

Spooks at bay

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Politics

The CIA is under attack again. In the past, its chief critics were on the left. Now the right joins in. The charge today is less one of misconduct than of incompetence and irrelevance. For eight years, Aldrich Ames, a senior officer in the CIA's Clandestine Service, shovelled secrets to the Soviet Union. His spying went virtually unsuspected, despite his lavish spending, public drunkenness and other behaviour that would surely have cost him his job had he been a school crossing guard or a night-watchman. Worse yet, the secrets seem not to have benefited Moscow or to have hurt any part of the US Government except the CIA itself. The Ames case thus raised questions not only about the CIA's management but more generally about its usefulness. Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan and others advocate that it be abolished or at least dismantled.

Why the CIA has reached this pass is made understandable by *Gentleman Spy*, Peter Grose's superb biography of Allen Dulles, and *Blond Ghost*, David Corn's unsatisfactory but nevertheless instructive book on Theodore Shackley. Grose, a long-time diplomatic correspondent for the *New York Times*, shows how the CIA grew as it did. Corn, Washington editor of the *Nation*, provides glimpses of the internal strains that resulted.

Allen Dulles became Director of Central Intelligence in 1953. He came as close as any American could to being a professional intelligence officer. In the Second World War, the United States had patched together its very first civilian intelligence organization, the Office of Strategic Services. OSS combined secret intelligence-gathering, covert operations and intelligence analysis, functions that in Britain were parcelled out separately to the Secret Intelligence Service, a Special Operations Executive, and a Foreign Office-run Joint Intelligence Committee. Dulles, who had experience in both diplomacy and law, became the OSS's representative in Switzerland. A born spymaster, he won trust and affection with ease. Grose's reconstruction of Dulles's love-life provides some evidence, for he won such discriminating bedmates as Toscanini's daughter, Clare Boothe Luce and Queen Frederika of Greece, meanwhile never losing the wife of his youth. He could also be discreet without ceasing to charm. Grose frequently describes him turning aside a question with a knowing look and a booming but uninformative "ho, ho, ho". Having achieved extraordinary success in penetrating Nazi Germany, Dulles returned from Switzerland with a reputation as a "master spy". He thus seemed a natural chief for America's Cold War intelligence service.

The only jarring note in Dulles's appointment came from his being chosen by Dwight Eisenhower, the same Republican President who had just made his older brother, John Foster Dulles, Secretary of State. But Allen Dulles did his

utmost to seem a professional, not a partisan. While he used his relationship with Foster to enhance the CIA's appearance of access and influence, he took pains not to intrude in decision-making, whether in support of his brother or in opposition to him.

Above all, Allen Dulles dedicated himself to giving the CIA permanence. After the Second World War, Harry Truman had abolished the OSS. Only Cold War exigencies caused him to create the CIA. Nothing was more important to Dulles than to see that the CIA did not go the way of the OSS. This preoccupation, more than his boyishness or a streak of his brother's militancy, accounted for his giving most of his time to covert operations. As Grose emphasizes, covert operations often conflicted with intelligence collection, for covert operations could expose individuals who would otherwise remain intelligence sources. In OSS, Dulles had fought

against operators using his spies. As head of the CIA, he gave orders that he would not himself have respected. He dismayed the station in Vienna, for example, by urging that its prize agent inside the Soviet KGB be told to organize "a small tightly knit resistance group". In spite of the Dulles legend, that phrase became a code-word for misguided home-office meddling in espionage. To presidents facing a nuclear-armed rival, however, covert operations offered a third choice instead of appeasement or war. This seemed to them more important than intelligence *per se*, and, for Dulles, what mattered

most was whatever would make presidents think the CIA valuable.

In addition to emphasizing covert operations, Dulles gave the CIA new missions. He branched into scientific and technical intelligence, and began to build reconnaissance aircraft and interpret aerial photographs. Though fiercely competitive on a tennis court, Dulles disliked personal or bureaucratic friction. These new missions meant friction with the military. The friction became ferocious when Dulles also had the CIA produce authoritative estimates of Soviet bomber and missile forces. But the White House wanted the CIA in the ring with the armed services, in the hope of holding down military budgets, and Dulles did whatever the White House asked.

Corn's *Blond Ghost* illustrates conditions in the agency that Dulles left behind. Twenty-five years Dulles's junior, Theodore Shackley joined

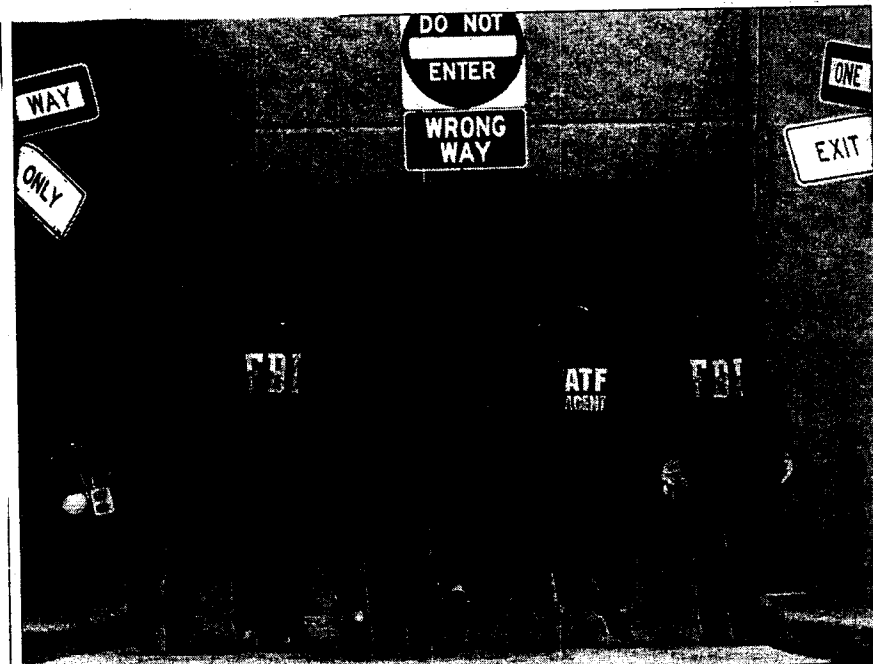
the CIA in 1951. The child of a broken family who was brought up by an immigrant aunt, he was a graduate of a large, non-selective public university and did not have the background of a "gentleman spy". His approach to intelligence would be more that of a manager in an odd line of work. "My business is producing spies", Shackley once testified. A go-getter in Berlin in the 1950s, Shackley became station chief in Saigon during the Vietnam war and rose by the early 1970s to head one of CIA's regional divisions. Stymied by disdainful reformers, he took early retirement and started a second career as a business consultant. Corn's book is not a biography comparable to Grose's. It seems more a collection of notes from interviews based on the question: "What did you dislike most about Shackley or the CIA or both?" The book's weaknesses extend to its title, for Shackley seems to have been "blond ghost" to a secretary in Saigon but to almost no one else. Moreover, the phrase does not fit the character Corn tries to paint, for his Shackley's dominant characteristic is not ghostliness but bustling visibility - a manager descending from headquarters to demand better performance from the field.

Yet Corn's book is useful, for the complaints he assembles seem authentic. Witness after witness tells of the equivalent of demands for a "tightly knit resistance group", of being given numerical targets - of agents to recruit or reports to file, and of being told that higher-ups wanted no signs of uncertainty or doubt. Officers in the field were directed to deliver what the White House wanted and nothing else. At the same time, and rather paradoxically, one sees the basic conditions that could nurture an Aldrich Ames, for the culture typified by Allen Dulles himself

was one in which gentlemen worked independently of bureaucratic interference. Aldrich Ames would take a bottle too much and pass out in the street - so what? His fellows protected one another from the philistines.

The most recent Director of Central Intelligence, James Woolsey, blamed the Ames affair on the culture of the Clandestine Service. Together, Grose's book and Corn's suggest rather that the CIA's problems stem from its having grown too large, having combined within itself too many incompatible cultures, and perhaps, above all, from carrying out no mission more important than ensuring its own survival. Given the current onslaught from left and right neither the structure nor the mission may last much longer.

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Federal investigators searching the World Trade Centre garage in New York after the bombing of March 2, 1993