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Once Again, The Only Solution is: Abolish the CIA

by Jacob G. Hornberger

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We all know that nothing is going to happen to the CIA officials who violated the criminal law by torturing people. Even if they were prosecuted — a highly unlikely possibility given the power of the CIA in America’s governmental structure — all they would do is say that they were following orders and protecting “national security.” Most federal judges would quickly let them off the hook. The few who wouldn’t would give minor slaps on the wrist to these “patriots” who were just trying to keep us safe.

Once the furor over the torture scandal dies down, as it always does after the discovery of each new CIA scandal, the CIA will continue doing whatever it wants to do, in secret.

It’s not just the CIA that is responsible for the criminal wrongdoing. Congress is just as responsible. After all, when a legislative body brings into existence a governmental agency that wields the omnipotent power to do whatever it deems necessary for “national security” and to do it in secret — and then keeps it in existence — then the legislative body is responsible for all the acts of that secret agency.

At any time since 1947, and especially since the end of the Cold War, Congress could have abolished the CIA. It chose not to do so, preferring instead to permit this omnipotent agency to continue operating in secret. That makes Congress equally responsible for the torture and all the other criminal acts committed by the CIA.

Consider what Harry Truman said about the CIA in his *Washington Post* op-ed 30 days after the John Kennedy assassination. Truman was the president who called the CIA into existence in 1947. Truman said that he intended to bring into existence an agency that would be involved only in gathering intelligence. Instead, he said that the CIA had gone far beyond its intended purpose. Here are his exact words in December 1963:

For some time I have been disturbed by the way CIA has been diverted from its original assignment. It has become an operational and at times a policy-making arm of the Government. This has led to trouble and may have compounded our difficulties in several explosive areas.

I never had any thought that when I set up the CIA that it would be injected into peacetime cloak and dagger operations. Some of the complications and embarrassment I think we have experienced are in part attributable to the fact that this quiet intelligence arm of the President has been so removed from its intended role that it is being interpreted as a symbol of sinister and mysterious foreign intrigue—and a subject for cold war enemy propaganda....

But there are now some searching questions that need to be answered. I, therefore, would like to see the CIA be restored to its original assignment as the intelligence arm of the President, and that whatever else it can properly perform in that special field—and that its operational duties be terminated or properly used elsewhere.

We have grown up as a nation, respected for our free institutions and for our ability to maintain a free and open society. There is something about the way the CIA has been functioning that is casting a shadow over our historic position and I feel that we need to correct it.

Since Truman's op-ed, we have experienced one horror story after another at the hands of the CIA—coups, assassinations, foreign meddling, torture, bribery, kidnapping, and who knows what else—it's all secret.

Should we follow Truman's advice and limit the CIA to intelligence-gathering?

Absolutely not. There is no way that the CIA would ever agree to such a limitation on its power. The cat is out of the bag. The only solution is to abolish it.

And after all, what was the original justification for bringing this totalitarian type agency into existence? It was to wage the Cold War against America's World War II partner and ally, the Soviet Union. In fact, as we have recently discovered, in order to wage that war the CIA secretly hired more than a thousand former Nazi officials — people who had faithfully served Adolf Hitler, including some who had participated in the Holocaust.

The CIA should never have been called into existence. A free society doesn't fight totalitarianism by embracing totalitarian methods. It fights totalitarianism by embracing freedom methods.

In any event, the original justification for the CIA expired a long time ago because the Cold War ended a long time ago. In fact, the CIA has done its best to revive it, so as to justify its continued existence.

Can the United States survive without the CIA? The real question is: Can the United States survive with the CIA, a dark-side, totalitarian agency that has the omnipotent power to do whatever it wants with impunity and in secret.

Free societies can survive without totalitarian governmental apparatuses. Such apparatuses destroy free societies.

Now would be a perfect time to move America down the road to freedom, peace, prosperity, harmony and limited government by abolishing the CIA. That's the only solution to the morass in which America finds herself.

Lord Acton said: Power tends to corrupt; absolute power corrupts absolutely.

There is no better example of that principle than the CIA.