



Dirty Tricks or Trump Cards: U.S. Covert Action and Counterintelligence

By Roy Godson

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Contrary to popular misconceptions and public branding as "dirty tricks," covert action and counterintelligence can have considerable value. Democracies, while wary of these instruments, have benefited significantly from their use, saving lives, treasure, and gaining strategic advantage. As liberal democracies confront the post-Cold War mix of rogue states and non-state actors, such as criminals and terrorists, and weapons of mass destruction and mass disruption, these clandestine arts may prove to be important tools of statecraft, and perhaps trump cards in the twenty-first century.

Godson defines covert action as influencing events in other parts of the world without attribution, and counterintelligence as identifying, neutralizing, and exploiting the secret activities of others. Together they provide the capability to resist manipulation and control others to advantage. Counterintelligence protects U.S. military, technological, and diplomatic secrets and turns adversary intelligence to U.S. advantage. Covert action enables the United States to weaken adversaries and to assist allies who may be hampered by open acknowledgment of foreign support.

Drawing on contemporary and historical literature, broad-ranging contacts with senior intelligence officials in many countries, as well as his own research and experience as a longtime consultant to the U.S. government, Godson traces the history of U.S. covert action and counterintelligence since 1945, showing that covert action works well when it is part of a well-coordinated policy and when policy makers are committed to succeeding in the long-term. Godson argues that the best counterintelligence is an offensive defense. His exposition of the essential theoretical foundations of both covert action and counterintelligence, supported by historical examples, lays out the ideal conditions for their use, as well as demonstrating why they are so difficult to attain.

This book will be of interest to students and general readers interested in political science, national security, foreign policy, and military policy.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Godson's impressive study, notable for its clarity, defines both counterintelligence and covert action, arguing that both are necessary. Counterintelligence, he writes, includes the identification, neutralization and exploitation of the intelligence activities of others (thus protecting state secrets from adversaries); covert action encompasses efforts to influence events in other parts of the world without revealing or acknowledging involvement. Godson outlines "ideal" counterintelligence and covert action, describes how both have been practiced by the U.S. and suggests possible ways to employ each more effectively in the national interest. Godson, a professor of government at Georgetown University and consultant to the National Security Council, has written a textbook accessible to the general reader.

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Review

"...if you want to understand how the whole thing works at Washington level, and to have an idea of what George W. Bush is hearing from his adviser, then reading this will prove quicker and cheaper than setting up your spy network."

—*Daily Telegram*

"Roy Godson provides much-needed balance, context, and insights for understanding the clandestine arts. As the United States debates the future of its intelligence capability, this provocative, interesting, and well-written book, which explains the significance of covert operations and what it takes to do them well, should be permitted to have a significant impact on the debate."

—Richard Helms, Former Director of Central Intelligence

"An independent analysis of key elements of intelligence, unbiased and unprejudiced—in contrast to the books of many 'insiders.' Godson illuminates the interdependence of the different but potent threats we will face in the 21st century: symbiotic relationships among transnational organized crime, security services, politicians, and terrorists, and the potential use of weapons of mass destruction and mass disruption. He demonstrates how the effective use of the clandestine arts—covert action and counterintelligence—can provide a winning edge. A wake-up call for everyone involved in global security."

—Volker Foertsch, Former Director, Germany's Clandestine Intelligence Service

"As a pioneer in intelligence studies and one of today's most influential scholars, Roy Godson has produced an outstanding analysis. Drawing on his extensive knowledge of history and contemporary intelligence practices in the United States and abroad, he sets forth principles to guide effective post-Cold War policy."

—Robert L. Pfaltzgraff, Jr, Shelby Cullom Davis Professor of International Security, Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy

About the Author

Roy Godson is professor of government at Georgetown University and president of the National Strategy Information Center in Washington, DC. His most recent books include *Strategic Denial and Deception* (Transaction, 2002).

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