

WEDGE: THE SECRET WAR BETWEEN THE FBI AND THE CIA,
Mark Riebling (New York: Knopf, 1994).

The following is from a classified cable sent to CIA stations from Ted Price, Director for Operations, in 1994: "As you are aware, recent media coverage has painted a very bleak picture of the CIA's capabilities - depicting an organization which is both unable to run secure or worthwhile operations, and which blindly (and perhaps willfully) ignored numerous blatant signs of espionage in progress...you and I know that this is just not the case."

Mark Riebling's thorough investigation of the CIA and the FBI, and his persuasive and articulate argument proves Price's assertion both false and misleading.

A graduate (1984) of Berkeley's Philosophy department, Riebling's inquisitive mind caused him to turn away from the abstract and toward an intriguing detective search that begins in 1941 with Commander Ian Fleming (the creator of James Bond), as the protagonist. Just as the reader is learning about the creation of the CIA and Fleming's part in its inception Riebling shifts to J. Edgar Hoover. The reader simultaneously follows the actions of Hoover and the FDR appointed first director of the CIA, "Wild Bill" Donovan.

The book states that, since its inception, the CIA as an organization has been resented by those in power over at the FBI. J. Edgar Hoover believed that there was no need for what would, in effect, be a second spy agency. President Roosevelt accepted Churchill's argument that "intelligence and police work could not be made to mix" (10). The early rivalry between the two organizations resulted in a lack of cooperation which time did nothing to change. Riebling argues that the Ames spying affair, which was so embarrassing to the CIA, could have been uncovered two years earlier had the CIA cooperated with the FBI. In March 1994, the National Security Council was asked to review FBI-CIA problems in light of the Ames affair and other cases. One of the conclusions was that "the two agencies were acting like two teenagers and raising incidents that go back into past history" (447). The Senate Intelligence Committee also reviewed FBI-CIA bungling at about the same time and reached similar conclusions: "Ames and his wife might have been caught years earlier if the CIA had fully complied with the 1988 Session-Webster Memo of Understanding" (447).

The information provided by Riebling is shocking and annoying. He argues, for example, that the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor could have been predicted and perhaps avoided if the two agencies had cooperated. An FBI agent named Popov or "Dusko" (Fleming's prototype for James Bond), provided the FBI with information that, if interpreted correctly, could have exposed the Japanese plan to bomb Pearl Harbor. However, Hoover "had reasons for not wanting to give Donovan sensitive information" (27). The CIA, likewise, was unwilling to cooperate with the FBI. Ironically, each agency accused the other of being "unsafe." Donovan's personal behavior suggested that COI (Counterintelligence) was an unsafe repository for secrets. "'Wild Bill's' loss of secret papers in a Sofia nightclub was only one of a series of security breaches...He would talk about the most secret affairs at a cocktail party or a dinner" (29). The FBI also resented the fact that the CIA was home to "blueblood...playboy bankers and stupid sons of wealthy and politically important families" (34). Donovan recruited Ivy League experts in foreign affairs and operatives who knew several foreign languages and could find their way around Europe. J. Edgar Hoover, disliked this "old boys" network. On the other side Donovan resented the FBI using known criminals to perform sensitive government work.

Although Riebling does not hold back on blaming both federal agencies for the lack of cooperation, his sympathies seem to lie with the CIA. Both agencies made major mistakes and failed in many respects, but Riebling portrays Hoover as the leading villain. One learns that Hoover refused to accept that the FBI would not control all intelligence activities. The FBI chief believed that his "long-standing hostility to communism lent a certain credibility to the idea that he was the one to lead American intelligence against the new threat" (64). Hoover tried, with some degree of success, to destroy the credibility of the CIA by asserting that it was riddled with Communist spies. "Naval Intelligence refused to accept [information from the CIA] because it was riddled with communists and the material was probably a deception" (65). Consequently, the CIA had to fight an uphill battle to establish itself as a bone-fide

intelligence agency against Hoover's constant campaign to destroy it.

Riebling mentions only briefly the CIA involvement in the smuggling of Nazi criminals out of Germany after WW II. The ugly facts became known following the trial of Klaus Barbie, the "Butcher of Lyon."

Riebling's astonishing revelations about FBI-Mafia connections in regard to anti-Castro activities raises questions about his sources. The author does not detail the majority of his sources, although his account appears very accurate and seems to have been derived from high-ranking sources. He argues that "most of the Agency's covert operators believed that intelligence work was something different, somehow falling outside the normal realm of the law...there was nothing wrong with wiretaps, mail-opening, "black-bag" jobs, there was nothing wrong with stealing from thieves, lying to liars, killing those who killed" (86). However, this code clashed with the FBI's fundamental mission, the enforcement of the very laws the CIA were breaking. The conflicts that were latent in the beginning became sharper and stronger. The results, according to Riebling, were devastating.

The book dedicates a long chapter to the details surrounding the assassination of JFK, and the author contributes his theory about Kennedy's murder. Riebling concludes that the CIA could and should have known that Oswald was planning to kill the President. Moreover, the writer describes those who he maintains sent Oswald, and why the CIA, having all the information, did not apply it. Although the Agency knew about Oswald's pro-Castro activities it could not act "because Oswald was a US citizen, and clearly an FBI charge" (173). Therefore, in Riebling's view, interagency rivalry is shown to have also played a role in the assassination of JFK.

Riebling's book is full of opinions and conclusions, but the author often neglects to mention his sources. He also quotes unnamed sources and one has to take it on faith that the quotations are genuine. Having expressed these reservations, it is only fair to add that the book is very exciting, being written in a style reminiscent of a spy novel. Once one begins reading it is difficult to stop.

The book raises serious questions about the competence and integrity of both the FBI and the CIA, and can be recommended both to experts and the merely curious. After reading this work, one may better understand how the Iran-Contra affair occurred, although one will probably remain baffled as to how the Ames' family's espionage activities remained undetected for so long a time. Riebling blames it all on interagency rivalry, but perhaps his conclusion is overly simplistic.

Nowadays, with widespread economic espionage and international terrorism on the rise, it is disturbing to read about the following occurrences; "in 1993, secret data about US operations in Somalia had been faxed from Washington to Liberia...a martial-Arts instructor was passing classified documents to the Philippine government...a CIA communications officer at the US embassy in Athens confessed to passing more than 240 secret documents to Greek military intelligence...and a former San Francisco police officer and CIA contract agent were selling secrets to South Africa" (430).

In the case of the World Trade Center bombing, there is evidence that the CIA had issued Abdul Rahman (the alleged ringleader) his entry visa. The bombing took place even though German intelligence sources had warned the CIA against a planned terrorist operation. Furthermore, "The bureau had failed to analyze evidence seized more than two years before the bombing" (436). The evidence in the World Trade Center bombing came to the attention of the FBI in the Kahane murder case. "When FBI agents finally got around to examining and translating Nosair's [the alleged perpetrator] papers in March 1993, they were able to thwart [plans] to blow up New York bridges, the UN, and assassinate US government leaders" (437). In essence, therefore, Riebling argues that the bombing of the World Trade Center could have been avoided.

For the future, Riebling argues that "it is not inconceivable that the FBI might someday be placed in charge of all counterintelligence, foreign and domestic...as was suggested after the Felix Bloch affair, and after the Ames disaster...But [defenders of the CIA] have objected that this would give the FBI too much power, and it would hurt CIA overseas operations" (457). Riebling adds another argument in favor of the CIA. The FBI's traditional refusal

(or inability) to analyze intelligence information should disqualify it from running any CI (counterintelligence) brain center. Moreover, the FBI law-enforcement approach would be ill-suited to counterintelligence needs.

On the other hand, the CIA, unlike the FBI, possesses no police, subpoena, or law-enforcement powers. When prosecution is required, the CIA must turn the case over to the FBI or the Justice Department. Riebling does not attempt to answer the question of whether some kind of a super agency could be made to work, despite raising the question. Riebling ends the book by observing that although the present situation surrounding United States government agencies dedicated to gathering intelligence is not encouraging, it could be a lot worse.

The quandary which gave rise to this book can be summed up in a question; should we, or should we not, try to change the structure of our intelligence community? Riebling leaves this fundamental question unanswered.

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