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# Assessing CIA involvement in the 1966 Ghana coup: an analysis of declassified intelligence records

Steven E. Hendrix

**ABSTRACT**

This article reassesses alleged CIA involvement in the 1966 overthrow of Ghanaian president Kwame Nkrumah using declassified U.S. records and competing hypotheses. The evidence establishes extensive American foreknowledge, contact with sources close to the conspiracy, economic pressure on Nkrumah, and a preference for his removal. Yet the presently available record does not establish CIA planning, financing, logistical support, tactical direction, or operational control of the coup. The article distinguishes intelligence collection and political influence from operational responsibility and argues that Ghana illustrates the difficulty of attributing covert action amid secrecy, partial declassification, and archival absence.

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## I. Introduction

On 24 February 1966, while President Kwame Nkrumah was traveling in Asia, Ghanaian military and police officers seized power, dissolved the Convention People's Party government, and established the National Liberation Council. A Central Intelligence Agency assessment issued the following day described the overthrow as the work of officers long opposed to Nkrumah who had taken advantage of his absence from the country.[1] Almost immediately, however, the coup acquired a second history: that the United States, and particularly the CIA, had helped bring it about.

Nkrumah himself placed the overthrow within the politics of neocolonial intervention. Writing after the coup, he described Ghana as having been seized by Ghanaian 'traitors' who had been 'inspired and helped by neo-colonialists'.[2] Subsequent accounts gave the allegation greater specificity. John Stockwell, a former CIA officer, later described unusually close relations between the CIA station in Accra and Ghanaian officers plotting against Nkrumah. Seymour Hersh subsequently reported that intelligence sources with first-hand knowledge said the CIA had 'advised and supported' the officers who carried out the coup. Susan Williams has more recently situated the Ghana episode within a wider history of CIA activity in postcolonial Africa.[3]

The allegation cannot be dismissed merely because it emerged within a broader critique of American power. CIA participation in covert political intervention during the Cold War is extensively documented, including operations against governments and political leaders in the developing world. That history makes operational intervention in

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Ghana plausible as a category of activity. It does not, however, determine what occurred in Ghana.[4] The central problem is therefore one of attribution: what does the evidence establish about the particular relationship between American intelligence and the Ghanaian conspiracy that culminated on 24 February 1966?

The question requires greater precision than the binary formulation – 'Was the CIA involved?' – normally allows. American hostility toward aspects of Nkrumah's foreign policy is not equivalent to participation in his overthrow. Intelligence collection concerning coup plotters is not equivalent to directing them. Political preference for regime change is not equivalent to causing regime change. Conversely, the fact that Ghanaian officers possessed domestic motives and executed the seizure of power themselves does not establish that they received no foreign encouragement or assistance. Indigenous agency and foreign influence are analytically compatible.

The documentary record makes these distinctions particularly important. By March 1965, almost a year before the coup, U.S. officials were discussing a conspiracy 'now being planned' by Acting Police Commissioner John Harlley and Generals Stephen Otu and Joseph Ankrah.[5] Two months later, White House official Robert Komer told National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy that 'we may have a pro-Western coup in Ghana soon' and that 'the plotters are keeping us briefed'.[6] Yet in the same memorandum Komer added, 'While we're not directly involved (I'm told), we and other Western countries (including France) have been helping to set up the situation by ignoring Nkrumah's pleas for economic aid'.[7]

CIA reporting continued to follow the conspiracy in unusual detail. A retrospective memorandum prepared for Deputy Director of Central Intelligence Richard Helms immediately after the coup summarized approximately a year of reporting on military and police dissatisfaction, repeated plotting, postponements, the identities of potential leaders, and circumstances under which the conspirators might act. Most strikingly, intelligence reporting on 23 February 1966 – the day before the overthrow – indicated that the commanders of Ghana's two army brigades and the police commissioner might move while Nkrumah was abroad.[8]

The same record complicates any simple characterization of U.S. policy as either supportive of Nkrumah or committed to his removal. Ambassador William Mahoney recommended in March 1965 that Washington reject an anticipated request for additional financial assistance 'in the interests of further weakening Nkrumah', while simultaneously supporting continuation of existing U.S. programs and defending the Volta River Project as a lasting American contribution to Ghana.[9] After the coup, Komer described Nkrumah's overthrow as a 'fortuitous windfall' and urged the Johnson administration to consolidate the resulting political opportunity.[10]

These records establish substantially more than passive observation. They demonstrate extensive foreknowledge, access to information close to the conspiracy, political preference for Nkrumah's weakening, and deliberate economic pressure. They do not by themselves establish operational responsibility for the coup. The distinction is the central concern of this article.

This article therefore asks a narrower question than whether the United States engaged in covert activity against Nkrumah generally. It asks whether the presently available evidence establishes that the CIA planned, directed, financed, supplied, or otherwise operationally enabled the 24 February 1966 seizure of power itself. That

delimitation matters because evidence of propaganda, political influence, intelligence collection, economic pressure, or other hostile activity toward Nkrumah may establish an important American role in the political environment without necessarily establishing operational participation in the coup.

To assess that question, the article compares three explanations. The first holds that CIA or other U.S. officials participated operationally in the coup through planning, direction, financing, material assistance, or comparable support. The second holds that the United States possessed extensive foreknowledge, maintained intelligence relationships close to the conspiracy, and pursued policies intended partly to weaken Nkrumah, but did not operationally direct or materially execute the coup. The third treats the United States primarily as an observer that monitored Ghanaian instability and welcomed the result after it occurred.

The analysis is necessarily provisional. Declassified archives are incomplete. Relevant records may remain classified, have been withheld, destroyed, lost, or never created. Informal or unauthorized intelligence activity may also leave a different documentary trail from a formally approved covert operation. Absence of evidence therefore affects confidence; it does not automatically establish absence. But the inverse is equally important: the possibility of missing evidence cannot itself constitute evidence for the proposition the missing records are hypothesized to prove.[11]

The resulting conclusion differs from both categorical accounts. The presently available evidence does not support an image of Washington merely watching an autonomous Ghanaian process from afar. American officials knew far more, and were politically closer to the developing conspiracy, than such an interpretation allows. Nor, however, does the available record presently establish the operational mechanics required to attribute the execution of the coup itself to CIA. Foreknowledge and contact are established. Operational orchestration is not. Whether activity occurred within the space between those propositions is the principal evidentiary problem addressed below.

## II. The contested history of Nkrumah's overthrow

Any assessment of a foreign role in the February 1966 coup must begin with the political history that made a Ghanaian conspiracy possible. Kwame Nkrumah did not come to power through foreign sponsorship or elite appointment. Returning to the Gold Coast in 1947 after years abroad, he became general secretary of the United Gold Coast Convention before breaking with its leadership and founding the Convention People's Party in 1949. The CPP's demand for 'self-government now', its strategy of Positive Action, and its capacity for mass political mobilization distinguished Nkrumah from the more gradualist nationalism of the older political establishment. His imprisonment by the colonial authorities in 1950 enhanced rather than extinguished his political standing, and the CPP's electoral victories in 1951 brought him from prison to the leadership of government.[12]

Ghana's independence on 6 March 1957 consequently represented both the culmination of a mass nationalist movement and the beginning of an ambitious experiment in postcolonial state-building. Nkrumah expanded education and infrastructure, promoted industrialization, and sought to reduce Ghana's dependence upon the colonial economic structure. Internationally, he made Ghana a center of Pan-African politics, supported

African liberation movements, advocated African political unity, and attempted to maintain a prominent role within the non-aligned world. The Volta River Project, culminating in the Akosombo Dam, embodied the scale of his developmental ambitions and the willingness of his government to work pragmatically with Western governments, international financial institutions, and private capital even while criticizing colonialism and Western influence.[13]

The domestic political system nevertheless became increasingly restrictive. The Preventive Detention Act of 1958 authorized detention without trial and became an important instrument against political opponents. Other institutional changes progressively concentrated authority in the executive and the CPP. Following the constitutional referendum of 1964, Ghana formally became a one-party state and Nkrumah's political position became increasingly identified with the state itself.[14] These developments do not by themselves explain the military overthrow two years later, but they form part of the domestic political environment in which opposition to Nkrumah widened.

The death in detention of J. B. Danquah in February 1965 became one particularly visible manifestation of that political environment. Danquah had been among the leading figures of Gold Coast nationalism and later became one of Nkrumah's most important political opponents. He died while detained at Nsawam Prison under the Preventive Detention Act.[15] The significance of the episode should not be overstated beyond what the evidence supports, but his death added to an already substantial controversy over preventive detention, political opposition, and the narrowing of lawful avenues through which the government could be challenged.

Economic deterioration intensified these political tensions. Ghana entered independence with substantial foreign reserves and exceptionally high expectations for state-led development, but the fiscal and external position worsened sharply during the first half of the 1960s. Falling or unstable cocoa earnings, large public investment programs, growing reliance on supplier credits, and increasing pressure upon foreign exchange produced severe balance-of-payments difficulties. By 1965 the government confronted acute external constraints, shortages, import restrictions, debt pressure, and difficult choices between development expenditure and stabilization.[16] These problems do not reduce Nkrumah's development program to economic failure; many of its investments had long-term significance. They do help explain why the political coalition surrounding his government became increasingly vulnerable.

Discontent also developed within the institutions ultimately responsible for removing him. Ghanaian military and police grievances had their own institutional history. Senior officers resented Nkrumah's intervention in military affairs, including promotions and retirements, and some feared the expanding role of the President's Own Guard Regiment as a politically favored force that might displace or marginalize the regular army. Robert Dowse characterizes the conspirators' attitudes in terms of 'fear and resentment', including concern about the Guard Regiment and resentment of presidential interference in professional military matters.[17] Contemporaneous American intelligence reporting likewise recorded continuing dissatisfaction among senior military and police officers.

The evidence also establishes that plotting against Nkrumah did not suddenly appear on the eve of 24 February 1966. By March 1965, U.S. officials were discussing a coup 'now being planned' by Acting Police Commissioner John Harlley and Generals

Stephen Otu and Joseph Ankrah. Intelligence reporting over the following year described repeated discussions of possible action, postponements, personnel changes, uncertainty among conspirators, and renewed plotting.[18] The conspiracy was therefore Ghanaian in origin and organization in the important sense that Ghanaian officers possessed their own political and institutional motives and were actively considering Nkrumah's removal well before the final operation. That proposition does not answer the separate question whether foreign actors encouraged, assisted, or otherwise influenced them.

The coup itself occurred while Nkrumah was traveling to North Vietnam as part of an effort to explore a possible diplomatic role in the Vietnam conflict. On 24 February 1966, military and police units moved against the government, seized strategic facilities, and announced the establishment of the National Liberation Council. CIA reporting issued the next day described officers who had long opposed Nkrumah as having taken advantage of his absence from Ghana.[19] The seizure of power was carried out by Ghanaian forces and produced a Ghanaian governing council composed of military and police leaders.

Those facts are central to any account of the coup, but they cannot bear more analytical weight than they support. The existence of substantial domestic grievances does not demonstrate the absence of foreign involvement. A locally generated conspiracy can simultaneously possess indigenous motives and receive foreign intelligence, encouragement, financing, political reassurance, or material assistance. Conversely, evidence that an outside power desired political change or maintained contacts with conspirators does not establish that it caused their decision to act. The task is therefore not to choose between 'Ghanaian agency' and 'American influence', but to determine what evidence exists for different forms of interaction between them.

Nkrumah himself interpreted the coup as part of a wider neocolonial assault upon African independence. In *Dark Days in Ghana*, published after his overthrow, he described Ghana as having been seized by Ghanaian 'traitors' who were 'inspired and helped by neo-colonialists'.[20] The allegation was consistent with the larger political analysis that had occupied much of Nkrumah's later writing: formal political independence, he argued, did not prevent outside powers from using economic, political, and covert means to constrain postcolonial governments.

Later accounts made the intelligence dimension more explicit. John Stockwell, a former CIA officer, wrote that an Agency proposal to overthrow Nkrumah had been rejected at a higher level but that CIA's Accra Station nevertheless maintained close contact with Ghanaian military dissidents for intelligence purposes. His retrospective account went further, describing 'intimate contact with the plotters' as the coup developed and recalling that the station subsequently received 'full, if unofficial credit' within CIA for the result.[21] Stockwell's account would become one of the principal sources for later claims of American participation.

Seymour Hersh gave the allegation additional prominence in 1978. Reporting in the *New York Times* from intelligence sources described as possessing first-hand knowledge, Hersh wrote that the CIA had 'advised and supported' the Ghanaian officers involved in Nkrumah's overthrow. He further reported that the alleged activity had occurred without prior approval from the high-level interagency body responsible for reviewing major covert operations.[22] Hersh's account therefore alleged considerably more than American knowledge of a Ghanaian conspiracy. It alleged assistance.

More recently, Susan Williams has incorporated the Ghana episode into a broader interpretation of CIA activity in Africa during decolonization and the Cold War, treating Nkrumah's overthrow as part of a wider struggle over the political and economic direction of newly independent African states.[23] Whatever judgment is ultimately reached concerning her attribution of the coup, the broader historical setting she emphasizes cannot simply be dismissed. CIA covert activity elsewhere in Africa and the developing world is documented. The appropriate question is therefore not whether the Agency was institutionally capable of intervening in Ghana, but whether the evidence establishes that it did so in relation to the specific operation of February 1966.

Declassification has made that question both easier and more difficult. It is easier because the surviving record now establishes that American knowledge of the conspiracy was considerably deeper than a narrative of detached observation suggests. U.S. officials knew important conspirators by name, received reporting from sources close to their discussions, tracked repeated plotting over an extended period, and considered the political consequences of Nkrumah's possible removal. It is more difficult because those same documents require distinctions among knowledge, contact, political preference, economic pressure, encouragement, and operational participation that earlier binary accounts often did not make.[24]

The historiographical dispute is therefore not adequately captured by asking whether the coup was 'internal' or 'external'. Ghanaian grievances, Ghanaian planning, and Ghanaian execution are well supported by the historical record. So too are substantial American interest in the outcome, close intelligence access to the conspiratorial environment, and policies intended in part to weaken Nkrumah. The central unresolved issue is whether that relationship crossed the line from collection and influence into operational participation in the seizure of power itself. Answering that question requires first clarifying what counts as evidence of covert action and how such evidence should be evaluated when the archival record is incomplete.

## III. Covert action, attribution, and historical narrative

The Ghana controversy sits within a wider problem in the study of covert action: how historians should attribute political outcomes when foreign intelligence services are present, interested, and sometimes deeply connected to local actors, but the surviving record does not cleanly reveal the boundary between observation, influence, encouragement, and operational intervention. Covert action is designed in part to obscure authorship. That feature complicates historical reconstruction because the very success of concealment may limit the evidence later available to establish responsibility.

Recent scholarship has emphasized that covert action should not be treated as a single, uniform category. Stephen Long and Francesco Cacciatore, for example, show that early Cold War Anglo-American covert programs varied considerably in objective, scale, and method; intelligence collection, political warfare, subversion, and regime-change activity could overlap without being analytically identical.[25] That distinction is directly relevant to Ghana. The presence of CIA officers, intelligence contacts, or political influence does not by itself establish a coup operation. The task is to identify what kind of activity the evidence supports.

A related problem concerns causal attribution. Rory Cormac, Calder Walton, and Damien Van Puyvelde have argued that claims of 'successful' covert action often exaggerate the causal role of the intervening power by underweighting indigenous political forces and retrospectively crediting intelligence services for developments shaped heavily by local actors.[26] Their argument is not that covert action is unreal or unimportant, but that political outcomes are frequently over-attributed to the foreign service that sought to influence them. In a case such as Ghana, where domestic military and police grievances are independently well documented, this warning matters. The fact that the United States welcomed Nkrumah's removal cannot be converted automatically into evidence that it caused it.

Jack Duffield similarly emphasizes the role of narrative in shaping the interpretation of covert action. Historical accounts can become organized around a compelling causal story long before the surviving evidence permits that degree of confidence.[27] Once such a narrative becomes established, later fragments of evidence may be interpreted through it rather than assessed independently. This is especially likely in intelligence history, where partial declassification often reveals important surrounding facts without resolving the decisive operational question.

Duffield has also documented the pronounced Anglocentrism of covert-action scholarship, demonstrating how the concentration of research on Western intelligence services and reliance on Western conceptual frameworks can limit understanding of non-Western political and intelligence activity.[28] His findings raise an important concern for the Ghana case. Harlley, Otu, Ankrah, and other Ghanaian officers did not need American motives in order to possess their own reasons for opposing Nkrumah. Any account of foreign influence that erases those motives becomes analytically weaker, not stronger. Yet the converse error is also possible: restoring Ghanaian agency cannot be used as evidence that foreign encouragement or assistance did not occur.

The epistemic problem is compounded by the politics of secrecy. Karim El Taki's recent work on 'antiepistemology' highlights the way international order can be structured not simply by what is known, but by systems that produce, preserve, and distribute ignorance.[29] Intelligence archives are an obvious setting in which this problem arises. Historians may encounter selective release, redaction, missing files, compartmented reporting, institutional self-protection, and records created for purposes very different from later historical reconstruction. The result is not merely an incomplete archive, but an archive whose incompleteness may itself be structured.

Selective disclosure creates a further complication. Luca Trenta, Kevin Fahey, and Douglas Atkinson show in their study of Guatemala that secrecy and disclosure can coexist: governments may conceal some aspects of intervention while releasing or publicizing others for political or institutional purposes.[30] The relevance to Ghana is methodological rather than analogical. Guatemala does not establish what occurred in Accra. It demonstrates instead that the documentary record of covert action may be uneven by design, and that historians must distinguish between what an archive proves, what it merely suggests, and what remains genuinely unknown.

The broader history of U.S. intervention also shapes interpretation. Greg Grandin's work on Cold War intervention in Latin America underscores how covert action operated within larger structures of political and economic power rather than as a series of isolated clandestine episodes.[31] That perspective matters because Ghana cannot be assessed

solely by searching for a single operational directive. Economic pressure, diplomatic isolation, propaganda, intelligence relationships, and political signaling may all form part of a broader environment of intervention even if none individually establishes responsibility for a specific coup.

Susan Williams applies a similarly expansive framework to Africa, emphasizing the interaction of intelligence, decolonization, economic power, and Western strategic interests.[32] Her account gives the Ghana coup a place within a larger pattern of post-colonial contestation and treats CIA activity around Nkrumah as part of that history. Whether every event-specific attribution can be sustained is a separate evidentiary question. But her broader intervention is important because it prevents the Ghana case from being artificially isolated from the documented history of Western intelligence activity elsewhere on the continent.

Taken together, this literature suggests two errors that the present analysis must avoid. The first is reductive skepticism: treating the absence of a surviving operational directive as sufficient to dismiss allegations of covert involvement. The second is reductive attribution: treating motive, proximity, intelligence access, or post hoc benefit as sufficient to prove operational responsibility. Both approaches collapse distinctions that should remain separate.

The analytical problem can therefore be stated more precisely. In assessing the 1966 Ghana coup, the question is not simply whether the United States was 'involved'. It is whether the available evidence supports one or more distinct forms of involvement: intelligence collection, political preference, economic pressure, encouragement or signaling, logistical or material assistance, tactical coordination, or direct operational control. These categories may overlap, but they are not interchangeable.

This distinction also matters for historical narrative. If the evidence establishes only that U.S. officials knew of the conspiracy and desired Nkrumah's removal, then a narrative of CIA orchestration overstates causation. If the evidence establishes that CIA officers financed, armed, directed, or otherwise materially enabled the plotters, then a narrative of mere observation understates the foreign role. The proper account depends upon the discriminatory value of the evidence rather than upon the political attractiveness of either conclusion.

For that reason, this article does not begin from the assumption that confirmed American interventions elsewhere either prove or disprove the Ghana allegation. Iran, Guatemala, Congo, Albania, and other cases are useful for showing the range of documentary traces covert action can generate and the difficulties of reconstructing secret activity. They are not templates that Ghana must reproduce. The Ghana case must be judged on its own evidentiary record.

The next section therefore sets out the method used to do so. It identifies the competing explanations, defines the documentary corpus, distinguishes positive from negative evidence, and specifies what kinds of indicators would materially strengthen or weaken the hypothesis of operational CIA participation.[33]

## IV. Evidence, method, and the problem of covert action

Assessing covert action from an incomplete historical record requires greater precision than asking whether a foreign intelligence service was simply 'involved'. In contemporary

U.S. law, covert action is defined as an activity of the United States government intended to influence political, economic, or military conditions abroad where the American role is not intended to be apparent or publicly acknowledged; activities intended primarily to acquire intelligence are expressly excluded.[34] That statutory definition postdates the Ghana coup and is not applied here anachronistically as a legal standard governing CIA activity in 1966. It is nevertheless useful analytically because it captures a distinction central to the present inquiry: acquiring intelligence about a conspiracy is different from acting to influence or assist it.

The evidentiary corpus examined here consists principally of contemporaneous U.S. government records concerning Ghana before, during, and immediately after the February 1966 coup. These include State Department and White House records reproduced in the *Foreign Relations of the United States* series; CIA Office of Current Intelligence reporting; CIA assessments of the coup and Ghanaian political conditions; and records concerning U.S. economic policy toward Nkrumah and the Volta River Project. Particular weight is given to documents that identify the source, recipient, date, institutional location, and contemporaneous purpose of the reporting.[35] Retrospective insider testimony, investigative journalism, and subsequent scholarship are assessed separately rather than treated as equivalent to contemporaneous records.

The source base has an important geographical and institutional limitation. Because the central attribution question concerns what U.S. officials knew and did, American records necessarily occupy a prominent place in the analysis. They cannot, however, provide a complete account of Ghanaian motives, deliberations, or political conditions. Ghanaian political histories, studies of the military and police, and Nkrumah's own writings are therefore used to reconstruct the domestic context and to guard against making American documentation the organizing perspective for events whose principal visible actors were Ghanaian.[36] The imbalance nevertheless remains a limitation: this is principally an assessment of the evidence for an American operational role, not a comprehensive reconstruction of the coup from Ghanaian archival holdings.

The analysis compares three competing explanations. H1 holds that CIA or other U.S. officials participated operationally in the overthrow by planning, directing, financing, materially assisting, or otherwise enabling the conspirators. H2 holds that the United States possessed extensive foreknowledge, maintained intelligence relationships close to the conspiracy, and pursued policies intended in part to weaken Nkrumah, but did not operationally direct or materially execute the coup. H3 holds that the American role was essentially observational: U.S. officials monitored Ghanaian instability and later welcomed Nkrumah's removal but exercised little consequential influence upon the circumstances surrounding it.

These hypotheses are analytical models rather than exhaustive categories. Historical conduct need not fit perfectly within any one of them. In particular, informal encouragement, political reassurance, or tacit signaling could occupy a gray area between intelligence collection and operational assistance. The purpose of the framework is not to force every fact into one of three boxes, but to ask which explanation best accounts for the available evidence and where that evidence remains insufficient to distinguish among them.

The analysis is informed by the logic of Analysis of Competing Hypotheses rather than constituting a formal ACH exercise.[37] Rather than asking whether individual pieces of

evidence are merely compatible with CIA involvement, it asks how well each item discriminates among alternative explanations. Evidence that Washington disliked Nkrumah, for example, is compatible with all three hypotheses and therefore has limited discriminatory value. Evidence that American officials received detailed information from people close to the conspiracy weakens H3 but remains compatible with both H1 and H2. Evidence of CIA financing, weapons, tactical direction, or coordination of the timing of the coup would be considerably more discriminatory in favor of H1.

For purposes of this inquiry, several kinds of evidence would materially strengthen an attribution of operational participation: authorization or tasking to support Nkrumah's removal; recruitment or direction of conspirators; financing; provision of weapons or communications equipment; transportation or other logistics; intelligence supplied for execution of the operation; coordination of timing; use of intermediaries to transmit operational instructions or resources; contemporaneous reporting describing American operational activity; and post-operation accounting or assessment treating the coup as a supported covert action.[38] No covert operation need generate every one of these indicators, and the absence of any single indicator is not dispositive. Their value lies in helping distinguish operational participation from foreknowledge, political preference, or collection.

Confirmed covert operations elsewhere illustrate why such indicators matter without establishing a mandatory documentary template. The surviving records of the 1954 Guatemala operation, for example, reveal multiple forms of planning, organization, political warfare, and operational support. But differences in authorization, compartmentation, record preservation, subsequent disclosure, and operational design mean that Ghana cannot be expected to reproduce Guatemala's archival footprint.[39] Comparison is useful for identifying the kinds of traces covert action can leave, not for reasoning that their absence in identical form disproves intervention.

The analysis accordingly distinguishes positive evidence from negative evidence. Positive evidence directly bears upon a proposition: a document authorizing assistance, a financial record, an operational communication, or credible testimony describing a particular form of support. Negative evidence derives from the failure to observe something that might reasonably be expected if a hypothesis were true. Negative evidence can be probative, but only in proportion to the likelihood that the missing indicator would have been created, preserved, declassified, and located if the alleged activity occurred.[40]

This distinction is especially important in intelligence history. The absence of a surviving authorization memorandum cannot establish that no unauthorized or compartmented activity occurred. The absence of financing records has greater significance if the hypothesis specifically alleges substantial Agency financing, but less if the alleged conduct consists of informal encouragement. An incomplete archive therefore requires calibrated confidence rather than categorical inference.

Two analytical rules are applied here. First, absence of evidence affects confidence; it does not automatically establish absence. Second, the possibility of missing evidence cannot itself constitute evidence for the proposition the missing records are hypothesized to prove.[41] These rules apply symmetrically. Archival gaps prevent excessive confidence in a negative finding, but they cannot be filled by assuming that undisclosed records would confirm the stronger allegation.

Partial declassification creates additional difficulty. Records may survive unevenly across agencies; documents may be released in different decades under different standards; and disclosure may confirm peripheral elements of an allegation while leaving its central operational claim unresolved. Studies of secrecy and selective disclosure demonstrate why the resulting archive cannot be treated as a neutral or comprehensive representation of what occurred.[42] The proper response is not to abandon evidentiary judgment, but to state explicitly which propositions the surviving material establishes and which remain inferential.

Sources are therefore weighted according to what they are capable of establishing. Contemporaneous internal records receive substantial weight for what identified officials knew, believed, recommended, or reported at a particular time. They are not treated as omniscient accounts of everything another component of the government may have been doing. Retrospective testimony by former intelligence officials is assessed according to proximity to the events, institutional access, specificity, internal consistency, and independent corroboration. Investigative reporting based upon anonymous intelligence sources is neither accepted automatically nor excluded categorically; its weight depends upon the specificity of the allegation and the extent to which its underlying sourcing can be evaluated or corroborated. Secondary scholarship supplies historiographical and political context but does not substitute for event-specific evidence of operational conduct.[43]

Institutional fragmentation within the U.S. government further limits what any individual document can prove. CIA, the State Department, the White House, the embassy in Accra, and interagency covert-action mechanisms did not necessarily possess identical information. Even a senior official's statement about whether the United States was 'involved' must therefore be evaluated in light of that official's position and probable access. Robert Komer's May 1965 statement that the United States was 'not directly involved (I'm told)', for example, is important contemporaneous evidence, but its parenthetical qualification prevents it from functioning as an authoritative certification of all possible CIA activity.[44]

The same caution applies in the opposite direction. Detailed CIA foreknowledge of plotting does not establish that the Agency caused the plotting. Intelligence services seek precisely this kind of access to political and military developments abroad. A source close to conspirators may generate extraordinary intelligence without being an operational asset tasked to make the conspiracy succeed. Conversely, a relationship initiated for collection can evolve into encouragement or assistance. The classification of the relationship must therefore rest upon evidence of what the participants actually did, not simply upon the closeness of the access.

The method used here is consequently comparative rather than binary. Each significant item of evidence is assessed according to how well it explains the alternatives and whether it changes their relative plausibility.[45] The objective is not to prove a historical negative or to demand an archival 'smoking gun'. It is to identify the explanation that presently accounts for the widest range of positive and negative evidence while requiring the fewest unsupported assumptions – and to preserve uncertainty where the record does not permit a stronger judgment.

Applied to Ghana, this approach immediately changes the evidentiary question. The important issue is no longer whether American intelligence knew that a coup was

possible. It plainly did. The question is how much it knew, how it acquired that knowledge, what U.S. officials sought to accomplish politically, and whether the relationship with the conspiratorial environment crossed from intelligence collection and political influence into operational assistance. The contemporaneous record permits the first of those questions to be reconstructed in unusual detail.

## V. What U.S. intelligence knew before the coup

The strongest evidence concerning the American relationship to the conspiracy is also among the most important material to emerge from the declassified record. It establishes that U.S. knowledge of coup plotting was neither vague nor confined to generalized assessments of Ghanaian instability. By early 1965, American officials knew the identities of important conspirators, received information about their deliberations, followed changes in their plans, and continued to receive reporting about possible action until immediately before Nkrumah's overthrow.

A memorandum of conversation dated 11 March 1965 records a discussion among Director of Central Intelligence John McCone, U.S. Ambassador to Ghana William P. Mahoney, and the deputy chief of the CIA's Africa Division. The memorandum referred explicitly to a coup 'now being planned by Acting Police Commissioner Harlley and Generals Otu and Ankrah'. It further reported that the principal conspirators had been scheduled to meet on 10 March to decide when to act.[46] This was not merely an assessment that Ghana was vulnerable to military intervention. American officials possessed reporting about identified individuals engaged in a particular conspiracy and about their deliberations over timing.

Mahoney remained uncertain whether the planned coup would actually occur. He nevertheless believed that Nkrumah was likely to be removed from power within approximately a year. His recommendations reflected that expectation. According to the memorandum, Mahoney argued that a forthcoming Ghanaian request for additional financial assistance should be refused 'in the interests of further weakening Nkrumah'.[47] At the same time, he favored continuing existing American assistance programs. The significance of this distinction for U.S. policy is considered below. For present purposes, the March conversation demonstrates that knowledge of coup plotting had reached senior officials in both CIA and the State Department almost a year before the eventual overthrow.

The documentary picture becomes still more significant in May. On 27 May 1965, White House official Robert Komer wrote to National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy that 'we may have a pro-Western coup in Ghana soon'. He added: 'The plotters are keeping us briefed, and State thinks we're more on the inside than the British'.[48] The statement is among the most probative contemporaneous pieces of evidence in the surviving record because it establishes more than American awareness of Ghanaian discontent. At least as Komer understood the situation, information was reaching the United States from a relationship sufficiently close to the conspiracy that he described the plotters themselves as keeping American officials informed.

Yet the same memorandum contains an equally important qualification. Komer immediately continued: 'While we're not directly involved (I'm told), we and other Western countries (including France) have been helping to set up the situation by ignoring

Nkrumah's pleas for economic aid'.[49] Both portions of the statement require weight. Quoting the first while ignoring the second would overstate the evidence for operational participation; relying upon the second while omitting the first would substantially understate American proximity to the conspiracy.

Komer's language also reveals that the categories of involvement were already blurred in contemporary policymaking. He denied – or, more precisely, reported that he had been told to deny – direct American involvement while simultaneously acknowledging a Western role in 'helping to set up the situation'.[50] In context, the latter phrase referred to economic pressure rather than operational coup assistance. It nevertheless demonstrates that senior officials did not regard American policy as wholly external to the political conditions affecting Nkrumah's position.

CIA reporting over the following months provides a more detailed chronology. A memorandum prepared for Deputy Director of Central Intelligence Richard Helms on 25 February 1966, the day after the coup, reviewed Office of Current Intelligence reporting on Ghana during the preceding year. It stated that OCI had repeatedly noted military dissatisfaction and reports that army and police officers were plotting against Nkrumah.[51] The document is particularly valuable because it permits the pre-coup intelligence record to be reconstructed without relying solely upon retrospective recollection decades later.

The chronology began before the March McCone-Mahoney discussion. A 10 February 1965 report stated that 'plotting is actively underway' among military and police officers and described conditions under which they might move against Nkrumah.[52] The significance of the reporting lies not simply in its prediction of instability but in its repeated attention to organized activity within the security services.

During the spring of 1965, CIA reporting continued to track discussions among senior officers concerning possible action. The conspiracy did not proceed according to a fixed timetable. Plans were repeatedly postponed, in part because of countermeasures by Nkrumah and in part because of indecision among the officers themselves.[53] That pattern is important for two reasons. First, it helps explain why advance American knowledge of plotting did not amount to knowledge of an exact coup date. Second, it demonstrates that the conspiracy had a history of internal Ghanaian calculation and adaptation rather than being a single operation activated on command from outside.

By June, reporting identified connections among specific senior figures. A 19 June report noted that General Stephen Otu was in close contact with Police Commissioner John Harlley.[54] By late July, CIA reporting identified Otu and Joseph Ankrah as potential coup leaders, while also noting that personnel actions by Nkrumah had affected their ability to act.[55] The intelligence picture was therefore dynamic: individuals appeared as potential leaders, were reassigned or retired, and the prospects for action changed accordingly.

The reporting also recorded the circumstances the conspirators regarded as advantageous. Throughout this period, the possibility of acting while Nkrumah was outside Ghana repeatedly appeared in intelligence assessments.[56] This point is especially significant in light of the circumstances of the eventual coup, which occurred while Nkrumah was traveling in Asia. It does not demonstrate that CIA selected the timing. It does demonstrate that American intelligence understood well in advance that Nkrumah's absence might provide the conspirators with an opportunity.

Plotting had not disappeared by the beginning of 1966. The OCI chronology recorded new information on 15 January concerning renewed coup activity.[57] On 17 February, reporting described 'another plot afoot to kill Nkrumah' and stated that a clandestine source had reported the involvement of important military and police officers.[58] The language demonstrates that CIA access extended beyond general political analysis into reporting about active conspiratorial activity.

The most striking report came on 23 February 1966, one day before the coup. According to the post-coup OCI memorandum, intelligence received that day indicated that the commanders of Ghana's two army brigades and the police commissioner might move against Nkrumah during his Asian tour.[59] The report did not provide the exact hour or operational plan of the following day's action. It nevertheless placed American intelligence extraordinarily close in time and substance to the eventual event.

The following day, Ghanaian military and police forces moved. A CIA *Weekly Summary* dated 25 February described officers who had long opposed Nkrumah as having taken advantage of his absence and assessed the new regime as likely to be less hostile to the West.[60] Read together with the preceding year's reporting, the post-coup assessment was not simply retrospective explanation. It followed a sustained intelligence record that had identified conspirators, monitored their discussions, tracked changes in leadership and timing, and anticipated action under circumstances closely resembling those in which the coup actually occurred.

This record substantially weakens any characterization of the United States as a passive observer. H3 cannot readily account for the degree of access reflected in the March and May 1965 documents or for the specificity of OCI reporting through 23 February 1966. American officials were not merely forecasting that an unpopular government might someday face a coup. They possessed detailed and continuing intelligence about identifiable people engaged in plotting.

The evidence does not, however, answer by itself how that intelligence was acquired or what relationship produced it. Komer's statement that 'the plotters are keeping us briefed' is unusually suggestive, but the memorandum does not identify which plotters, which American officials or intermediaries received the information, whether CIA officers dealt directly with the conspirators, or what – if anything – the Americans communicated in return. Similarly, the OCI chronology demonstrates access to sources close to the conspiracy but does not establish from the reporting alone that those sources were being encouraged or directed to act.

That distinction is central to the competing explanations. Detailed foreknowledge strongly disfavors H3. It is compatible, however, with both H1 and H2. An intelligence service maintaining close collection relationships with military officers could acquire precisely this kind of information without participating operationally in their plans. The same relationships could also provide channels through which encouragement, assistance, or direction might occur. The intelligence record establishes the proximity; it does not independently resolve the nature of the relationship.

The documentary evidence therefore supports a stronger conclusion than that reached in accounts portraying Washington as surprised by an essentially autonomous event, but a narrower conclusion than operational attribution. By February 1966, American intelligence had penetrated the conspiratorial environment deeply enough to identify important actors, follow the repeated development of their plans, and anticipate the

circumstances under which they might act.[61] What the contemporaneous intelligence reporting does not itself establish is whether that access remained collection or crossed into operational assistance.

The next question is therefore what Washington was trying to accomplish politically. Here too the evidence is more complicated than either a narrative of American support for Nkrumah or one of an undifferentiated campaign to overthrow him. The same officials who discussed coup plotting were simultaneously making decisions about economic assistance, political pressure, and one of the largest Western-backed development projects in postcolonial Africa.

## VI. U.S. policy toward Nkrumah: pressure, interests, and Akosombo

The intelligence record cannot be separated from the broader policy environment in which it was produced. U.S. policy toward Nkrumah during the final years of his government combined substantial long-term investment in Ghana with growing dissatisfaction with Nkrumah himself. That combination is important because it cuts against two overly simple interpretations: that American economic commitments demonstrate that Washington could not have favored political change, or that hostility toward Nkrumah meant that U.S. policy was uniformly directed toward destabilizing Ghana.

The Volta River Project illustrates the scale of the American stake. A later CIA Directorate of Intelligence memorandum placed the cost of the project's existing facilities at approximately $278.5 million and attributed $126.2 million of the financing to U.S. sources. Of that amount, $30.2 million supported the Volta River Authority facilities and $96 million the VALCO aluminum smelter.[62] The United States was therefore not economically indifferent to Ghana. Akosombo connected American public financing and private investment to a major element of Ghana's long-term economic infrastructure.

Yet the contemporaneous policy record shows that American commitment to Ghanaian development coexisted with an increasingly explicit desire to weaken Nkrumah politically. The distinction appeared clearly in Ambassador William Mahoney's March 1965 conversation with CIA Director John McCone. Mahoney recommended that Washington refuse a forthcoming Ghanaian request for additional financial assistance 'in the interests of further weakening Nkrumah'. At the same time, he recommended continuation of existing aid programs and the Peace Corps and defended the Volta project and Kaiser investment as lasting American contributions to Ghana.[63]

This was not simply inconsistency. Mahoney distinguished between Ghana and Nkrumah. Existing American investments could be understood as serving long-term Ghanaian and U.S. interests even as additional assistance to Nkrumah's government was withheld for political effect.[64] The distinction makes the Volta project poor evidence for the proposition that Washington could not have desired Nkrumah's removal. It instead demonstrates that economic engagement and political pressure could operate simultaneously.

Komer's memorandum of 27 May makes the pressure strategy still more explicit. After reporting that the Ghanaian plotters were keeping American officials briefed, Komer wrote that although the United States was 'not directly involved (I'm told)', the United States and other Western governments had been 'helping to set up the situation by ignoring Nkrumah's pleas for economic aid'.[65] This is unusually consequential language.

A senior White House official was not merely observing that Ghana's economic difficulties might weaken Nkrumah. He described Western policy as contributing deliberately to the political environment in which a possible pro-Western coup might occur.

The statement nevertheless requires careful delimitation. Komer did not say that economic pressure constituted support for the coup plotters, nor that aid policy was coordinated with their operational plans. Indeed, his contemporaneous statement that the United States was not 'directly involved' cuts against such an inference, subject to the limitation implied by 'I'm told'.[66] What the memorandum establishes is narrower but still significant: American policy was not neutral toward Nkrumah's political vulnerability.

The distinction helps explain why conventional categories such as 'support' and 'destabilization' are inadequate. Washington could support Ghanaian institutions and infrastructure, seek intelligence from individuals close to a conspiracy, deny additional resources in order to weaken Nkrumah, and prefer a successor government more favorably disposed toward the West without all of those activities constituting a single coordinated coup operation.[67] The historical question is how these layers of policy related to one another.

Institutional fragmentation also matters. Ambassador Mahoney, State Department officials, CIA officers, and White House staff did not necessarily approach Ghana with identical priorities or possess identical information. The March conversation involving Mahoney, McCone, and the CIA Africa Division shows substantial overlap between diplomatic and intelligence awareness of coup plotting. Komer's May memorandum demonstrates that the White House also possessed significant knowledge. But neither document establishes that every element of the U.S. government understood the American relationship to the conspirators in precisely the same way.[68]

The immediate American reaction to the coup reinforces this need for distinction. On 25 February, the State Department instructed the embassy in Accra to avoid appearing excessively eager to recognize the new regime, specifically because such conduct could lend credibility to charges that the United States had 'masterminded' Nkrumah's overthrow. At the same time, Washington sought to develop useful relations with the National Liberation Council and authorized discreet contacts with its members.[69] The instruction establishes sensitivity to the appearance of American responsibility. It does not establish whether the concern reflected merely anticipation of accusations or knowledge of undisclosed activity.

Senior officials were considerably less restrained in private assessments of the political result. On 10 March, Komer described the Ghana coup as a 'distinct plus' for the United States. Significantly, however, he also wrote that in Ghana and other recent African coups, **'i**t was primarily internal conditions that caused the coups'.[70] This was Komer's contemporaneous interpretation, not an authoritative determination of everything CIA may have done. It nevertheless shows that an official who had known of the Ghanaian plotting and welcomed its success understood domestic conditions as the principal cause.

Two days later, Komer went further in emphasizing the opportunity the coup created. In a memorandum to President Lyndon Johnson, he called Nkrumah's overthrow a 'fortuitous windfall' and described the new regime as strongly pro-Western.[71] He urged the administration to move rapidly to consolidate the favorable political outcome through assistance, including food aid, and to use American leverage with the new authorities.[72]

The phrase 'fortuitous windfall' is suggestive but not dispositive. It is consistent with an interpretation in which Washington benefited unexpectedly from a Ghanaian operation it had not directed. It cannot prove such an interpretation, because Komer may not have possessed knowledge of every compartmented or unauthorized intelligence activity. Conversely, describing the result as advantageous does not establish that the United States caused it. Post-coup satisfaction has limited discriminatory value between H1 and H2.

Akosombo should be understood in the same way. The scale of American participation in the Volta project demonstrates substantial U.S. economic commitment to Ghana and helps explain why American officials distinguished between opposition to Nkrumah and longer-term relations with the country.[73] It does not logically preclude CIA participation in activity directed against Nkrumah. States routinely pursue multiple and sometimes conflicting objectives through different institutions and instruments.

The policy record therefore supports neither the old inference that American investment made destabilization implausible nor a converse inference that economic pressure proves coup orchestration. It instead establishes a layered American posture. Washington had major economic interests in Ghana. Senior officials increasingly regarded Nkrumah as an obstacle to U.S. interests. At least some deliberately sought to increase the pressure upon him by withholding additional assistance. They knew that Ghanaian officers were plotting his removal, possessed information from sources close to those plotters, and viewed the prospect of a more pro-Western government favorably.[74]

This evidence is consequential for attribution because it establishes motive, preference, pressure, and opportunity for contact. But those propositions remain compatible with both H1 and H2. The decisive question is whether other evidence demonstrates that the relationship crossed the remaining boundary into assistance with the coup itself. The strongest affirmative evidence for that proposition comes not from Akosombo or from generalized American hostility, but from the retrospective intelligence accounts of John Stockwell and the intelligence sources reported by Seymour Hersh.

## VII. The case for CIA involvement reconsidered

The strongest case for CIA participation in Nkrumah's overthrow rests on considerably more than American hostility toward his government or satisfaction with the coup's outcome. By 1965, U.S. officials knew important conspirators by name, received information sufficiently close to their deliberations for Komer to write that 'the plotters are keeping us briefed', deliberately used economic policy in part to weaken Nkrumah, and anticipated that Ghanaian military and police officers might act during one of his absences abroad. Against that contemporaneous background, the later allegations of John Stockwell and Seymour Hersh deserve serious consideration rather than dismissal as speculation.

Stockwell's account is particularly important because it purports to describe the relationship between CIA's Accra Station and the Ghanaian conspirators from within the Agency. In a footnote to *In Search of Enemies*, Stockwell wrote that a CIA proposal to oust Nkrumah had been rejected by the high-level committee responsible for covert operations. According to Stockwell, however, the Accra Station was subsequently encouraged by headquarters to maintain contact with Ghanaian army dissidents 'for the purpose of

gathering intelligence on their activities'. He described the station as possessing a generous budget and maintaining 'intimate contact with the plotters' while the coup was being prepared.[75]

The distinction within Stockwell's own account is important. He did not describe the initial justification for the relationship as a directive to organize a coup. He described it as intelligence collection. Yet his account suggests a relationship considerably closer than detached observation. Stockwell further wrote that, as the coup occurred, the station coordinated the recovery of classified Soviet military equipment from the Chinese embassy and other locations. He also described a proposed operation against the Chinese embassy that headquarters rejected. Most consequentially for attribution, he recalled that within CIA headquarters the Accra Station received 'full, if unofficial credit' for the eventual coup, while adding that this role was not adequately reflected in written records.[76]

One detail in Stockwell's account requires clarification. He referred to the body that rejected the proposed operation against Nkrumah as the '40 Committee'. That name did not apply in 1966. The interagency covert-action review body was then known as the 303 Committee; it became the 40 Committee in February 1970 after President Richard Nixon issued National Security Decision Memorandum 40.[77] The discrepancy is real, but it is not by itself sufficient reason to reject Stockwell's substantive account. Writing retrospectively in the 1970s, he may simply have used the later institutional name for the body performing the same general covert-action review function. It does, however, reinforce the need to distinguish his retrospective recollection from contemporaneous documentation.

Stockwell's evidentiary value must therefore be assessed with care rather than either accepted wholesale or dismissed. His account is specific about institutional relationships and purported internal CIA understandings, but it is retrospective and compressed into a footnote rather than presented as a documented reconstruction of the Ghana operation.[78] Most importantly, his assertion that the station received unofficial credit for the coup is not the same proposition as evidence specifying what the station actually did to produce the outcome. 'Credit' within an intelligence bureaucracy may reflect genuine operational assistance, cultivation of useful relationships, successful collection, post-coup exploitation, institutional self-promotion, or some combination of these.

Seymour Hersh's 1978 reporting strengthens the affirmative case because it was not simply a repetition of the claim that CIA knew about the coup. Hersh reported that intelligence sources with first-hand knowledge said CIA had 'advised and supported' the Ghanaian officers who overthrew Nkrumah. He further reported that the Agency's role occurred without prior authorization from the interagency body responsible for approving major covert operations and that an earlier CIA proposal to act against Nkrumah had been rejected.[79] If accurate, this account would help explain why the surviving record might contain evidence of extraordinary intelligence proximity without a formal authorization directing the coup.

The phrase 'advised and supported', however, remains operationally underdefined. It could encompass activity ranging from political encouragement and intelligence sharing to financing, logistical assistance, or direct participation in planning. Hersh's article does not provide sufficient detail to determine which of those forms of support his sources alleged. Nor does the anonymity of the underlying sources permit independent assessment of their precise institutional access. These limitations reduce the precision with

which Hersh's allegation can be incorporated into the historical reconstruction; they do not justify treating it as evidentially meaningless.

Stockwell and Hersh are significant partly because their accounts overlap. Both describe a CIA relationship with Ghanaian coup plotters that went beyond Washington simply learning of the conspiracy after the fact. Both report that a proposal for formally approved action against Nkrumah had previously been rejected. Both nevertheless describe subsequent CIA activity close to the officers who eventually removed him. And both raise the possibility that whatever assistance occurred may not have been fully represented in the formal documentary record.[80] The convergence does not amount to independent documentary confirmation – the relationship between the underlying information available to the two accounts cannot be reconstructed with confidence – but it prevents either source from being evaluated in isolation.

The declassified contemporaneous record has subsequently confirmed several surrounding elements of these retrospective accounts. Most importantly, Komer's May 1965 memorandum establishes that U.S. officials were receiving information sufficiently close to the conspiracy for him to say that 'the plotters are keeping us briefed' and that the United States was 'more on the inside than the British'. The same document records his understanding that the United States was 'not directly involved (I'm told)'.[81] The result is partial corroboration accompanied by an important contemporaneous constraint. The later allegations of close CIA access are substantially more plausible in light of Komer's memorandum; the allegation of operational assistance is not independently established by it.

The March 1965 McCone-Mahoney discussion and the February 1966 OCI chronology reinforce the same conclusion. American officials knew the identities of Harlley, Otu, and Ankrah; knew that senior conspirators were discussing when to act; followed relationships among military and police officers; tracked repeated postponements; and received intelligence on 23 February that senior military commanders and the police commissioner might move during Nkrumah's Asian trip.[82] Such reporting is consistent with Stockwell's claim that the Accra Station maintained unusually close intelligence contacts with the conspiratorial environment. It remains compatible with a relationship maintained principally for collection.

Williams treats these elements cumulatively rather than in isolation. In *White Malice*, she places Nkrumah's overthrow within a wider pattern of CIA and Western intervention in Africa and presents the coup as having occurred with CIA assistance.[83] Her interpretation gains plausibility from evidence that earlier accounts did not always possess: the documented American hostility toward Nkrumah, deliberate economic pressure, extensive intelligence access, and the known history of CIA covert activity elsewhere in Africa. It also draws upon the retrospective allegations of Stockwell and Hersh.

The wider African record matters to plausibility. The Church Committee's investigation of CIA activities in Congo, for example, documented covert involvement in efforts directed against Patrice Lumumba, including Agency discussion and activity extending far beyond passive intelligence collection.[84] Such evidence makes it untenable to dismiss CIA operational involvement in Ghana on the ground that intervention of this kind would have been institutionally extraordinary. But Congo cannot answer the Ghana question. Demonstrated CIA activity against one African leader establishes capability and historical context, not operational responsibility for the overthrow of another.

Taken cumulatively, the affirmative case for H1 is substantial. The United States had strategic and political reasons to prefer a change in Ghanaian leadership. Senior officials deliberately sought to weaken Nkrumah economically. American intelligence possessed unusually detailed foreknowledge of coup plotting and maintained access close to the conspirators. Stockwell later described 'intimate contact with the plotters' and internal CIA credit for the coup. Hersh reported from intelligence sources that the Agency had 'advised and supported' those who carried it out. Williams situates these allegations within a broader documentary history of Western covert activity in post-colonial Africa.

What remains missing is equally specific. The presently available contemporaneous record does not independently establish the operational form of the assistance alleged by Stockwell and Hersh. The documents examined here have not yielded an authorization or tasking order to make the February coup succeed; an independently corroborated record of CIA financing of the conspirators; provision of weapons, communications equipment, or transportation; operational intelligence supplied for the seizure of power; tactical instructions; coordination of the timing of the coup; or contemporaneous reporting identifying an American role in executing the operation.[85] None of those categories is individually indispensable, and their absence cannot prove that assistance did not occur. Their collective absence does limit the degree of confidence with which the stronger operational claim can presently be specified.

Nor should the absence of formal authorization be treated as dispositive. Hersh specifically alleged activity without approval, and Stockwell described a relationship that continued after a proposal to remove Nkrumah had been rejected. If officers in Accra crossed from collection into encouragement or assistance without a formally authorized operation, the resulting documentary footprint could differ substantially from that of a conventional covert-action program. The methodological framework used here therefore leaves genuine room for unauthorized, informal, or poorly documented activity.

There is also an intermediate possibility that the documentary record cannot presently resolve. CIA officers may have maintained relationships with conspirators for collection while communicating approval, reassurance, or encouragement short of material operational support. Such conduct would be more consequential than passive intelligence gathering but less than planning or directing the coup. It would also help explain why retrospective participants might remember CIA as having 'supported' the conspirators while formal records characterized the relationship differently. This possibility is analytically important, but it cannot be converted into a historical finding without evidence specifying that such exchanges occurred.

The strongest conclusion from the affirmative evidence is therefore neither exoneration nor attribution of operational control. Extensive American foreknowledge is established. Close access to the conspiratorial environment is established. American preference for Nkrumah's weakening and removal is established. Deliberate Western economic pressure contributing to his political vulnerability is established. Retrospective insider testimony alleging additional CIA assistance is credible enough that operational participation cannot responsibly be excluded. What remains presently unestablished is the nature and extent of any operational contribution by the CIA to the execution of the coup itself.[86]

That distinction helps explain why the controversy has proved so durable. Declassification has not simply disproved earlier allegations. On several important points, it has confirmed circumstances that make those allegations more plausible: the depth of American foreknowledge, the proximity of intelligence reporting to the plotters, and Washington's preference for political change. Yet confirmation of those surrounding facts can easily become, in historical memory, confirmation of the remaining operational allegation. Understanding that process is necessary to explain why the CIA narrative has endured even as the decisive evidentiary question remains unresolved.

## VIII. Why the CIA narrative endured

The persistence of the claim that the CIA helped overthrow Nkrumah cannot be explained simply as repetition of an unsupported allegation. The narrative developed through several distinct stages, each of which added information that made the broader claim appear more credible. Nkrumah supplied an early interpretive framework; subsequent disclosures established that CIA intervention against foreign governments and political leaders was a genuine feature of Cold War policy; Stockwell and Hersh supplied apparent insider confirmation specific to Ghana; and later declassification established that American officials had possessed far greater foreknowledge of the Ghanaian conspiracy than a narrative of detached observation would suggest. The resulting interpretation therefore rests upon a mixture of established facts, retrospective testimony, historical analogy, and unresolved inference.

Nkrumah's own interpretation provided an influential starting point. In *Dark Days in Ghana*, he did not treat his overthrow as an isolated military revolt. He situated it within the broader structure of neocolonialism and described the Ghanaian participants as having been 'inspired and helped by neo-colonialists'.[87] That explanation was consistent with the analysis he had already developed before the coup: political sovereignty did not eliminate foreign power because external states and economic interests could continue to influence formally independent countries through indirect means. For Nkrumah and many of his supporters, foreign involvement was therefore not an incidental possibility but part of a larger explanation of postcolonial politics.

Events elsewhere subsequently made such allegations increasingly difficult to dismiss as inherently implausible. Investigations during the 1970s established that CIA activity in the developing world had included covert political intervention and operations directed against foreign leaders. The Church Committee's investigation of the Congo, for example, documented CIA consideration and pursuit of measures against Patrice Lumumba extending far beyond ordinary intelligence collection.[88] Evidence of this kind did not establish a Ghana operation, but it changed the background against which allegations concerning Ghana were evaluated. Claims that might previously have appeared extraordinary now described conduct known to fall within the historical repertoire of American intelligence.

Stockwell's account then supplied an apparent institutional bridge between that broader history and Ghana itself. His description of close CIA contact with Ghanaian military dissidents, the station's activities surrounding the coup, and the 'full, if unofficial credit' it allegedly received within CIA provided something that generalized suspicion of American policy could not: a former Agency officer attributing significance to the Accra

Station's relationship with the plotters.[89] The account remained retrospective and did not specify the operational mechanics by which CIA supposedly caused or assisted the coup, but it gave the allegation an insider provenance.

Hersh's reporting strengthened that effect. His 1978 article attributed to intelligence sources with first-hand knowledge the more direct claim that CIA had 'advised and supported' the Ghanaian officers.[90] Read alongside Stockwell, the article transformed the controversy from an argument based principally upon Nkrumah's interpretation and American motive into one containing allegations from people presented as possessing knowledge of intelligence activity. The underlying evidence remained difficult for outside scholars to evaluate, but the source category had changed.

Later declassification created a further and particularly important development. The contemporaneous documents now available confirm substantial American foreknowledge, unusually close intelligence access to the conspiratorial environment, deliberate economic pressure upon Nkrumah, and a clear preference for political change.[91] Stockwell's description of close intelligence contacts consequently appeared more plausible after the release of records demonstrating extensive foreknowledge than it could have on the basis of his testimony alone.

But a subtle problem follows. Corroboration can migrate. Once declassification confirms several surrounding components of an allegation, those confirmations may come to be treated as corroboration of the allegation's remaining components even where the latter have not been independently established. In Ghana, documentary confirmation of American foreknowledge, contact, hostility toward Nkrumah, economic pressure, and satisfaction with the outcome can readily be absorbed into a larger proposition that the CIA therefore helped execute the coup. The first set of propositions is now strongly documented. The final inference remains a separate evidentiary step.[92]

This process is particularly powerful when the underlying term – 'involvement' – is left undefined. If CIA involvement means that American intelligence knew about the conspiracy, maintained relationships capable of producing detailed information about it, and reported upon the plotters, CIA involvement is established. If involvement includes American policies deliberately intended to weaken Nkrumah while officials anticipated the possibility of his removal, the evidence is stronger still. If involvement means that CIA officers encouraged or signaled approval to conspirators, the record is suggestive but presently incomplete. If it means that the Agency financed, supplied, planned, tactically directed, or otherwise materially enabled the February operation, the evidentiary burden becomes different.

The ambiguity allows accounts that are making different claims to appear to agree. An intelligence officer recalling that a station received internal 'credit', a journalist reporting that the Agency 'advised and supported' plotters, a political leader describing a coup as neocolonial intervention, and a historian documenting American foreknowledge may all be cited for the proposition that the CIA was 'involved'. Yet the underlying propositions are not identical. Without disaggregating them, cumulative citation can create an appearance of corroboration stronger than the underlying evidence warrants.

Partial declassification intensifies the effect. Trenta, Fahey, and Atkinson's work on secrecy and selective disclosure demonstrates that intelligence history rarely moves cleanly from ignorance to complete documentary revelation.[93] Records emerge unevenly. Some allegations are confirmed, some disproved, and others remain unresolved. The

resulting fragments may legitimately change the probability assigned to earlier claims without establishing them in full. Ghana illustrates this dynamic particularly well: declassification has strengthened the case for American proximity and influence while leaving the operational question open.

The problem is not unique to Ghana. Duffield's narrative approach to covert action draws attention to the way historical interpretation organizes disparate evidence into causal accounts, while Cormac, Walton, and Van Puyvelde caution against assigning foreign intelligence services more causal power than the evidence warrants.[94] Once a covert-action narrative becomes the dominant organizing frame, newly disclosed evidence may be incorporated into that narrative even where it supports only part of the causal claim.

At the same time, correcting over-attribution must not produce the opposite distortion. Duffield's critique of Anglocentrism is particularly relevant here. A history centered exclusively on what CIA did or did not do can make Ghanaian officers appear as secondary characters in an American intelligence story.[95] Harlley, Ankrah, Otu, and other Ghanaian actors had their own institutional grievances, political calculations, ambitions, and capacity for action. Recognizing that agency does not exonerate foreign powers; it simply prevents attribution from assuming that the interests of Washington supplied the motives of Accra.

Nor is it necessary to speculate about the personal motives of Nkrumah, Stockwell, Hersh, or later historians to explain the narrative's persistence. The documentary history itself is sufficient. Nkrumah articulated a neocolonial interpretation. Subsequent investigations established that covert American intervention elsewhere was real. Stockwell and Hersh supplied Ghana-specific allegations from intelligence sources. Later declassification confirmed significant surrounding elements of those accounts. Each development rationally increased the plausibility of the broader claim, even though none independently resolved the operational question.

This distinction is particularly important because archival uncertainty cuts in both directions. The absence of currently available operational documentation cannot establish that Stockwell and Hersh were wrong. Records may remain classified or unavailable; activity may have been informal or unauthorized; and some actions may never have generated the documentary traces historians would prefer. But archival incompleteness also cannot transform the confirmed surrounding facts into proof of the still-unconfirmed operational allegation.[96]

The durability of the CIA narrative is therefore historically intelligible. It arose from Nkrumah's own interpretation, acquired greater plausibility as genuine CIA operations elsewhere became public, gained apparent insider corroboration from Stockwell and Hersh, and was subsequently reinforced when declassification confirmed substantial American foreknowledge and political interest. None of those developments, separately or cumulatively, eliminates the remaining evidentiary distinction between proximity to the conspiracy and operational responsibility for it.[97]

The issue can now be returned to the competing hypotheses. The question is no longer whether evidence exists for an American role; substantial evidence plainly does. The question is which hypothesis best explains the particular role the evidence establishes, including both the extraordinary American proximity to the conspiracy and the continuing uncertainty over operational assistance.

## IX. Assessing the competing explanations

The evidence can now be assessed against the three explanations identified at the outset. None resolves every uncertainty in the record, and the hypotheses should not be understood as exhaustive descriptions of every possible American interaction with the conspirators. They are useful because they require the same evidence to be tested against alternatives rather than treated simply as either 'proof' or 'disproof' of CIA involvement.

H3 – the essentially passive-observer hypothesis – is the least consistent with the surviving evidence. American officials did considerably more than monitor generalized political instability and welcome Nkrumah's overthrow after it occurred. By March 1965 they knew the identities of important conspirators and were receiving information concerning their deliberations. By May, Komer could report that 'the plotters are keeping us briefed' and that American officials believed themselves 'more on the inside than the British'. CIA reporting subsequently tracked military and police plotting through repeated postponements and personnel changes and, on 23 February 1966, reported that senior Ghanaian security officials might move while Nkrumah was abroad.[98]

Nor was American policy politically neutral. Mahoney recommended withholding additional assistance 'in the interests of further weakening Nkrumah', while Komer later described the United States and other Western governments as 'helping to set up the situation' by declining his requests for economic aid.[99] After the coup, senior officials privately characterized the outcome as advantageous and moved to consolidate the resulting political opportunity.[100] These facts are difficult to reconcile with an explanation in which the United States exercised little consequential influence upon the environment surrounding Nkrumah's removal.

Rejecting H3 does not establish H1. H1 – the hypothesis of operational American participation – accounts readily for several important features of the record. If CIA officers were assisting the conspirators, the extraordinary quality of American foreknowledge would be unsurprising. Stockwell's description of 'intimate contact with the plotters' and of the Accra Station receiving unofficial internal credit for the coup would fit naturally within such an explanation.[101] Hersh's report that CIA 'advised and supported' the officers would provide still more direct support.[102] American political preference, economic pressure, intelligence access, and the eventual pro-Western outcome would all be consistent with H1.

H1 also offers a possible explanation for the tension between the surviving contemporaneous record and the later allegations. Hersh specifically reported that the alleged CIA role proceeded without approval from the high-level interagency body responsible for covert operations. Stockwell similarly described continuing contacts with Ghanaian dissidents after an Agency proposal to remove Nkrumah had been rejected.[103] If officers in Accra moved informally or exceeded an intelligence-collection mandate, a formal authorization directing the coup might never have existed. Institutional compartmentation could also explain why Komer qualified his statement that the United States was not directly involved with the parenthetical 'I'm told'.

These considerations mean that H1 cannot responsibly be excluded. They do not, however, establish its operational content. Neither Stockwell nor Hersh specifies with sufficient precision what assistance made the difference to the execution of the coup. The presently available contemporaneous records independently

establish intelligence access, foreknowledge, economic pressure, and political preference, but do not independently corroborate financing, weapons, logistical support, operational intelligence supplied to the conspirators, tactical direction, timing coordination, or other identifiable assistance in carrying out the seizure of power.[104]

That gap matters because H1 is not simply the proposition that CIA officers were close to the conspirators. The evidence already establishes proximity. To discriminate H1 from H2, the relevant question is whether that relationship crossed from collection and political influence into operational assistance. The retrospective evidence says that it may have. The presently available contemporaneous record does not specify how.

H2 best accounts for the evidence presently available. Under H2, American intelligence maintained unusually close relationships with the conspiratorial environment and obtained extensive advance reporting about Ghanaian military and police plotting. U.S. policymakers preferred Nkrumah's weakening, deliberately contributed to economic pressures upon his government, anticipated the possibility of a more pro-Western successor, and welcomed the result when the coup occurred. At the same time, the Ghanaian conspirators possessed independently documented motives and organizational capacity, and the available record does not presently establish that American assistance was operationally necessary to their decision or ability to act.[105]

H2 also accommodates the most important contemporaneous statements better than H3. Komer's memorandum does not describe passive observation: 'the plotters are keeping us briefed' plainly indicates a closer relationship. But neither does it document an American coup operation. His simultaneous statement that the United States was 'not directly involved (I'm told)' and his acknowledgment of Western economic pressure describe almost precisely the distinction captured by H2: significant American proximity and influence without acknowledged direct operational participation.[106]

The same is true of the post-coup evidence. Komer's characterization of the overthrow as a 'fortuitous windfall' is consistent with an outcome Washington strongly desired but did not necessarily produce. His separate assessment that 'primarily internal conditions' caused the recent African coups likewise fits H2, although neither statement can establish what every CIA officer knew or did.[107] H2 therefore requires fewer assumptions than either an essentially passive H3 or an H1 whose precise operational mechanisms remain unspecified.

H2 should not be understood as a midpoint selected because the evidence is ambiguous. It is the hypothesis that presently accounts most economically for both the positive evidence of American access and influence and the absence of independently corroborated evidence establishing operational execution. That conclusion is probabilistic rather than categorical. New evidence of financing, operational tasking, logistical assistance, tactical intelligence, or direct encouragement could materially shift the balance toward H1.

There remains, moreover, a gray area that the three hypotheses imperfectly capture. The record leaves room for forms of encouragement or signaling that fall between passive collection and operational direction, but it does not presently permit their nature or causal significance to be established. An intelligence officer can communicate sympathy, reassurance, or expectations without formally directing an operation. A conspirator may interpret continued contact with a powerful foreign intelligence service as tacit approval

even if no explicit promise of assistance is made. Such interactions could be historically consequential while leaving only limited documentary traces.

Stockwell and Hersh make that intermediate possibility especially important. If their references to CIA 'support' encompassed encouragement, political reassurance, intelligence sharing, or other assistance short of operational control, the apparent conflict between their accounts and the contemporaneous record might be smaller than it initially appears. But the ambiguity cannot be resolved by redefining their allegations after the fact. Without more specific evidence, the nature of any such activity remains unknown.[108]

The causal role of Ghanaian actors remains important across both H1 and H2. The existence of American influence would not transform Harlley, Ankrah, Otu, or other Ghanaian officers into passive instruments. Their grievances predated the coup, plotting persisted over an extended period, and intelligence reporting itself records their indecision, changing plans, responses to Nkrumah's countermeasures, and judgments about when conditions were favorable.[109] Even if future evidence were to establish CIA assistance, the historical question would remain one of interaction between foreign intervention and indigenous political action rather than substitution of one for the other.

The evidentiary ranking can therefore be stated with reasonable clarity. H3 can be rejected with relatively high confidence. H2 is the best-supported explanation. H1 remains plausible and cannot responsibly be excluded, particularly in light of Stockwell and Hersh, but its operational content remains insufficiently specified and independently corroborated to displace H2.[110] That assessment is provisional and should change if additional evidence changes the balance among the competing explanations.

This conclusion is narrower than a finding that CIA played no role in Nkrumah's fall. The evidence establishes an important American role in the political environment surrounding the coup: intelligence access, foreknowledge, deliberate pressure, and a clear preference concerning the outcome. What it does not presently permit is confident attribution of the coup's operational execution to the Agency. That distinction has implications beyond Ghana because it illustrates the broader difficulty of assigning responsibility for covert action when intelligence presence, political influence, local agency, and incomplete archives intersect.

## X. Conclusion

The declassified record does not support either of the simplest accounts of the February 1966 overthrow of Kwame Nkrumah. The United States was not merely a distant observer surprised by a Ghanaian military revolt. Nor does the presently available evidence establish that the CIA planned, directed, financed, supplied, or operationally controlled the coup. The documentary record instead reveals a relationship between American intelligence and the political environment surrounding Nkrumah's overthrow that was substantial, unusually close, and more ambiguous than either formulation allows.

American foreknowledge was extensive. U.S. officials identified important conspirators, received reporting close to their deliberations, tracked plotting over an extended period, and anticipated possible action during Nkrumah's absence abroad. American policy was also consequential: officials deliberately used economic assistance in part to increase pressure on Nkrumah while simultaneously maintaining substantial long-term interests in

Ghana.[111] These facts establish much more than passive observation, but they do not themselves establish operational responsibility for the coup.

The retrospective evidence prevents the analysis from ending there. Stockwell's account of 'intimate contact with the plotters' and unofficial CIA credit for the coup, together with Hersh's report that intelligence sources described the Agency as having 'advised and supported' the Ghanaian officers, provides affirmative evidence for a more operational American role.[112] Those allegations cannot responsibly be dismissed merely because equivalent contemporaneous operational records have not been declassified. Nor, however, do the allegations specify with sufficient precision and independent corroboration the form of assistance that would permit confident attribution of the coup's execution to CIA.

The best-supported explanation is therefore H2: extensive American foreknowledge, intelligence access, political preference, and deliberate pressure without presently demonstrated operational orchestration. H3 understates what American officials knew and did. H1 remains plausible, particularly in light of Stockwell and Hersh, but its operational content remains insufficiently specified and independently corroborated to displace H2.[113] That judgment is provisional rather than categorical. Additional records – or more specific corroboration of the retrospective allegations – could change the evidentiary balance.

The conclusion does not diminish Ghanaian agency. The officers who overthrew Nkrumah possessed their own grievances, interests, and institutional capacity, and their plotting developed over an extended period.[114] But recognizing those domestic dynamics does not require treating foreign influence as irrelevant. Ghana illustrates why indigenous agency and external intervention should not be framed as mutually exclusive explanations. The more difficult historical question concerns the interaction between them.

That interaction also demonstrates a broader problem in intelligence history. Intelligence presence is not operational causation. Access to conspirators may reflect collection, cultivation, encouragement, assistance, or some combination of these. Political preference for an outcome does not prove responsibility for producing it. Conversely, the absence of a surviving authorization or operational file cannot conclusively establish that covert assistance did not occur. Attribution therefore depends upon maintaining distinctions among propositions that secrecy tends to collapse.

Partial declassification makes those distinctions still more important. In the Ghana case, newly available records have confirmed significant portions of an older allegation without resolving its most consequential component. They establish that American officials knew much more about the conspiracy than accounts of detached observation suggested. They confirm close intelligence access and deliberate political pressure. In doing so, they increase the plausibility of some retrospective claims. But corroboration of surrounding circumstances is not automatically corroboration of operational responsibility.[115]

This is why archival absence must be treated with discipline in both directions. Historians should not infer noninvolvement merely because a covert-action directive has not appeared. Secret operations may be compartmented, informally authorized, poorly recorded, destroyed, or remain classified. But neither can the possibility of undisclosed evidence substitute for evidence of the activity it is invoked to explain. The proper conclusion is sometimes bounded uncertainty rather than categorical attribution.

The Ghana case consequently offers a broader lesson for the study of covert action. Historical judgment should not turn on whether an intelligence service was simply 'involved', because that term can encompass activities with radically different causal significance. The more useful questions are what officials knew, how they knew it, what outcomes they sought, what influence they exercised, what assistance they provided, and whether that assistance materially affected the operation under examination. Those distinctions allow historians to acknowledge the realities of secrecy without making secrecy itself an argument.

The most defensible conclusion is therefore neither that the CIA 'made' the Ghana coup nor that Washington merely watched it happen. U.S. officials possessed extensive foreknowledge, maintained unusually close access to the conspiratorial environment, deliberately contributed to pressures weakening Nkrumah, and welcomed his removal. Whether CIA officers crossed the remaining line from intelligence collection and political influence to operational assistance is a question the presently available record does not settle. Preserving that distinction is not an evasion of historical judgment. It is the evidentiary discipline required to write the history of covert action under conditions of secrecy.

## Notes

1. CIA, "Army Overthrows Nkrumah Regime in Ghana," 17.
2. Nkrumah, *Dark Days in Ghana*, 9.
3. Stockwell, In Search of Enemies, 201n; Hersh, "C.I.A. Said to Have Aided Plotters," 6; and Williams, *White Malice*, 497.
4. See, for example, Cormac, Walton, and Van Puyvelde, "What Constitutes Successful Covert Action?" 111–28; and U.S. Senate, Alleged Assassination Plots Involving Foreign Leaders, 13–33.
5. Memorandum of Conversation, "Ghana," 11 March 1965, FRUS, doc. 251, 443–44.
6. Komer to Bundy, 27 May 1965, FRUS, doc. 253.
7. Ibid.
8. CIA, "Recent OCI Reporting on Ghana," FRUS, doc. 257, 453–54.
9. See note 5 above.
10. Komer to Johnson, 12 March 1966, FRUS, doc. 260, 457–58.
11. U.S. Government, *Tradecraft Primer*, 14–16; and El Taki, "Ignorance Is Power," 835–57.
12. Austin, *Politics in Ghana, 1946–1960*; and James, *Nkrumah and the Ghana Revolution*, 104–23.
13. Birmingham, *Kwame Nkrumah*. See also Mazrui, *Towards a Pax Africana*.
14. Birmingham, *Kwame Nkrumah*; and Williams, *White Malice*, 186.
15. Biney, *Political and Social Thought of Kwame Nkrumah*, 84–5, 96.
16. Killick, *Development Economics in Action*, 100–10.
17. Dowse, "Military and Police Rule," 16–36; and CIA, "Recent OCI Reporting on Ghana," FRUS, doc. 257, 453–54.
18. See note 8 above.
19. See note 1 above.
20. See note 2 above.
21. Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies*, 201n.
22. Hersh, "C.I.A. Said to Have Aided Plotters," 6.
23. Williams, *White Malice*, 497.
24. Memorandum of Conversation, "Ghana," 11 March 1965, FRUS, doc. 251, 443–44; Komer to Bundy, 27 May 1965, FRUS, doc. 253; and CIA, "Recent OCI Reporting on Ghana," FRUS, doc. 257, 453–54.

25. Long and Cacciatore, "One Size Does Not Fit All," 599–619.
26. Cormac, Walton, and Van Puyvelde, "What Constitutes Successful Covert Action?" 111–28.
27. Duffield, "A Narrative Approach to Analysis of Covert Action," 608–26.
28. Duffield, "Overcoming Anglocentrism in Covert Action Scholarship," 1291–1316.
29. El Taki, "Ignorance Is Power," 835–57.
30. El Taki, "Ignorance Is Power," 835–57; Trenta, Fahey, and Atkinson, "Secrecy and the Politics of Selective Disclosures," 579–98.
31. Grandin, *The Last Colonial Massacre*.
32. See note 23 above.
33. Long and Cacciatore, "One Size Does Not Fit All," 599–619; Cormac, Walton, and Van Puyvelde, "What Constitutes Successful Covert Action?" 111–28.
34. 50 U.S.C. § 3093(e). The statutory definition postdates the events examined here and is used as an analytical distinction rather than as the governing legal definition of CIA activity in 1966.
35. See, in particular, Memorandum of Conversation, "Ghana," 11 March 1965, FRUS, doc. 251, 443–44; Komer to Bundy, 27 May 1965, FRUS, doc. 253; CIA, "Recent OCI Reporting on Ghana," FRUS, doc. 257, 453–54; Department of State to Embassy in Ghana, 25 February 1966, FRUS, doc. 258; Komer to Johnson, 10 March 1966, FRUS, doc. 208, 322–23; Komer to Johnson, 12 March 1966, FRUS, doc. 260, 457–58; CIA, "Army Overthrows Nkrumah Regime in Ghana," 17.
36. See Austin, *Politics in Ghana*, 1946–1960; Austin and Luckham, eds., *Politicians and Soldiers in Ghana*; and Birmingham, *Kwame Nkrumah*; and Nkrumah, Dark Days in Ghana.
37. U.S. Government, *Tradecraft Primer*, 14–16.
38. The categories identified here are analytical criteria developed for the present inquiry, informed by the distinction between intelligence collection and influence reflected in 50 U.S.C. § 3093(e) and by the comparative logic of structured analysis. See U.S. Government, *Tradecraft Primer*, 14–16.
39. Trenta, Fahey, and Atkinson, "Secrecy and the Politics of Selective Disclosures," 579–98.
40. See note 37 above.
41. These propositions are analytical rules adopted for the present inquiry, informed by contemporary structured-analysis principles. See Office of the Director of National Intelligence, *Intelligence Community Directive 203: Analytic Standards*, 21 January 2022; U.S. Government, *Tradecraft Primer*, 14–16.
42. Trenta, Fahey, and Atkinson, "Secrecy and the Politics of Selective Disclosures," 579–98; El Taki, "Ignorance Is Power," 835–57.
43. The source-weighting framework stated here is adopted for the present inquiry. See generally Office of the Director of National Intelligence, *Intelligence Community Directive 203: Analytic Standards*, 21 January 2022.
44. Komer to Bundy, 27 May 1965, FRUS, doc. 253.
45. See note 37 above.
46. See note 5 above.
47. Ibid.
48. Komer to Bundy, 27 May 1965, FRUS, doc. 253.
49. Ibid.
50. Ibid.
51. See note 8 above.
52. Ibid.
53. Ibid.
54. Ibid.
55. Ibid.
56. Ibid.
57. Ibid.
58. Ibid.
59. Ibid.

60. See note 1 above.
61. See note 24 above.
62. CIA, Ghana's Volta River Project, 4, table 1.
63. See note 5 above.
64. Ibid.
65. Komer to Bundy, 27 May 1965, FRUS, doc. 253.
66. Ibid.
67. See note 24 above.
68. Memorandum of Conversation, "Ghana," 11 March 1965, FRUS, doc. 251, 443–44; and Komer to Bundy, 27 May 1965, FRUS, doc. 253.
69. Department of State to Embassy in Ghana, 25 February 1966, FRUS, doc. 258.
70. Komer to Johnson, March 10, 1966, FRUS, doc. 208, 322–23.
71. Komer to Johnson, March 12, 1966, FRUS, doc. 260, 457–58.
72. Ibid.
73. See note 62 above.
74. Memorandum of Conversation, "Ghana," 11 March 1965, FRUS, doc. 251, 443–44; Komer to Bundy, 27 May 1965, FRUS, doc. 253; CIA, "Recent OCI Reporting on Ghana," FRUS, doc. 257, 453–54; and Komer to Johnson, 12 March 1966, FRUS, doc. 260, 457–58.
75. See note 21 above.
76. Ibid.
77. *F*oreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976, vol. II, Organization and Management of U.S. Foreign Policy, 1969–1972, doc. 203. President Richard Nixon issued National Security Decision Memorandum 40 on 17 February 1970, superseding the previous arrangement and renaming the covert-action review mechanism the 40 Committee; in 1966 the corresponding interagency body was the 303 Committee.
78. See note 21 above.
79. See note 22 above.
80. Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies*, 201n; and Hersh, "C.I.A. Said to Have Aided Plotters," 6.
81. Komer to Bundy, 27 May 1965, FRUS, doc. 253.
82. Memorandum of Conversation, "Ghana," 11 March 1965, FRUS, doc. 251, 443–44; and CIA, "Recent OCI Reporting on Ghana," FRUS, doc. 257, 453–54.
83. See note 23 above.
84. U.S. Senate, *Alleged Assassination Plots Involving Foreign Leaders*, 13–33.
85. See Memorandum of Conversation, "Ghana," 11 March 1965, FRUS, doc. 251, 443–44; Komer to Bundy, 27 May 1965, FRUS, doc. 253; and CIA, "Recent OCI Reporting on Ghana," FRUS, doc. 257, 453–54. The point is not that these records constitute a complete archive, but that the principal contemporaneous records examined here establish foreknowledge, contact, and policy preference without independently specifying the operational assistance alleged retrospectively.
86. Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies*, 201n; Hersh, "C.I.A. Said to Have Aided Plotters," 6; Memorandum of Conversation, "Ghana," 11 March 1965, FRUS, doc. 251, 443–44; Komer to Bundy, 27 May 1965, FRUS, doc. 253; and CIA, "Recent OCI Reporting on Ghana," FRUS, doc. 257, 453–54.
87. See note 2 above.
88. See note 84 above.
89. See note 21 above.
90. See note 22 above.
91. Memorandum of Conversation, "Ghana," 11 March 1965, FRUS, doc. 251, 443–44; and Komer to Johnson, 12 March 1966, FRUS, doc. 260, 457–58.
92. See Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies*, 201n; Hersh, "C.I.A. Said to Have Aided Plotters," 6; Komer to Bundy, 27 May 1965, FRUS, doc. 253; and CIA, "Recent OCI Reporting on Ghana," FRUS, doc. 257, 453–54. The distinction drawn here is analytical: corroboration of surrounding propositions increases the plausibility of an allegation without necessarily corroborating every component of it.

93. See note 39 above.
94. Duffield, "A Narrative Approach to Analysis of Covert Action," 608–26; and Cormac, Walton, and Van Puyvelde, "What Constitutes Successful Covert Action?" 111–28.
95. See note 28 above.
96. See note 30 above.
97. Nkrumah, *Dark Days in Ghana*, 9; Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies*, 201n; Hersh, "C.I.A. Said to Have Aided Plotters," 6; Memorandum of Conversation, "Ghana," 11 March 1965, FRUS, doc. 251, 443–44; Komer to Bundy, 27 May 1965, FRUS, doc. 253; and CIA, "Recent OCI Reporting on Ghana," FRUS, doc. 257, 453–54.
98. Memorandum of Conversation, "Ghana," 11 March 1965, FRUS, doc. 251, 443–44; Komer to Bundy, 27 May 1965, FRUS, doc. 253.
99. Ibid.
100. Komer to Johnson, 10 March 1966, FRUS, doc. 208, 322–23; Komer to Johnson, 12 March 1966, FRUS, doc. 260, 457–58.
101. See note 21 above.
102. See note 22 above.
103. Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies*, 201n; Hersh, "C.I.A. Said to Have Aided Plotters," 6. On Stockwell's use of "40 Committee" for the body known in 1966 as the 303 Committee, see n. 77 above.
104. See Memorandum of Conversation, "Ghana," 11 March 1965, FRUS, doc. 251, 443–44; Komer to Bundy, 27 May 1965, FRUS, doc. 253; and CIA, "Recent OCI Reporting on Ghana," FRUS, doc. 257, 453–54. The conclusion concerns what the presently available contemporaneous record independently establishes, not what may have occurred outside that record.
105. Memorandum of Conversation, "Ghana," 11 March 1965, FRUS, doc. 251, 443–44; Komer to Bundy, 27 May 1965, FRUS, doc. 253; CIA, "Recent OCI Reporting on Ghana," FRUS, doc. 257, 453–54; Dowse, "Military and Police Rule," 16–36.
106. Komer to Bundy, 27 May 1965, FRUS, doc. 253.
107. Komer to Johnson, 10 March 1966, FRUS, doc. 208, 322–23; and Komer to Johnson, 12 March 1966, FRUS, doc. 260, 457–58.
108. See note 80 above.
109. CIA, "Recent OCI Reporting on Ghana," FRUS, doc. 257, 453–54; Dowse, "Military and Police Rule," 16–36.
110. Memorandum of Conversation, "Ghana," 11 March 1965, FRUS, doc. 251, 443–44; Komer to Bundy, 27 May 1965, FRUS, doc. 253; CIA, "Recent OCI Reporting on Ghana," FRUS, doc. 257, 453–54; Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies*, 201n; Hersh, "C.I.A. Said to Have Aided Plotters," 6.
111. Memorandum of Conversation, "Ghana," 11 March 1965, FRUS, doc. 251, 443–44; Komer to Bundy, 27 May 1965, FRUS, doc. 253; CIA, "Recent OCI Reporting on Ghana," FRUS, doc. 257, 453–54.
112. Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies*, 201n; and Hersh, "C.I.A. Said to Have Aided Plotters," 6.
113. See note 110 above.
114. See note 17 above.
115. Trenta, Fahey, and Atkinson, "Secrecy and the Politics of Selective Disclosures," 579–98; and Duffield, "A Narrative Approach to Analysis of Covert Action," 608–26.

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