

The KGB's 'Safe House'

Thus far only one fact of real importance has emerged from the rumpus about domestic surveillance by the CIA and FBI. This country, in fact, turns out to be shockingly vulnerable to the Soviet Union's ruthless, omnipresent KGB because of a shockingly incompetent and ill-advised counter-intelligence system.

As an illustration, consider the truly bizarre ukase issued by the late J. Edgar Hoover toward the end of the 1960s. By order, the director of the FBI provided a gigantic, gloriously convenient "safe house" for the KGB's all too numerous agents and any other spies happening to be in Washington.

A "safe house," of course, is the intelligence community's lable for a place where foreign agents can meet their local contacts in perfect security to make payoffs or to transmit orders or to pick up information. Just to add an extra touch of fantasy, the Hoover-provided safe house was no less than the second center of the U.S. government, the huge U.S. Capitol with all its grounds and dependencies.

Under the terms of the Hoover ukase, the Capitol complex was put strictly off-limits for all the FBI's counterintelligence men. Yet the FBI has a legal monopoly on all counter-intelligence within the territorial limits of the United States. Hence Hoover's ukase meant that known Soviet spies, who were known to be about to make an American contact known to be dangerous, could still be sure of doing so with perfect impunity—provided they just named a rendezvous in the off-limits part of Capitol Hill.

All this seemed downright incredible to me when it was first reported by Ron Kessler of The Washington Post. My own check has fully sustained Kessler's story, however. There is only one significant point that remains in some doubt. It is no more than 95 per cent certain that the Hoover ukase remains in full force and that the Capitol, therefore, continues to be a KGB safe house. That 95 per cent certainty is too close for comfort, one must add.

Furthermore, I think I know why Hoover issued his ukase. For background, you must first understand that the KGB maintains an enormous number of spies in this country. As a measure, remember that we are priority No. 1, whereas Great Britain is no more than priority No. 4. Yet when the KGB grew over-bold in Britain, the Foreign Office had to expell 105 well-authenticated KGB men.

Second, you must understand that with such ample human resources, the KGB has long given a lot of its men part-time or full-time assignments on Capitol Hill. By the mid-1960s, there were somewhere between 20 and 30 KGB men dealing with the U.S. Congress or with the countless staff people the Congress and its committees employ.

This does *not* mean that KGB were constantly seeing senators and representatives. On the contrary, they were known to concentrate rather heavily on the lawmakers' personal staffs and also on the committee staffs.

But this is almost a distinction without a difference. Nowadays, in truth, domineering and able staff members largely control the thoughts and acts of all too many lawmakers, especially in the Senate. Great numbers of left of center staff members on the Senate side of the Capitol also constitute a quasi-independent power bloc. They all work together, all protect one another and often join to extend their

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bloc's power by planting friends and allies in new senatorial offices.

I myself believe that this unknown, unseen power bloc is an unhealthy new political growth. Yet I must hasten to add that it was *not* and is *not* necessarily improper for these people—or indeed for anyone else on Capitol Hill—to see the KGB men who have swarmed there for so long. The KGB men, of course, were all masquerading, and still are masquerading, as Tass correspondents, embassy secretaries, trade experts and so on.

Particularly on the left of the political spectrum, however, the FBI watch that J. Edgar Hoover staffed with his ukase showed an astonishing number of KGB contacts on Capitol Hill. It would have looked remarkably bad if anyone had made a public issue of them. Furthermore, President Johnson was tempted to do just that toward the end of his second term; and President Nixon actively wished to do just that in 1969.

It was about then that the Hoover ukase was issued. I feel sure, therefore, the aim was to suspend the FBI's former careful watch on the Capitol in order to be protected from Congress if the White House went too far in its revelations.

So there you have it—a horrifying story which is pretty likely to be going on this minute. The story is horrifying, of course, because foreign espionage is a damnably serious business, even in a free society like ours.

It is so serious, in turn, because it is

dangerous to have a government, a press, an academic world and the ranks of science all bristling with people like Kim Philbey; Guy Burgess and Donald MacLean. I hope and think this is not our situation; but this is certainly the situation the KGB has been going all out to produce ever since the United States became the unique giant power in our half of the world.

If you reflect upon this story, you find that its main lesson is the singularly unprofessional character of the FBI approach to counterintelligence—at any rate under the leadership of the aging J. Edgar Hoover. Nor is this at all surprising. To have truly professional counterintelligence you have to know the story from the beginning, which is in Moscow in the case of the KGB.

The CIA, of course, is supposed to know all about Moscow. But another appalling revelation of the current CIA-FBI rumpus is the bloody bitterness of the FBI-CIA feud. The two agencies never worked together until new liaison arrangements were made by new leaders a year ago. This kind of crippling non-cooperation can too easily recur, too.

Again, the rumpus has glaringly revealed the recurring dominance of domestic politics in the FBI counterintelligence work, at any rate in the Hoover era. It was politics that caused the former FBI director to create the KGB safe house. It was politics, too, that caused him to ignore President Johnson's order to have a look at the peace movement's foreign links, thereby spurring Johnson to call in the CIA.

In short, the foolish may credit the argument that the CIA-FBI rumpus has uncovered a grave threat to our civil liberties. But more sensible people will instead perceive an open invitation to the KGB.