems likely given his history as a French covert operator.

All of this made Trinquier a perfectly deniable asset. He was officially retired and was at least partly labelled *persona non grata*. He and other French mercenaries were on the Katangese payroll, meaning France's financial costs were heavily subsidized. They represented little in-terms of political costs as — publicly at least — they were private actors perhaps even rebels.

The second instance of potential French state-backed covert intervention in support of Katanga is the supply of arms through illicit markets and merchants. As mentioned above, the three Fouga Magister jets originated in France. The exact level of state complicity though is disagreed upon. Scholars range from the French government passively allowing the sale of the jets,<sup>56</sup> to the company selling the jets "probably with government encouragement."<sup>57</sup> A French Foreign Officer at the time told their counterparts in the American Embassy in Paris that the transaction would likely have required "complicity" from the French government but did not know anything specific.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Leonard Mosely, *Dulles: A Biography of Eleanor, Allen, and John Foster Dulles and Their Family Network* (New York: The Dial Press, 1978), 165, and Susan Williams, *Who Killed Hammarskjold? The UN, the Cold War and White Supremacy in Africa* (London: Hurst & Company, 2011), 45.

<sup>56</sup> Stephen R. Weissman, *American Foreign Policy in the Congo 1960-1964* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974), 72.

<sup>57</sup> David N. Gibbs *The Political Economy of Third World Intervention: Mines, Money, and U.S. Policy in the Congo Crisis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 116.

<sup>58</sup> RG 59 Central Decimal Files (CDF), 1960-1963. Box 1981.

Looking beyond the Magisters, we see that this is part of a broader strategic pattern of French involvement in illicit arms traffic to Katanga. According to former CIA agent John Stockwell, France was sponsoring arms smugglers to varying degrees, offering false passports and visas.<sup>59</sup> This is an interesting departure from their American counterparts' reliance on their own in-house smuggling infrastructure in the form of air proprietaries.<sup>60</sup> Perhaps France lacked the budget to maintain that much covert infrastructure, or perhaps they simply prioritized the additional deniability and flexibility of using freelance smugglers.<sup>61</sup>

In one such possible case, a French fighter-ace-turned-arms dealer named Pierre Laureys was implicated in a plot to procure fighter-bomber airplanes for Katanga. According to French Foreign Officers corresponding with the US State Department at the time, Laureys was an outlaw. He was acting alone, and France was trying to arrest and prosecute him they claimed, showing that France was not always cooperative with US intelligence.<sup>62</sup> In 1967 however, Laureys shows up again, smuggling combat aircraft to another African secessionist movement, this time in Nigeria in support of the Biafran separatists. This time however, there is firm evidence indicating that Laureys was definitely in the employ of the French state.<sup>63</sup>

If he was doing the same thing in Nigeria in the employ of the French state, then it seems far more likely that he was working for the French state in Congo. Of course, there are plausible alternative explanations. Perhaps the French government saw his private arms dealing in Congo in 1961 and were

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<sup>59</sup> John Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies: A CIA Story* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1978), 193.

<sup>60</sup> For more on the infrastructure of intelligence and covert action, see Mark Lowenthal, *Intelligence: From Secrets to Policy*, (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2006), 158, and Loch Johnson, "A Conversation with Former DCI William E. Colby: Spymaster During the 'Year of the Intelligence Wars,'" *Intelligence and National Security* (2003): 260.

<sup>61</sup> Stockwell, 221.

<sup>62</sup> RG 59 Central Decimal Files (CDF), 1960-1963. Box 1981.

<sup>63</sup> Christopher Griffin, "French Military Policy in the Nigerian Civil War, 1967-1970." *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 26, Issue 1 (2015), 119.

impressed enough to then hire him in 1967. Either way, whether Laureys specifically was working for French intelligence during the Congo Crisis or simply as a freelancer is somewhat immaterial to my argument. We know that France was sponsoring arms traffickers in Katanga, and we know that Laureys was sponsored by France in Biafra, both indicating that France adopted a corporatized strategy.

Additionally, French intelligence had shown a pattern of working with criminal elements and shielding them from prosecution in order to further their covert goals. More specifically, Jacques Foccart, a close personal friend and political ally of Charles De Gaulle, and intelligence official — the rough French equivalent of the CIA's Division Chief for Africa— had shown this willingness.<sup>64</sup> This appears to be institutional as well. As discussed above, in Indochina, Colonel Trinquier operated independently, funding his army through heroin production and trafficking.

Seen through this lens, the arms smuggling into Katanga seems relatively insignificant. If French intelligence would endorse the production and smuggling of heroin around the world, including into allied countries — again challenging the myth of a unitary liberal world-order with the US as its arbiter,<sup>65</sup> why would they be trepidatious about employing small-scale arms smugglers in support of their clients?<sup>66</sup>

In both cases — French mercenaries and smugglers — the four difficulties of covert intervention are once again addressed. Both mercenaries and smugglers offer a high degree of plausible deniability. They get around the issue of financial costs masterfully by having secondary sources of income —

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<sup>64</sup> Alfred McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin: CIA Complicity in the Global Drug Trade* Revised Edition (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2003), 67.

<sup>65</sup> Alfred McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin: CIA Complicity in the Global Drug Trade* Revised Edition (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2003), 67. French intelligence collaborated with and shielded from prosecution the Corsican mafia smuggling heroin into New York in the famous French Connection.

<sup>66</sup> Alfred McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin: CIA Complicity in the Global Drug Trade* Revised Edition (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2003), 67.

Katangese payrolls and arms sales proceeds respectively. They come at an extremely low political cost again because of the deniability and low cost. Lastly, they were imminently flexible as the mercenaries were highly sought after by the rebel state and the smugglers came with their own plumbing already set up.

The case of Belgian interventions is very similar to that of France. Many Belgian mercenaries fought for the Katangese military with the same benefits to Belgium as France above. One key difference was Belgium's use of high-profile private companies, namely the Belgian conglomerate *Societe-Generale de Belgique* (SG) and its subsidiary Congolese mining companies *Union-Miniere* (UM) and *FORMINIERE*. SG allegedly paid for the three Fouga Magisters that the CIA's proprietary airline smuggled into Katanga in February 1961,<sup>67</sup> and paid for and arranged for the smuggling of Dornier DO-28 aircraft with another Belgian company Mitraco in September of 1961,<sup>68</sup> and UM provided a convenient front for purchasing and storing military equipment for Katangese use as much of their equipment was dual-use — 4x4 trucks, explosives, and aircraft.<sup>69</sup>

Once again, we see that this variation on the corporatization strategy provided solutions for the four main difficulties of covert intervention. It was deniable, as much of their equipment had legitimate industrial use and the companies had no official connection to Brussels. SG likely happily paid much or all of the cost themselves in an attempt to protect their long-term profits from Congolese mines, taking care of the financial costs. The political cost was negligible again because of how deniable and cheap the

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<sup>67</sup> RG 59 Central Decimal Files (CDF), 1960-1963. Box 1981. Declassified documents do not specifically name SG, but SG controlled a vast network of companies both in Congo and in Belgium, including a large investment bank and UM, which gave SG control of half of all capital in Congo. They also enjoyed close ties to the Belgian royal family (see Gibbs, 60). They also definitely funded other illicit aircraft purchases for the Katangese government. In September, 1961, SG funded the purchase of several German-made Dornier DO-28s (see RG 59 Central Decimal Files (CDF), 1960-1963. Box 1981).

<sup>68</sup> RG 59 Central Decimal Files (CDF), 1960-1963. Box 1981, and Air America Notebooks From the William M. Leary Papers. Eugene McDermott Library. University of Texas, Dallas. Dallas, TX.

<sup>69</sup> RG 59 Central Decimal Files (CDF), 1960-1963. Box 1981.



operation was. Lastly, like the French arms smugglers above, UM came with its own plumbing. They had massive facilities, workshops, warehouses, airstrips, and personnel already in place, no need for Belgian intelligence to build out networks of contacts, safehouses, or logistics.

While this singular in-depth case study of US, French, and Belgian intervention in Congo illustrates that all three states were interveners and adopted some variation on a corporatized strategy of covert intervention, it is worthwhile to look elsewhere at least briefly to show that intervention and corporatization of covert intervention was by no means limited to these three states and in this particular case.

In Southeast Asia for example, we see a much larger French covert intervention. Roger Trinquier, at the time still in the French army, was given wide leeway to recruit and lead a force of locals in a guerilla war against Communist forces. Trinquier took control of local opium production and trafficking rings, using the proceeds to fund his war. Trinquier was operating largely independent of his chain of command, offering France plausible deniability, was self-funded via drug-trafficking, represented very little in-terms of political cost because he was deniable and self-funded, and though he may have built much of his own plumbing, apparently did so very quickly.<sup>70</sup>

Later, when the United States was fighting its own covert war in Laos, Larry Devlin and others commanded a huge network of proprietary front companies and private contractors who supported forces of mercenaries and local guerillas much like Trinquier. Just as in Congo, the proprietaries and contractors solved the four problems of covert action.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Alfred McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin: CIA Complicity in the Global Drug Trade* Revised Edition (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2003), 131.

<sup>71</sup> John Jacob Nutter, *The CIA's Black Ops: Covert Action, Foreign Policy, and Democracy* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2000), 78-79, and John Prados, *Presidents' Secret Wars: CIA and Pentagon Covert Operations from World War II Through the Persian Gulf* (Chicago: Elephant Paperbacks, 1996), 276.

Other notable cases include KGB operated front companies in the West<sup>72</sup> and using Aeroflot flights — the Soviet flag carrier commercial airline — for intelligence gathering missions.<sup>73</sup> In the 1980s, Israeli intelligence services operated a full-service luxury diving resort in Sudan all as a front through which to smuggle Ethiopian Jewish refugees out of Sudan and to safety in Israel.<sup>74</sup> During the Troubles, UK intelligence services operated front companies — including a laundry service and a brothel — in Northern Ireland to help identify Republican militants.<sup>75</sup> Though deep research on these case studies is beyond the scope of this thesis, it can be assumed that the USSR, Israel, and the United Kingdom all undertook these strategies for the same or similar reasons that the United States, France, and Belgium all did.

Looking more contemporarily, it seems little has changed. In 2020, it was revealed that Switzerland-based encrypted communications firm Crypto AG, used by states around the world, had been secretly owned by the CIA until 2018. Crypto AG's compromised products gave the CIA backdoor access to the secret communications of Iran, Libya, and Argentina, just to name a few, with a CIA report on the matter calling it "the intelligence coup of the century."<sup>76</sup>

Israeli cybersecurity firms are producing powerful hacking tools and maintain close ties to their government and intelligence services. Multiple former chiefs of Mossad — Israel's foreign intelligence

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<sup>72</sup> Statement of Richard L. Palmer on the Infiltration of the Western Financial System by Elements of Russian Organized Crime Before the House Committee on Banking and Financial Services on September 21, 1999, <https://archives-financialservices.house.gov/banking/92199pal.shtml> and Sanshiro Hosaka, "Chekists Penetrate the Transition Economy: The KGB's Self-Reforms during Perestroika," *Problems of Post-Communism*, June 17, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2022.2077219>.

<sup>73</sup> Robert Hutton and Thomas Penny, "KGB Used Aeroflot Jets as Spy Planes, U.K. Files Show," *Bloomberg*, December 27, 2012, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2012-12-28/kgb-used-aeroflot-jets-as-spy-planes-u-k-files-show#xj4y7vzkg>.

<sup>74</sup> Sophia Ankel, "Israel's Elite Mossad Unit Set Up a Luxury Diving Resort in the 1980s as a Front to Smuggle Ethiopian Jews out of Sudan," *Insider*, March 15, 2020, <https://www.insider.com/mossad-red-sea-resort-arous-ethiopian-jews-escape-photos-2020-3>.

<sup>75</sup> "Spies Often Use Business as Cover," *The Economist*, Feb. 22, 2020, <https://www.economist.com/business/2020/02/22/spies-often-use-businesses-as-cover>.

<sup>76</sup> Greg Miller, "The Intelligence Coup of the Century," *The Washington Post*, February 11, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2020/world/national-security/cia-crypto-encryption-machines-espionage/>.

service — are heading cybersecurity firms primarily made up of former Israeli military and intelligence hackers. Direct ties to the state are carefully obscured and may or may not exist. Given the pattern outlined in this thesis however, the problems that corporatization solves, it seems at the very least plausible.<sup>77</sup>

Lastly and most recently, it appears that China is also getting on board with the corporatization model. Though observers have long worried about Chinese tech companies' ties to the Chinese government and the potential for espionage they hold, recent reports indicate that Chinese tech companies such as Huawei and ZTE pose very credible and specific intelligence threats. These include Huawei equipment on cell phone towers near US military bases with the ability to intercept sensitive communications data, and the proposed construction of a monument in Washington D.C. in the perfect position for a listening post.<sup>78</sup>

## Conclusions and Further Research

Though his contributions are valuable, ultimately, Andrew Thomson's claims are perhaps too broad and rigid to apply to the specific study of the modalities of covert intervention. In opposition to his claims, my empirical analysis finds that the United States is not uniquely interventionist nor uniquely corporatized in its intervention. Instead, we see that all great powers appear to employ covert intervention in rough proportion to their relative power, including the United States. Likewise, we see

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<sup>77</sup> Tova Cohen, "Former Israeli Spy Chief and Team of Elite Hackers for Cybersecurity Firm," *Reuters*, March 20, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-israel-cyber-mossad/former-israeli-spy-chief-and-team-of-elite-hackers-form-cybersecurity-firm-idUSKBN1GW1HA>, and Sagi Cohen, "Outgoing Mossad Head Yossi Cohen's Latest Cybersecurity Adventure," *Haaretz*, Dec 13, 2021, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2021-12-13/ty-article/.premium/big-in-japan-ex-mossad-head-yossi-cohens-latest-cybersecurity-adventure/0000017f-e832-df2c-a1ff-fe73fe960000>.

<sup>78</sup> Katie Bo Lillis, "FBI Investigation Determined Chinese-Made Huawei Equipment Could Disrupt US Nuclear Arsenal Communications," *CNN*, July 25, 2022, <https://www.cnn.com/2022/07/23/politics/fbi-investigation-huawei-china-defense-department-communications-nuclear/index.html>.

that many if not all states that employ covert intervention have and likely still do employ some variation of a corporatized — or to use his term, outsourced — strategy for covert intervention.

To understand why this strategy has become so widespread, we need look no further than Mark Lowenthal's proscriptions for covert intervention missions. He tells us that every covert intervention mission must have plausible deniability, be affordable both financially and politically, and be flexible and agile enough to work quickly. The corporatized model provides a simple and effective solution to all four of those hurdles, hence, states of all different government systems, relative power, and positions within the global system have adopted this strategy.

Due to the sensitive and secretive nature of this line of research, further research on contemporary employment of such strategies may prove difficult or impossible, but my research outlined here concerning historical strategies and patterns of covert intervention seem to indicate that this use of private contractors, front companies, public-private partnerships, and illicit actors is very likely still widespread today.

Relationships with private companies and the true nature of front companies will likely remain closely guarded secrets as with Crypto AG (whose ownerships was obscured for even for several years after its dissolution), with little ability for researchers to penetrate. One potential avenue for successful research on this topic going forward is to focus on organize crime syndicates and other illicit actors. Perhaps there are enough clues in court proceedings and arrest records to begin to piece together some of their potential relationships with state intelligence services to see if this pattern still holds true.

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