

The Deadliest Operation. Truman on “The Purpose and Operations of Our CIA”

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Choose your battles wisely.

One month to the day after President Kennedy’s assassination, the Washington Post published an article by former president Harry Truman.

I think it has become necessary to take another look at the purpose and operations of our Central Intelligence Agency—CIA. At least, I would like to submit here the original reason why I thought it necessary to organize this Agency during my Administration, what I expected it to do and how it was to operate as an arm of the President.

Truman had envisioned the CIA as an impartial information and intelligence collector from “every available source.”

But their collective information reached the President all too frequently in conflicting conclusions. At times, the intelligence reports tended to be slanted to conform to established positions of a given department. This becomes confusing and what’s worse, such intelligence is of little use to a President in reaching the right decisions.

Therefore, I decided to set up a special organization charged with the collection of all intelligence reports from every available source, and to have those reports reach me as President without department “treatment” or interpretations.

I wanted and needed the information in its “natural raw” state and in as comprehensive a volume as it was practical for me to make full use of it. But the most important thing about this move was to guard against the chance of intelligence being used to influence or to lead the President into unwise decisions—and I thought it was necessary that the President do his own thinking and evaluating.

Truman found, to his dismay, that the CIA had ranged far afield.

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.

The article appeared in the Washington Post's morning edition, but not the evening edition.

Truman reveals two naive assumptions. He thought a government agency could be apolitical and objective. Further, he believed the CIA's role could be limited to information gathering and analysis, eschewing "cloak and dagger operations." The timing and tone of the letter may have been hints that Truman thought the CIA was involved in Kennedy's assassination. If he did, he also realized an ex-president couldn't state his suspicions without troublesome consequences.

Even the man who signed the CIA into law had to stay in the shadows, the CIA's preferred operating venue. The CIA had become the exact opposite of what Truman envisioned and what its enabling legislation specified. Within a few years after its inauguration in 1947, it was neck-deep in global cloak and dagger and pushing agenda-driven, slanted information and outright disinformation not just within the government, but through the media to the American people.

The CIA lies with astonishing proficiency. It has made an art form of "plausible deniability." Like glimpsing an octopus in murky waters, you know it's there, but it shoots enough black ink to obscure its movements. Murk and black ink make it impossible for anyone on the outside to determine exactly what it does or has done. Insiders, even the director, are often kept in the dark.

For those on the trail of CIA and the other intelligence agencies' lies and skullduggery, the agencies give ground glacially and only when they have to. What concessions they make often embody multiple layers of back-up lies. It can take years for an official admission—the CIA didn't officially confess its involvement in the 1953 coup that deposed Iranian leader Mohammad Mosaddeq until 2013—and even then details are usually not forthcoming. Many of the so-called exposés of the intelligence agencies are in effect spook-written for propaganda or damage control.

The intelligence agencies monitor virtually everything we do. They have tentacles reaching into every aspect of contemporary society, exercising control in pervasive but mostly unknown ways. Yet, every so often some idiot writes an op-ed or bloviates on TV, bemoaning the lack of trust the majority of Americans have in "their" government and wondering why. The wonder is that anyone still trusts the government.

The intelligence agency fog both obscures and corrodes. An ever increasing number of Americans believe that a shadowy Deep State pulls the strings. Most major stories since World War II—Korea, Vietnam, Kennedy's assassination, foreign coups, the 1960s student unrest, civil rights agitation, and civic disorder, Watergate, Iran-Contra, 9/11, domestic surveillance, and many more—have intelligence angles. However, determining what those angles are plunges you into the miasma perpetuated by the agencies and their media accomplices.

The intelligence agencies and captive media's secrecy, disinformation, and lies make it

futile to mount a straightforward attack against them. It's like attacking a citadel surrounded by swamps and bogs that afford no footing, making advance impossible. Their deadliest operation has been against the truth. In a political forum, how does one challenge an adversary who controls most of the information necessary to discredit, and ultimately reform or eliminate that adversary?

You don't fight where your opponent wants you to fight. What the intelligence apparatus fears most is a battle of ideas. Intelligence, the military, and the reserve currency are essential component of the US's confederated global empire. During the 2016 campaign, Donald Trump questioned a few empire totems and incurred the intelligence leadership's wrath, demonstrating how sensitive and vulnerable they are on this front. The transparent flimsiness of their Russiagate concoction further illustrates the befuddlement. Questions are out in the open and are usually based on facts within the public domain. They move the battle from the murk to the light, unfamiliar and unwelcome terrain.

The US government, like Oceania, switches enemies as necessary. That validates military and intelligence; lasting peace would be intolerable. After World War II the enemy was the USSR and communism, which persisted until the Soviet collapse in 1991. The 9/11 tragedy offered up a new enemy, Islamic terrorism.

Seventeen years later, after a disastrous run of US interventions in the Middle East and Northern Africa and the rout of Sunni jihadists in Syria by the combined forces of the Syrian government, Russia, Iran, and Hezbollah, it's clear that Islamic terrorism is no longer a threat that stirs the paranoia necessary to feed big military and intelligence budgets. For all the money they've spent, intelligence has done a terrible job of either anticipating terrorist strikes or defeating them in counterinsurgency warfare

So switch the enemy again, now it's Russia and China. The best insight the intelligence community could offer about those two is that they've grown stronger by doing the opposite of the US. For the most part they've stayed in their own neighborhoods. They accept that they're constituents, albeit important ones, of a multipolar global order. Although they'll use big sticks to protect their interests, carrots like the Belt and Road Initiative further their influence much better than the US's bullets and bombs.

If the intelligence complex truly cared about the country, they might go public with the observation that the empire is going broke. However, raising awareness of this dire threat—as opposed to standard intelligence bogeymen—might prompt reexamination of intelligence and military budgets and the foreign policy that supports them. Insolvency will strangle the US's exorbitantly expensive interventionism. It will be the first real curb on the intelligence complex since World War II, but don't expect any proactive measures beforehand from those charged with foreseeing the future.

Conspiracy theories, a term popularized by the CIA to denigrate Warren Commission skeptics, are often proved correct. However, trying to determine the truth behind intelligence agency conspiracies is a time and energy-consuming task, usually producing much frustration and little illumination. Instead, [as Caitlin Johnstone recently observed](#), we're better off fighting on moral and philosophical grounds the intelligence complex and the rest of the government's depredations that are in plain sight.

Attack the intellectual foundations of empire and you attack the whole rickety edifice, including intelligence, that supports it. Tell the truth and you threaten those who deal in lies.

Champion sanity and logic and you challenge the insane irrationality of the powers that be. They are daunting tasks, but less daunting than trying to excavate and clean the intelligence sewer.

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