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THE CIA, TERRORISM, AND THE COLD WAR: THE EVIL OF THE NATIONAL SECURITY STATE

by Jacob G. Hornberger

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The following is Chapter 1 of The Future of Freedom Foundation's newest ebook, *The CIA, Terrorism, and the Cold War: The Evil of the National Security State* by Jacob Hornberger. Purchase the book for \$1 here.

The two most important words in the lives of the American people for the past 60 years have been “national security.” The term has transformed American society for the worse. It has warped the morals and values of the American people. It has stultified conscience. It has altered the constitutional order. It has produced a democratically elected government that wields totalitarian powers.

We now live in a country whose government wields the legal authority to round up people, including citizens, and take them to concentration camps, detention centers, or military dungeons where the government can torture them, incarcerate them indefinitely, and even execute them as suspected terrorists.

We now live in a country whose government wields the legal authority to send its military and intelligence forces into any country anywhere in the world, kidnap people residing there, and transport them to a prison for the purpose of torture, indefinite detention, and even execution.

We now live in a country whose government wields the legal authority to sneak and peek into people's homes or businesses without warrants; to monitor their emails, telephone calls, and financial transactions; and to spy on the citizenry.

We now live in a country whose government wields the legal authority to support, with money and armaments, totalitarian regimes all over the world and to enter into partnerships with them for the purpose of torturing people whom the U.S. government has kidnapped.

We now live in a country whose government wields the legal authority to assassinate anyone it wants, including American citizens, anywhere in the world, including here in the United States.

We now live in a country whose government wields the legal authority to impose sanctions and embargoes on any other nation and to severely punish the American people and foreign citizens and foreign companies who violate them.

We now live in a country whose government wields the legal authority to invade and occupy any country on earth, without a congressional declaration of war, for any purpose whatever, including regime change and the securing of resources.

And it's all justified under the rubric of "national security."

Most people would concede that that's not the kind of country that America is supposed to be. The nation was founded as a constitutional republic, one whose governmental powers were extremely limited. In fact, the whole idea of using the Constitution to bring the federal government into existence was to make clear that the government's powers were limited to those enumerated in the Constitution itself. To make certain that everyone got the point, the American people secured the passage of the Bill of Rights, which further clarified the extreme restrictions on government power.

Four separate amendments in the Bill of Rights address the power of the federal government to take people, both Americans and foreigners, into custody and to inflict harm on them: the Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, and Eighth Amendments. Due process of law, right to counsel, grand-jury indictments, trial by jury, search and seizure, cruel and unusual punishments, bail, speedy trial — they are all expressly addressed, reflecting how important they were to our American ancestors and to their concept of a free society.

In the age of national security, all of those protections have been rendered moot. They have all been trumped by the concept of national security.

Ironically, the term isn't even found in the Constitution. One searches in vain for some grant of power anywhere in that document relating to "national security." It isn't there. Nonetheless, the government now wields omnipotent powers — powers that the greatest totalitarian dictatorships in history have wielded — under the rubric of "national security."

With the exception of libertarians, hardly anyone questions or challenges it, including those who profess an ardent allegiance to the Constitution. Consider, for example, the Constitution's

Interstate Commerce Clause. For decades, both libertarians and conservatives have complained that the meaning of that clause has been so expanded as to transform it into a general grant of power enabling the federal government to regulate the most minute, localized aspects of economic activity.

Yet here's a phrase — "national security" — that isn't even found in the Constitution, which has been interpreted to grant omnipotent, totalitarian-like powers to the federal government, and conservatives have been rendered mute.

It would be one thing if there had been an amendment to the Constitution stating, "The federal government shall have the power to do whatever it deems necessary in the interests of national security." At least then one could argue that such totalitarian measures were constitutional.

But that's not the situation we have here. We have the government coming up with a concept known as "national security," which it has then used to adopt powers that would otherwise violate the Constitution. It's as if national security has been made the foundation of the nation. Everything else — the Constitution, society, the citizenry, freedom, prosperity — are then based on that foundation.

The goodness of national security

What is "national security"? No one really knows. There is certainly no precise definition of the term. It's actually whatever the government says it is. National security is one of the most meaningless, nebulous, nonsensical terms in the English language, but, at the same time, the most important term in the lives of the American people.

All the government has to do is say "national security," and all discussion and debate shuts down. If the government says that national security is at stake, that's the end of the story. Federal judges will immediately dismiss lawsuits as soon as the government claims, "The case is a threat to national security, your honor." Congress will immediately suspend investigations when the government claims that national security is at stake. The Justice Department will defer to the national-security establishment when it raises the issue of national security.

National security, a term not even in the Constitution, trumps everything. It trumps the judiciary. It trumps the legislative branch of government. It trumps federal criminal investigations. This nebulous term, whose meaning is whatever the government wants it be at any particular time, has been made the foundation of American society.

What is the national-security establishment? It is composed of several agencies, two of the main ones being the vast military-industrial establishment and the CIA. Those two entities have done more to transform American life than anything else, even more than the welfare state. They are the entities that enforce the sanctions and embargoes and engage in the invasions, occupations, regime-change operations, coups, assassinations, torture, indefinite incarcerations, renditions, partnerships with totalitarian regimes, and executions — all in the name of "national security."

One of the most fascinating aspects of all this is how successful the government has been in convincing Americans of two things: that all this is necessary to keep them safe and, at the same time, that America has continued to be a free country notwithstanding the fact that the government has acquired and has exercised totalitarian powers in order to preserve national security.

When Americans see the governments of such countries as the Soviet Union or North Korea wield such powers, they can easily recognize them as being totalitarian in nature. When Americans read that the Soviet government rounded up its own people and sent them into the Gulag, they recoil against the exercise of such totalitarian powers. They have the same reaction when they hear that the North Korean government has tortured people within its prison system. It's the same when Americans hear that the Chinese government has arrested and incarcerated people for years without charges or trial.

But when the U.S. government does such things or even just claims the authority to do them — in the name of national security — the mindset of the average American automatically shifts. It can't be evil for the U.S. government to wield such powers because the agents who are wielding them are Americans, not communists. They have an American flag on their lapel. They have children in America's public schools. They're doing it to keep us safe. They're on our side. We wouldn't be free without them. They're preserving our national security.

In fact, another fascinating aspect to all this is the mindset of those within the national-security establishment itself. Even though they are wielding the same kinds of powers that are wielded by totalitarian regimes, the last thing in their minds is that they're doing anything evil or immoral. In their mind, they're fighting evil in order to preserve security and freedom. Sure, they have to do some unsavory things, but those things are necessary to preserve the nation. Americans are safe and free because of things they're doing, and we're supposed to be grateful that they're doing them.

After all, as advocates of the national-security state often remind us, the Constitution is not a suicide pact. If measures have to be taken to preserve the nation — or the security of the nation — that are inconsistent with the Constitution, then so be it. What good would it do to adhere strictly to the Constitution if, by doing so, the nation were to fall to the terrorists or the communists?

Thus, when officials in totalitarian regimes round people up without charges, incarcerate them indefinitely, torture them, and execute them, what they are doing is evil. But when officials within the U.S. national security state do those same things — and more — they look upon themselves as good and the citizenry look upon them in the same way, simply because they are doing it to advance freedom and to preserve the national security of the United States.

And even then, things are not so clear, at least not when it comes to national security. For example, some foreign totalitarian regimes are considered evil while others are considered good. Consider, for example, Iran and North Korea. In the mindset of the U.S. national-security establishment, they are considered to be evil totalitarian regimes. But then consider, say, Egypt, which has been ruled by a brutal military dictatorship for nearly 30 years, a totalitarian regime

that wields the same kind of totalitarian powers that the U.S. government now wields. For decades, Egyptian military and intelligence forces have rounded people up, taken them to prison camps for indefinite detention, tortured them, and executed them, without formal charges and trial.

Nonetheless, the U.S. national-security establishment has long looked on the Egyptian military dictatorship as good, because of its close relationship with the U.S. national-security state. In fact, during the past several decades the U.S. government has sent hundreds of millions of dollars in money and armaments to Egypt to help fund its totalitarian military dictatorship, and there has been close cooperation between the national-security apparatuses of both nations. In fact, Egypt's national-security state even agreed to serve as one of the U.S. empire's rendition-torture partners, a relationship that enables U.S. officials to send a kidnapped victim to Egypt for the purpose of torture.

Good regime, bad regime

Sometimes, the nether world of national security becomes even more clouded, with some nations shifting back and forth from good to evil. Consider Iran and Iraq, for example. In 1953, Iran was considered a threat to U.S. national security. Thus, the CIA, one of the principal components of the U.S. national-security establishment, engaged in its first regime-change operation, one that succeeded in ousting Iran's democratically elected prime minister, Mohammad Mossadegh, from power and installing the shah of Iran into power.

For the next 25 years, Iran was considered good, notwithstanding the fact that the shah's regime was totalitarian in nature. In fact, the CIA even helped him and his national-security establishment to oppress the Iranian people. When Iranians finally revolted against the domestic tyranny that the U.S. national-security state had foisted upon them, Iran immediately became an evil regime in the eyes of the U.S. national-security establishment, notwithstanding the fact that the new regime wasn't doing anything different than the shah's regime had done. During the 1980s, Iraq had a brutal totalitarian regime headed by Saddam Hussein. Nonetheless, it was considered a good regime because it was friendly to the U.S. national-security state. In fact, during that time the relationship was so solid that the United States even sent Iraq biological and chemical weapons of mass destruction so that Saddam could use them to attack Iran (which was considered evil).

Later, when Iraq invaded Kuwait, the U.S. national-security establishment reclassified Iraq as an evil regime. Today, Iraq is headed by a democratically elected regime that exercises the same totalitarian powers that Saddam exercised, but it's considered to be a good regime because it's perceived to be on the side of the U.S. national-security state. If it ultimately formally aligns itself with Iran, as many suspect it will, it will find itself back in the ranks of the evil.

How did it all come to this? How did the United States become transformed from a constitutional republic into a national-security state? How did the concept of national security become the guiding star of American life, without even the semblance of a constitutional amendment? How did the national-security establishment — the vast, permanent military-industrial complex and the CIA — come to be the foundation of American society?

More important, is a national-security state truly compatible with the principles of a free society? Did Americans delude themselves into thinking that they could retain a free and safe society with a government that wields totalitarian powers? Did Americans sacrifice their freedom, their security, their values, and their consciences on the altar of national security?

Perhaps most important, has the time come to dismantle the national-security state in order to restore a free, prosperous, peaceful, normal, and harmonious society to our land? Is it time to restore a limited-government, constitutional republic, the type of government that was clearly envisioned by the Founding Fathers?

Let's examine those questions. Let's start by focusing on Cuba.