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Seven Former CIA Directors Want To Bury The Truth

By Melvin A. Goodman

On September 23, 2009

Last week, seven former directors of the Central Intelligence Agency, who made their own contributions to the CIA's low esteem over the past 35 years, [asked President Barack Obama](#) to make sure there is no criminal investigation of the crimes associated with the Agency's detentions and interrogations policies over the past eight years.

Their letter to the president is particularly self-serving for three of the directors (Michael Hayden, Porter Goss, and George Tenet), who would presumably be the subject of any investigation, and simply self-aggrandizing for the others (John Deutch, James Woolsey, William Webster, and James Schlesinger), whose stewardship of the CIA since the early 1970s has contributed to the Agency's loss of influence and credibility.

The key to managing a complex organization such as the CIA is based on the integrity and competence of the director and his senior management. These traits were certainly lacking during the two decades these "magnificent seven" were at the helm.

The letter itself represents a stunning display of irrelevance and wrong-headedness. The former directors argue, for example, that any reopened investigation would damage the intelligence community's ability to obtain cooperation of foreign intelligence agencies.

In fact, the opposite is the case. Foreign intelligence agencies have been holding back their liaison activities and their cooperation with the CIA because of the crimes associated with secret prisons, torture and abuse, and extraordinary renditions. It is quite unbelievable that CIA leaders decided to compromise the governments and intelligence services of the European community by locating secret prisons and using logistical facilities within their borders. It is very unlikely that any member of the European Union will cooperate with such CIA activities in the future.

The seven directors argue predictably that career prosecutors have already investigated the relevant cases where “Agency officers appeared to have acted beyond their existing legal authorities,” but with the exception of a prosecution of a CIA contractor there was a determination that prosecutions were not warranted. They do not mention that a political appointee in the Bush administration, Paul McNulty, was responsible for these decisions and they do not refer to the unconscionable politicization of the Bush administration’s Justice Department.

Finally, the letter argues that any criminal investigation would “seriously damage the willingness” of intelligence officers to “take risks to protect the country.”

This is arrant nonsense! One of the reasons why the CIA had to resort to independent contractors, particularly former military officers and enlisted men, to staff secret prisons and conduct torture and abuse was because of the opposition of professional intelligence officers to the policies of the Bush administration. An investigation would not compromise the national security interests of the United States, although it would cause grave embarrassment to those who carried out these policies and would perhaps guarantee that these actions would never again be permitted.

It is also worthwhile to examine those individuals who signed the letter to the president. Jim Schlesinger abolished the Office of National Estimates, the most prestigious Agency department for intelligence analysis, because of its independence and created a group of National Intelligence Officers who would be more responsive to the policy demands of the White House and the National Security Council.

Upon arrival at the CIA in 1973, he assembled the CIA’s Soviet analysts and told them to “stop fucking Richard Nixon.” Judge William Webster obstructed the Walsh investigation of Iran-Contra, particularly the case against a high-ranking operations officer who was responsible for illegal arms deliveries to the Contras. The officer was indicted by a Grand Jury for making false statements and obstructing the investigations of the CIA’s Inspector General as well as the work of the Tower Commission, but the case was dismissed after Webster refused to release necessary documents.

Jim Woolsey and John Deutch were short-lived directors who weakened the Agency’s role in collecting intelligence and conducting analysis in the key fields of arms control and international terrorism. Woolsey’s unwillingness to punish any of the eleven senior officers who were responsible for allowing Aldrich Ames, the notorious long-spy for the Soviet Union, to move into sensitive clandestine positions over a ten-year period led the Clinton administration to force his resignation.

Deutch’s security breaches at the CIA included the compromise of the most sensitive clandestine operations of the directorate of operations. Deutch had introduced sensitive intelligence to his home computer that had been used for accessing pornographic sites, but he blamed others in the household for the compromise.

Tenet, Goss, and Hayden were directly involved in the decision-making that led to the creation of secret prisons in Europe, Southwest Asia, and the Far East; the use of torture and abuse; and the rendition of individuals who were guilty of no crimes against the United States. Tenet, moreover, was directly responsible for the false intelligence given to the White

House to support the use of force authorization against Iraq in 2002 as well as the phony speech given by Secretary of State Colin Powell to the United Nations in 2003.

Goss worked assiduously to cover-up the 9/11 accountability report of the CIA's Inspector General. His handpicked executive secretary, the third highest position at the CIA, was Kyle "Dusty" Foggo, who is currently serving a jail sentence for steering Agency contracts to a lifelong friend who bribed former congressman Randall "Duke" Cunningham.

Hayden entered the CIA under a cloud because, as director of the National Security Agency, he approved the warrantless eavesdropping program that began after 9/11. And he left the CIA under a cloud this year because of his success in compromising the work of the Office of the Inspector General.

President Obama and Attorney General Eric Holder must ignore the efforts of the former CIA directors and many others to find the truths that would be part of any investigation of activities that went beyond any legal authority. Twenty-five years ago, CIA director William Casey tried to cover-up crimes that were committed in the remote El Salvadoran village of El Mozote. Eventually the Salvadoran government established a Truth Commission to investigate the crimes that had been dismissed by the Reagan administration.

Today, the United States needs to create a Truth Commission to understand the crimes that were committed over the past decade.