

Ames sentenced, indicts spy wars

by Jeffrey Steinberg

Career CIA counterintelligence officer Aldrich Ames appeared in federal court in Alexandria, Virginia on April 28, to plead guilty to charges that he had spied for the Soviet and Russian intelligence services since 1985. The plea agreement that Ames's attorneys struck with federal prosecutors preempted a lengthy trial that could have revealed sensitive national security data. In return, Ames secured a light sentence for his wife, who will be freed within less than five years to raise their son, who is now living with relatives in Colombia. Ames was sentenced under the agreement to life in prison without parole. The plea agreement will be reviewed in four months to determine whether he has lived up to his promise to fully cooperate with CIA, FBI, and Justice Department officials attempting to assess the damage to American national security that resulted from his double-agency. If he fails to live up to that promise, his wife's reduced sentence could be modified.

The CIA has been thrown into a state of near-panic by the Ames arrest, and further arrests are expected of former employees of the agency, FBI, National Security Council, and Congress in the near future. Old rivalries have broken out between the FBI and the CIA, and between surviving loyalists to James Jesus Angleton and William Colby inside the agency. President Clinton is battling ranking members of the Senate Intelligence Committee over intelligence community oversight.

But perhaps the most disturbing indictment of the performance of American intelligence organs came from the mouth of Ames himself. In his brief statement to the court before his sentencing, Ames gave an embarrassingly insightful critique of the agencies' Cold War spy-versus-spy shenanigans. His call for a top-to-bottom debate on national security policy was quickly endorsed by several senior members of Congress.

'A self-serving sham'

Ames's remarks were excerpted in the April 29 *New York Times*. He began by explaining how he had come to betray his country:

"First, I had come to dissent from the decades-long shift to the extreme right in our political spectrum and from our national security and foreign policies.

"Second, I had come to believe that the espionage business, as carried out by the CIA and a few other American agencies, was and is a self-serving sham, carried out by

careerist bureaucrats who have managed to deceive several generations of American policymakers and the public about both the necessity and value of their work.

"There is and has been no rational need for thousands of case officers and tens of thousands of agents working around the world, primarily in and against friendly countries. The information our vast espionage network acquires at considerable human and ethical costs is generally insignificant or irrelevant to our policymakers' needs. . . .

"Now that the Cold War is over and the Communist tyrannies largely done for, our country still awaits a real national debate on the means and ends—and costs—of our national security policies. . . . We need to question, as only a few have done, our real needs for intelligence collection, including the highly suspect tool of espionage. To the extent that public discussions of my case can move from government-inspired hypocrisy and hysteria to help even indirectly to fuel such a debate, I welcome and support it.

"Our teachers in the arts of espionage were Great Britain and the Soviet Union. Both used their traditions of secrecy and ruthless statecraft to sponsor huge and ultimately useless espionage campaigns directed against both friends and foes. The CIA learned well from its teachers and, despite its difficulty in maintaining the requisite secrecy, brought our own American tendency toward bureaucratic gigantism and missionary zeal to the task.

"But the longer we delay in recognizing the truth—that espionage is a desperate and limited expedient, not a routine bureaucratic practice—the more dangerous we will be to ourselves and our friends. Our enemies, as in the past, need not worry. . . . Frankly, these spy wars are a side show which have had no real impact on our significant security interests over the years. . . .

Congressmen respond

Some members of the congressional intelligence committees are wondering if Ames may not have a point.

"I don't want to give him any credit for anything, but even the lowliest of the low may have some positive things to say," the *New York Times* quoted Dan Glickman (D-Kan.), head of the House Intelligence Committee. "What is the role of counterintelligence in the modern world? Does it make any difference at all? What's the human role in terms of the analysis and collection of intelligence, as well as the operations side, recruiting spies? We're going to examine that role and they are going to have to make some changes in how they run operations. The Ames case allows us to ask these questions."

Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-N.Y.), who has called for the CIA to be dismantled and its functions parceled out to the FBI, the State Department, and the Pentagon, told the *Times* that the CIA did crucial work during the Cold War, but "that time is past and to persist is to ask for another Ames. The ideological wars are over."