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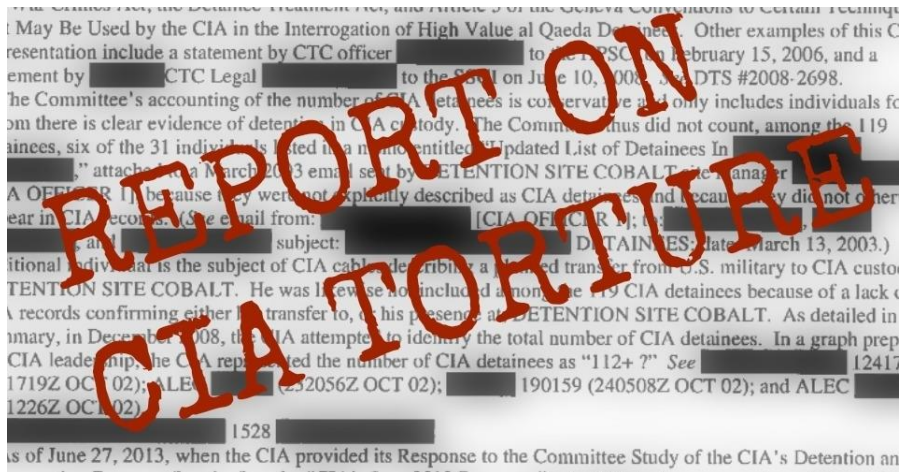
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Abolishing the CIA

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The question is, what do we do with this moment of national self-awareness? Beyond demanding the prosecution of high-level perps, how about really changing the game? (Image: Common Dreams)

The shock resonating from the Senate Intelligence Committee's CIA torture report isn't due so much to the revelations themselves, grotesque as the details are, but to the fact that they're now officially public. National spokespersons (except for Dick Cheney) can no longer deny, quite so glibly, that the United States is what it claims its enemies to be.

We're responsible for the worst sort of abuses of our fellow human beings: A half-naked man freezes to death. A detainee is chained to the wall in a standing position for 17 days. The stories have no saving grace, not even "good intelligence."

The Axis of Evil smiles, yawns: It's home.

The question is, what do we do with this moment of national self-awareness? Beyond demanding the prosecution of high-level perps, how about really changing the game? I suggest reviving S. 126, a bill introduced into the U.S. Senate on Jan. 4, 1995 by Daniel Patrick Moynihan, titled: Abolition of the Central Intelligence Agency.

Abolish the agency that has secretly stirred up hell on earth. Its sins go far beyond torturing suspected terrorists. This agency, with its annual budget (in 2013) of nearly \$15 billion, has covertly carried out the bidding of special economic and political interests since its founding, orchestrating, among much else, the overthrow of democratically elected, populist governments in Iran, Guatemala and Chile because the U.S. couldn't control them. In each case, the regime that followed was darkly repressive, murderous; the blood of their victims is also on American hands.

The abolition of the CIA could be a conscious step in tearing our government out of the grip of the war consensus — this unelected force that feeds on perpetual global mistrust and hatred, the exact opposite of what true security requires.

In Moynihan's speech introducing the bill to the Senate, he declared that the end of the Cold War "was a victory achieved by openness, not secrecy. By frankness, not intrigue.

"The Soviet Empire," he continued, "did not fall apart because the spooks had bugged the men's room in the Kremlin or put broken glass in Mrs. Brezhnev's bath, but because running a huge closed repressive society in the 1980s had become — economically, socially and militarily, and technologically — impossible."

A U.S. senator took a stand for openness and common sense. He noted that the Information Security Oversight Office, which monitors how many secrets are classified each year, "reported that in 1993 the United States created 6,408,688 secrets. Absurd. While each agency has different procedures and criteria for classifying documents, all seem to operate under the assumption that classification is preferable to disclosure.

"Secrecy," Moynihan proclaimed, "is a disease. It causes hardening of the arteries of the mind."

What if we knew and acknowledged this at the level of national government? Secrecy perpetuates rather than exposes mistakes and accommodates the agenda of special, highly limited

interests. Moynihan's criticism of the agency was focused on the secrecy itself, not the games the agency played in secret or the horrors it inflicted on the innocent, but it was a start.

The torture report opens the door to the nature of the CIA's secrets and forces public scrutiny of them. The agency operates in what has to be called a moral vacuum, seeking and claiming authorization to extract "intelligence" from people by cracking them open physically and emotionally. I call it Human Trash Syndrome: the belief that humans under one's complete control have no innate value and can be abused and discarded at will.

As Ray McGovern wrote, ". . . one can no more 'authorize' torture than rape or slavery. Torture inhabits that same moral category, which ethicists label intrinsic evil, always wrong — whether it 'works' or not."

As though absurdity could further degrade intrinsic evil, however, torture as practiced by the CIA didn't work at all. It produced no information of value to the national cause. But as McGovern also pointed out, referencing Gen. John Kimmons, former head of Army intelligence, ". . . if it's bad intelligence you're after, torture works like a charm. If, for example, you wish to 'prove,' post 9/11, that 'evil dictator' Saddam Hussein was in league with al-Qaeda and might arm the terrorists with WMD, bring on the torturers."

That's because a torture victim, under sufficient duress, will say anything you want him to. And it was torture testimony, specifically that of Ibn al-Sheikh al-Libi, that Bush administration officials used in their marketing of the Iraq war, McGovern noted. Al-Libi provided CIA interrogators with the golden (and nonexistent) link between Saddam and al-Qaeda, which was cited by, among others, Colin Powell in his infamous address to the United Nations in February 2003. Al-Libi eventually recanted all his testimony, to, of course, minimal publicity, and it didn't matter anyway because by then the war with Iraq was already underway.

Abolish the CIA. It serves national insecurity. It serves everything about this country we need to change. Waterboarding and "rectal rehydration" and the infliction of unendurable stress and terror on detainees are today's headlines, but what they guarantee is even worse: a world that will never learn how to live at peace with itself.