

ABSTRACT

Covert action is a popular and fruitful tactic employed in the Middle East, yet it has little common grounds with covert operations that were popularised by the United States or the Soviet Union. This dissertation offers a new perspective on covert action and attached plausible deniability, by taking into consideration the Middle Eastern region today and its specific characteristics. The need for secrecy, a key aspect of the traditional portrayal of covert actions, is replaced by the urge to assert and project power over this contested region, while all parties involved carefully seek to avoid engaging in conventional armed conflict. Middle Eastern countries are characterised by the ability to navigate conflict through grey zone tactics, covert action being a prominent one, due to the strong imbalance of military capabilities and due to the intricate, yet fragile, network of alliances and partnerships. This study explores the reasons why implausible deniability is a more appropriate term to describe the modern covert actions in the Middle East are carried out, rather than plausible deniability. Namely, implausible deniability, which is described as the more open acknowledgment of sponsorship in covert actions, is not merely imposed by a technologically interconnected society, which in the last two decades significantly impacted states' relationship with transparency, but it is a product of an intense power struggle that dictates the entire behaviour of this region. Moreover, the role of state-sponsored terrorism and its blatantly unconcealed tactics systematically impacts covert operations, either suffered or carried out, thus making it necessary to reframe plausible deniability. In addition to these premises, this study comes to the conclusion that implausible deniability has attached a specific set of implications and consequences, as it ultimately adds the possibility to implicitly intimidate the adversaries with a not-so-secret show of strength.