



# Safe for Democracy: The Secret Wars of the CIA

By John Prados

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## Safe for Democracy: The Secret Wars of the CIA By John Prados

From its founding in the aftermath of World War II, the Central Intelligence Agency has been discovered in the midst of some of the most crucial—and most embarrassing—episodes in United States relations with the world. Richard Nixon's 1969 presidential order that declared CIA covert operations necessary to the attainment of American foreign policy goals was an acknowledgment that secret warfare tools had a much wider application than just the cold war conflict with the Soviet Union. The question of what, exactly, these operations have contributed to U.S. policy has long been neglected in the rush to accuse the CIA of being a "rogue elephant" or merely listing its nefarious deeds. *Safe for Democracy* for the first time places the story of the CIA's covert operations squarely in the context of America's global quest for democratic values and institutions. National security historian John Prados offers a comprehensive history of the CIA's secret wars that is as close to a definitive account as is possible today. He draws on three decades of research to illuminate the men and women of the intelligence establishment, their resources and techniques, their triumphs and failures. In a dramatic and revealing narrative, *Safe for Democracy* not only relates the inside stories of covert operations but examines in meticulous detail the efforts of presidents and Congress to control the CIA and the specific choices made in the agency's secret wars. Along the way Mr. Prados offers eye-opening accounts of the covert actions themselves, from radically revised interpretations of classic operations like Iran, Guatemala, Chile, and the Bay of Pigs; to lesser-known projects like Tibet and Angola; to virtually unknown tales of the CIA in Guyana and Ghana. He supplies full accounts of Reagan-era operations in Nicaragua and Afghanistan, and brings the story up to date with accounts of more recent activities in Somalia, Bosnia, and Iraq, all the while keeping American foreign policy goals in view. *Safe for Democracy*<

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## Safe for Democracy: The Secret Wars of the CIA By John Prados Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #362551 in Books
- Brand: Brand: Ivan R. Dee
- Published on: 2009-02-16
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.36" h x 1.15" w x 6.37" l, 1.79 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 736 pages

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### Editorial Review

From [Booklist](#)

*\*Starred Review\** Most Americans know that the CIA is the agency primarily responsible for the gathering of foreign intelligence data. Some Americans are aware (to varying degrees) of the role the agency played in the overthrow of governments in Iran and Guatemala. So Prados, a historian who has written extensively on national-security affairs, has performed a valuable service by revealing the massive extent of CIA covert activities over the past 60 years. This is a comprehensive and superbly researched effort that is both engrossing and disturbing. Some of the topics covered are familiar ground, including clandestine efforts in Iran, Guatemala, and Cuba. But Prados also details lesser-known CIA activities in Guyana, Eastern Europe, and even Western Europe in the aftermath of World War II. In addition to organizing military coups, these activities included infiltration of labor unions, subsidizing publishing firms, and funding of anti-Soviet partisan groups. Prados is no rigid leftist engaged in America bashing. He accepts that U.S. foreign policy genuinely hoped to spread democracy while opposing the spread of Communism. But, as he convincingly illustrates, CIA covert efforts often produced the opposite result, and also produced an enduring legacy of hatred and mistrust toward our nation. *Jay Freeman*

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### Review

This definitive history of covert action is both timely and necessary. (James Bamford, author of *The Puzzle Palace*, *Body of Secrets*, and *A Pretext for War*)

*Prados brings together in one colorful narrative a sweeping history of America's covert wars. (Kai Bird, coauthor of American Prometheus: The Triumph and Tragedy of J. Robert Oppenheimer)*

*Safe for Democracy is history for adults?not White House spin but what really happened and why. (Thomas Powers, Pulitzer Prize winner for national reporting and author of Intelligence Wars: American Secret History from Hitler to Al-Qaeda)*

*Highly readable, this is intelligence history, and intelligent history at its best. (Lloyd Gardner, foreign policy specialist and author)*

*A comprehensive and up-to-date account. (Norman Polmar, co-author of Spy Book: The Encyclopedia of Espionage)*

*Prados... constructs factual narratives of events based on thorough research with minimal analytic interpretation interspersed. (Bruce Miller Blue Voice)*

Prados has performed a valuable service....A comprehensive and superbly researched effort that is both engrossing and disturbing. (*Booklist*)

If you're studying the CIA's operations and routines you can't be without *Safe for Democracy*. (*Midwest Book Review*)

This is the most detailed single volume on the modern history of US covert operations. (*CHOICE*)

Prados is an extraordinarily tenacious researcher....[This book is] an impressive achievement. (Lawrence D.

Freedman *Foreign Affairs*)

A rare degree of success....His coverage is unusually comprehensive and objective....An authoritative, original work....Prados demonstrates his virtuosity. (*Journal of American History*)

A well-researched, detailed, and vivid account....Prados proves a master of his subject. (Dimitris Keridas *Political Science Quarterly*)

Factual and capacious...if anyone writes hereafter about CIA's covert actions without consulting Prados, the result will be woefully deficient. (Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., special assistant to President Kennedy and author of *A Thousand Days*)

The book has many strengths...[Prados] introduces a mountain of newly declassified documents and information from memoirs and interviews. The book thus contains much new detail about individuals involved in covert operations and project costs. (*The Historian*)

*Safe for Democracy* argues its author's case very well, and it opens some very serious questions for scholarly military historians. (*Military History*)

#### About the Author

John Prados is widely recognized as one of the foremost historians of national security affairs. A Columbia University Ph.D., his major books include *Presidents' Secret Wars*, *Pentagon Games*, *Keepers of the Keys*, *Inside the Pentagon Papers*, *The Blood Road*, *Valley of Decision*, *The Hidden History of the Vietnam War*, and *Combined Fleet Decoded*. Mr. Prados is a senior fellow at the National Security Archives and lives in Silver Spring, Maryland.

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