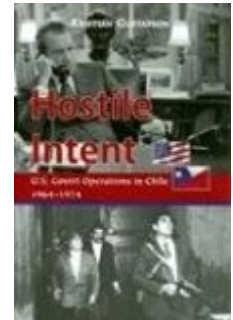


Kristian Gustafson. *Hostile Intent: U.S. Covert Operations in Chile, 1964-1974.* Dulles: Potomac Books, 2007. xiv + 317 pp. \$29.95, cloth, ISBN 978-1-59797-097-6.



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Published on H-War (December, 2008)

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At a press conference in 1975, Senator Frank Church castigated the CIA as "a rogue elephant on the rampage." As Chairman of the Select Committee on Intelligence, Senator Church had been investigating alleged abuses of power by the CIA and the FBI, including attempts to assassinate or overthrow foreign leaders. One of the main objects of the Church Committee's investigations was the CIA's sponsorship of covert actions in Chile from 1964 to 1974, and especially its role in the overthrow of the democratically elected government of President Salvador Allende on September 11, 1973, which quickly led to the military dictatorship headed by General Augusto Pinochet. As a direct consequence of the Church Committee's published reports, President Gerald Ford issued an Executive Order prohibiting any U.S. involvement in, or sanction of, assassinations of foreign leaders. The Committee's exposure of abuses of law and power by the CIA and FBI, and more generally, within the Executive Branch also led to the creation of permanent intelligence oversight

committees with broad powers in both the House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate.

In its closed hearings, the Church Committee did uncover a lengthy record of CIA activities in Chile, including covert funding designed, initially, to thwart Allende's accession to power, and, later, to undermine his government. But it did not produce evidence that directly linked the CIA to the coup itself. In essence, it failed to provide any further substantiation to Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's cryptic telephone comment to President Richard Nixon that: "We didn't do it. I mean we helped them ... created the conditions as great as possible." [1] Moreover, the fact that thousands of documents pertaining to Chile remained classified until President Clinton authorized the Chile Declassification Project in 1999 long inhibited scholars from a fuller examination of the historic record.

Now, using these newly declassified records and his own interviews with senior U.S. officials, Kristian Gustafson has produced a well-docu-

mented analytical study that argues persuasively that the real hostility toward Chile originated in the Nixon White House and that the CIA, far from being omnipotent, was often a mere instrument of White House directives that frequently ignored intelligence in favor of ill-conceived solutions. In support of this strong assertion, Gustafson quotes an official CIA assessment that "during Nixon's years in office, the relationship between the President and the CIA reached the lowest point in the Agency's history" (p. 17).

Gustafson's monograph opens with an excellent introduction that frames the rest of his work. Almost immediately he states that his sole purpose is "to better establish the facts of a particular series of covert actions initiated by the U.S. government and executed largely by the CIA" (p. 4). Gustafson makes it clear that he does not harbor the assumption that all covert action is evil. On the contrary, he asserts that "it is a tool of statecraft used by all the major world powers, whose study is important for its future use" (p. 4). This chapter also contains a useful review of the literature on Allende's fall, both in Spanish and English. Surprisingly, Gustafson has discovered that almost all Chilean writers do not hold Washington responsible for the Chilean coup. The rest of the work adheres to a chronological treatment of the events leading to the imposition of the military junta. Gustafson notes that both CIA planners and Secretary Kissinger were surprised by "the permanence of the junta and of Pinochet's grip on the apparatus of government" (p. 235).

Gustafson portrays CIA operations in Chile as mostly reactive and haphazard, and frequently out of touch with political realities. His research indicates that instead of trying to organize a coup against Allende in 1973, the CIA had reduced its contacts with military plotters and was relying largely on its sources within the Christian Democratic Party for political intelligence. Unfortunately for the CIA, military plotters did not trust Christian Democrats. "Thus the CIA did not have the

best intelligence on the coup plot as it developed," and in the post-coup period "the CIA focused on the political machinations of a party that the junta planned to marginalize" (p. 231).

In many respects, this book is a case study of a series of misguided covert actions that lacked the benefit of congressional oversight. Gustafson characterizes the Church Committee's investigations as "a lamentable and partisan inquisition against the CIA," but he also recognizes that these hearings produced a "codified approval process for covert action," and thus "served a beneficial purpose" (p. 243). As both a well-trained scholar of intelligence and a former military officer, Gustafson appreciates the reality that the United States, acting as a superpower in a dangerous world, will continue to utilize covert action as an instrument of both its defense and foreign policies. He also accurately observes that the U.S. government may be the best known, but it certainly is not the only practitioner of covert action. Yet, in the case of Chile, CIA's operations ultimately produced results that "were neither beneficial to the state nor desirable to the people." Worse, they led the United States "down the garden path to association with the Western Hemisphere's most reviled dictator" (p. 18).

This harsh judgment of U.S. operations in Chile, which cannot be avoided, suggests that even this persuasive study fails to answer the most important question: to what extent did U.S. covert machinations contribute to the overthrow of Allende and the ascendancy of Pinochet? It would have been instructive for Gustafson to have consulted *Covert Action* (1988) by Gregory Trevorton, who served on the staff of the Church Committee and years later as a senior official of the Central Intelligence Agency. Indeed, it was Trevorton who authored most of the Church Committee's report to Congress on covert actions in Chile. In his discussion of how the CIA helped to instigate a strike by Chilean truckers that paralyzed commerce and justified a military interven-

tion, Treverton finds that "what is most striking is how artificial the distinction was between supporting the opposition and seeking a change of government. It was a distinction [only] in the minds of Americans, not Chileans. Those Chileans in the opposition did not want merely to exist; they wanted to succeed.... Their paramount purpose was the end of the Allende government." [2]

Notes

[1]. See <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsaarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB123/chile.htm>.

[2]. Gregory Treverton, *Covert Action: The Limits of Intervention in the Postwar World* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), 141-143.

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Citation: Stephen I. Schwab. Review of Gustafson, Kristian. *Hostile Intent: U.S. Covert Operations in Chile, 1964-1974*. H-War, H-Net Reviews. December, 2008.

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