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JFK ASSASSINATION COULD HAVE BEEN PREVENTED, NEW BOOK SAYS

NEW YORK, Nov. 21 /PRNewswire/ -- President John F. Kennedy's death in Dallas was an avoidable tragedy, according to the new book "WEDGE: The Secret War Between the FBI and CIA," by historian Mark Riebling. "The cumulative effect of Riebling's research is staggering," the Wall Street Journal noted last week. "Mr. Riebling argues, quite persuasively, that if the FBI and the CIA had pooled their information on Lee Harvey Oswald, JFK would not have died in Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963."

Riebling's thesis, based largely on declassified FBI and CIA files, was first advanced earlier this year in an article for the New York Times.

In October 1963, Riebling says, the CIA told the FBI that Oswald had recently met in Mexico City with a Soviet consul, Valeriy Kostikov, but failed to explain that it believed Kostikov was a KGB agent who specialized in assassinations.

"If this belief had been communicated to the FBI, it might have put Oswald under surveillance on November 22, 1963," Riebling writes.

Riebling quotes a former CIA station officer in Mexico as affirming that Oswald "became a person of great interest to us" as a result of a visit to Mexico City in fall 1963. "We thought at first that Oswald might be a dangerous potential defector from the USA to the Soviet Union, so we kept a special watch on him and his activities."

On October 10, 1963, the CIA told the FBI that Oswald had contacted the Soviet Embassy in Mexico City on October 1. The Agency promised the Bureau that "any further information received on this subject will be furnished you."

But according to Riebling, CIA failed to follow through on its promise.

"On October 9, the CIA station in Mexico City cabled CIA headquarters to suggest that Oswald might be even more 'dangerous' than first feared," Riebling writes. "According to the cable, an American male speaking broken Russian, who 'said his name was Lee Oswald,' visited the Soviet Embassy on September 28 and spoke with Consul Valeriy V. Kostikov. The Agency had obtained that information by tapping the embassy's phones in Mexico City, and also had some highly placed informants within the embassy, who confirmed the Oswald-Kostikov meeting.

"According to a declassified CIA memo, it was suspected that Kostikov, while 'functioning overtly as a consul,' was also 'a staff officer of the KGB ... connected with the Thirteenth, or 'liquid affairs' department,' whose responsibilities reportedly included assassination.

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"Although it is unclear when CIA's suspicions about Kostikov first arose, a declassified CIA document shows that they existed by at least November 23, 1963, when one of CIA Counterintelligence Chief James Angleton's staffers shared his fears with FBI agent Samuel J. Papich. Two officials who later saw secret files on the case, however, insist that CIA's worries about Kostikov and Department 13 went back even earlier.

"According to former FBI director Clarence Kelley, and James Johnston, a counsel to the Senate Intelligence Committee, CIA suspected that Kostikov was an assassinations specialist in October 1963. If Kelley and Johnston are correct, any report to the FBI of Oswald's meeting with Kostikov should have given the Bureau clear grounds for watching Oswald on November 22. But things did not happen that way."

Although Riebling believes that CIA-FBI fumbling over Oswald's KGB contacts contributed to President Kennedy's death, he stresses that this "is not necessarily to say that Kostikov, or the KGB, ordered Kennedy killed. Soviet intelligence officers, like those of any nation, routinely carried out consular work unrelated to their clandestine functions, in order to preserve diplomatic 'cover.' Perhaps Kostikov had simply been helping Oswald with his visa request."

In "WEDGE," Riebling chronicles fifty years of FBI-CIA feuding in episodes such as Pearl Harbor, the U-2 affair, plots to kill Fidel Castro, Watergate, the Iran-Contra scandal, Iraq-Gate, and the World Trade Center Bombing, as well as the Kennedy assassination. Universal Pictures has optioned "WEDGE" for director Martin Brest ("Beverly Hills Cop," "Scent of a Woman," "Midnight Run"). Meanwhile, Riebling has drawn praise for his even-handed treatment of controversial issues. "There are few books that adequately cover this subject," the Wall Street Journal observed, referring to Riebling's research on the Kennedy assassination. "Much of what passes for 'the literature' is overblown, conspiracy-addled and fragmented. But Riebling has taken great pains to avoid using anonymous sources. That is just one of a number of reasons why serious students of this nation's haywire-rigged counterintelligence effort should read WEDGE."

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/CONTACT: Paul Bogaards of Knopf Promotion, 212-572-2177/ CO: Knopf ST: New York IN: PUB SU: PDT

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