

NATIONAL BESTSELLER

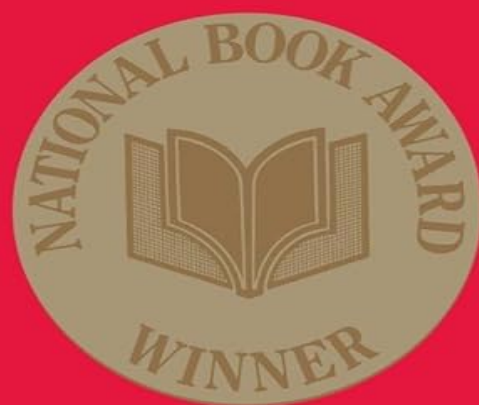
"Must reading for anyone interested in the CIA or American intelligence since World War II." —*The Washington Post*

# LEGACY of ASHES

---

The History of the

CIA



---

# TIM WEINER

With a New Afterword

# LEGACY *of* ASHES

---

The History of the

CIA 

---

TIM WEINER



Anchor Books  
A Division of Random House, Inc.  
New York

# CONTENTS

*TITLE PAGE*

*DEDICATION*

*EPIGRAPH*

*AUTHOR'S NOTE*

PART ONE | *"In the Beginning, We Knew Nothing"*  
"The CIA Under Truman, 1945 to 1953"

1. "INTELLIGENCE MUST BE GLOBAL AND TOTALITARIAN"

2. "THE LOGIC OF FORCE"

3. "FIGHT FIRE WITH FIRE"

4. "THE *MOST* SECRET THING"

5. "A RICH BLIND MAN"

6. "THEY WERE SUICIDE MISSIONS"

7. "A VAST FIELD OF ILLUSION"

PART TWO | *A Strange Kind of Genius*” The CIA Under Eisenhower, 1953 to 1961

8. “WE HAVE NO PLAN”

9. “CIA’S GREATEST SINGLE TRIUMPH”

10. “BOMB REPEAT BOMB”

11. “AND THEN WE’LL HAVE A STORM”

12. “WE RAN IT IN A DIFFERENT WAY”

13. “WISHFUL BLINDNESS”

14. “HAM-HANDED OPERATIONS OF ALL KINDS”

15. “A VERY STRANGE WAR”

16. “HE WAS LYING DOWN AND HE WAS LYING UP”

PART THREE | *Lost Causes*  
The CIA Under Kennedy and Johnson, 1961 to 1968

17. “NOBODY KNEW WHAT TO DO”

18. “WE HAD ALSO FOOLED OURSELVES”

19. “WE’D BE *DELIGHTED* TO TRADE THOSE MISSILES”

20. “HEY, BOSS, WE DID A GOOD JOB, DIDN’T WE?”

21. “*I* THOUGHT IT WAS A *CONSPIRACY*”

22. “AN OMINOUS DRIFT”

23. "MORE COURAGE THAN WISDOM"

24. "THE BEGINNING OF A LONG SLIDE DOWNWARDS"

25. "WE KNEW THEN THAT WE COULD NOT WIN THE WAR"

26. "A POLITICAL H-BOMB"

27. "TRACK DOWN THE FOREIGN COMMUNISTS"

PART FOUR | *Get Rid of the Clowns*"

The CIA Under Nixon and Ford, 1968 to 1977

28. "WHAT THE HELL DO THOSE CLOWNS DO OUT THERE IN LANGLEY?"

29. "USG WANTS A MILITARY SOLUTION"

30. "WE ARE GOING TO CATCH A LOT OF HELL"

31. "TO CHANGE THE CONCEPT OF A SECRET SERVICE"

32. "A CLASSIC FASCIST IDEAL"

PHOTO INSERT

33. "THE CIA WOULD BE DESTROYED"

34. "SAIGON SIGNING OFF"

35. "INEFFECTIVE AND SCARED"

PART FIVE | *Victory Without Joy*

The CIA Under Carter, Reagan, and George H. W. Bush, 1977 to 1993

36. “HE SOUGHT TO OVERTHROW THEIR SYSTEM”

37. “WE WERE JUST PLAIN ASLEEP”

38. “A FREELANCE BUCCANEER”

39. “IN A DANGEROUS WAY”

40. “HE WAS RUNNING A GREAT RISK”

41. “A CON MAN’S CON MAN”

42. “TO THINK THE UNTHINKABLE”

43. “WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO WHEN THE WALL COMES  
DOWN?”

PART SIX | *The Reckoning*

The CIA Under Clinton and George W. Bush, 1993 to 2007

44. “WE HAD NO FACTS”

45. “WHY IN THE WORLD DIDN’T WE KNOW?”

46. “WE’RE IN TROUBLE”

47. “THE THREAT COULD NOT BE MORE REAL”

48. “THE DARK SIDE”

49. “A GRAVE MISTAKE”

50. “THE BURIAL CEREMONY”

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

NOTES

PHOTOGRAPHY CREDITS

ALSO BY TIM WEINER

COPYRIGHT

*For Kate, Emma, and Ruby*



There are no secrets that time does not reveal.

—Jean Racine, *Britannicus* (1669)

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

*Legacy of Ashes* is the record of the first sixty years of the Central Intelligence Agency. It describes how the most powerful country in the history of Western civilization has failed to create a first-rate spy service. That failure constitutes a danger to the national security of the United States.

Intelligence is secret action aimed at understanding or changing what goes on abroad. President Dwight D. Eisenhower called it “a distasteful but vital necessity.” A nation that wants to project its power beyond its borders needs to see over the horizon, to know what is coming, to prevent attacks against its people. It must anticipate surprise. Without a strong, smart, sharp intelligence service, presidents and generals alike can become blind and crippled. But throughout its history as a superpower, the United States has not had such a service.

History, Edward Gibbon wrote in *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, is “little more than the register of crimes, follies, and misfortunes of mankind.” The annals of the Central Intelligence Agency are filled with folly and misfortune, along with acts of bravery and cunning. They are replete with fleeting successes and long-lasting failures abroad. They are marked by political battles and power struggles at home. The agency's triumphs have saved some blood and treasure. Its mistakes have squandered

both. They have proved fatal for legions of American soldiers and foreign agents; some three thousand Americans who died in New York, Washington, and Pennsylvania on September 11, 2001; and three thousand more who have died since then in Iraq and Afghanistan. The one crime of lasting consequence has been the CIA's inability to carry out its central mission: informing the president of what is happening in the world.

The United States had no intelligence to speak of when World War II began, and next to none a few weeks after the war ended. A mad rush to demobilize left behind a few hundred men who had a few years' experience in the world of secrets and the will to go on fighting a new enemy. "All major powers except the United States have had for a long time past permanent worldwide intelligence services, reporting directly to the highest echelons of their Government," General William J. Donovan, the commander of the wartime Office of Strategic Services, warned President Truman in August 1945. "Prior to the present war, the United States had no foreign secret intelligence service. It never has had and does not now have a coordinated intelligence system." Tragically, it still does not have one.

The CIA was supposed to become that system. But the blueprint for the agency was a hasty sketch. It was no cure for a chronic American weakness: secrecy and deception were not our strengths. The collapse of the British Empire left the United States as the sole force able to oppose Soviet communism, and America desperately needed to know those enemies, to provide foresight to presidents, and to fight fire with fire when called upon to light the fuse. The mission of the CIA, above all, was to keep the president forewarned against surprise attack, a second Pearl Harbor.

The agency's ranks were filled with thousands of patriotic Americans in the 1950s. Many were brave and battle-hardened. Some had wisdom. Few really knew the enemy. Where understanding failed, presidents ordered the CIA to change the course of history through covert action. "The conduct of political and psychological warfare in peacetime was a new art," wrote Gerald Miller, then the CIA's covert-operations chief for Western Europe. "Some of the techniques were known but doctrine and experience were lacking." The CIA's covert operations were by and large blind stabs in the

dark. The agency's only course was to learn by doing—by making mistakes in battle. The CIA then concealed its failures abroad, lying to Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy. It told those lies to preserve its standing in Washington. The truth, said Don Gregg, a skilled cold-war station chief, was that the agency at the height of its powers had a great reputation and a terrible record.

Like the American public, the agency dissented at its peril during the Vietnam War. Like the American press, it discovered that its reporting was rejected if it did not fit the preconceptions of presidents. The CIA was rebuked and scorned by Presidents Johnson, Nixon, Ford, and Carter. None of them understood how the agency worked. They took office “with the expectation that intelligence could solve every problem, or that it could not do anything right, and then moved to the opposite view,” notes a former deputy director of central intelligence, Richard J. Kerr. “Then they settled down and vacillated from one extreme to the other.”

To survive as an institution in Washington, the agency above all had to have the president's ear. But it soon learned that it was dangerous to tell him what he did not want to hear. The CIA's analysts learned to march in lockstep, conforming to conventional wisdom. They misapprehended the intentions and capabilities of our enemies, miscalculated the strength of communism, and misjudged the threat of terrorism.

The supreme goal of the CIA during the cold war was to steal Soviet secrets by recruiting spies, but the CIA never possessed a single one who had deep insight into the workings of the Kremlin. The number of Soviet spies with important information to reveal—all of them volunteers, not recruits—could be counted on the fingers of two hands. And all of them died, captured and executed by Moscow. Almost all had been betrayed by officers of the CIA's Soviet division who were spying for the other side, under Presidents Reagan and George H. W. Bush. Under Reagan, the CIA set off on misconceived third-world missions, selling arms to Iran's Revolutionary Guards to finance a war in Central America, breaking the law and squandering what trust remained reposed in it. More grievously, it missed the fatal weakness of its main enemy.

It fell to machines, not men, to understand the other side. As the technology of espionage expanded its horizons, the CIA's vision grew more and more myopic. Spy satellites enabled it to count Soviet weapons. They did not deliver the crucial information that communism was crumbling. The CIA's foremost experts never saw the enemy until after the cold war was over. The agency had bled the Soviets by pouring billions of dollars of weapons into Afghanistan to help fight the Red Army's occupying forces. That was an epic success. But it failed to see that the Islamic warriors it supported would soon take aim at the United States, and when that understanding came, the agency failed to act. That was an epochal failure.

The unity of purpose that held the CIA together during the cold war came undone in the 1990s, under President Clinton. The agency still had people who strove to understand the world, but their ranks were far too thin. There were still talented officers who dedicated themselves to serving the United States abroad, but their numbers were far too few. The FBI had more agents in New York than the CIA had officers abroad. By the end of the century, the agency was no longer a fully functioning and independent intelligence service. It was becoming a second-echelon field office for the Pentagon, weighing tactics for battles that never came, not strategies for the struggle ahead. It was powerless to prevent the second Pearl Harbor.

After the attacks on New York and Washington, the agency sent a small skilled cadre of covert operators into Afghanistan and Pakistan to hunt down the leaders of al Qaeda. It then forfeited its role as a reliable source of secret information when it handed the White House false reports on the existence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. It had delivered a ton of reportage based on an ounce of intelligence. President George W. Bush and his administration in turn misused the agency once proudly run by his father, turning it into a paramilitary police force abroad and a paralyzed bureaucracy at headquarters. Bush casually pronounced a political death sentence upon the CIA in 2004 when he said that the agency was "just guessing" about the course of the war in Iraq. No president had ever publicly dismissed the CIA that way.

Its centrality in the American government ended with the dissolution of the office of director of central intelligence in 2005. Now the CIA must be rebuilt if it is to survive. That task will take years. The challenge of understanding the world as it is has overwhelmed three generations of CIA officers. Few among the new generation have mastered the intricacies of foreign lands, much less the political culture of Washington. In turn, almost every president, almost every Congress, and almost every director of central intelligence since the 1960s has proved incapable of grasping the mechanics of the CIA. Most have left the agency in worse shape than they found it. Their failures have handed future generations, in the words of President Eisenhower, “a legacy of ashes.” We are back where we began sixty years ago, in a state of disarray.

*Legacy of Ashes* sets out to show how it has come to pass that the United States now lacks the intelligence it will need in the years ahead. It is drawn from the words, the ideas, and the deeds set forth in the files of the American national-security establishment. They record what our leaders really said, really wanted, and really did when they projected power abroad. This book is based on my reading of more than fifty thousand documents, primarily from the archives of the CIA, the White House, and the State Department; more than two thousand oral histories of American intelligence officers, soldiers, and diplomats; and more than three hundred interviews conducted since 1987 with CIA officers and veterans, including ten directors of central intelligence. Extensive endnotes amplify the text.

This book is on the record—no anonymous sources, no blind quotations, no hearsay. It is the first history of the CIA compiled entirely from firsthand reporting and primary documents. It is, by its nature, incomplete: no president, no director of central intelligence, and certainly no outsider can know everything about the agency. What I have written here is not the whole truth, but to the best of my ability, it is nothing but the truth.

I hope it may serve as a warning. No republic in history has lasted longer than three hundred years, and this nation may not long endure as a great power unless it finds the eyes to see things as they are in the world. That once was the mission of the Central Intelligence Agency.

# PART ONE

---

*“In the Beginning, We Knew Nothing”*

The CIA Under Truman

*1945 to 1953*

---

# **1. “INTELLIGENCE MUST BE GLOBAL AND TOTALITARIAN”**

All Harry Truman wanted was a newspaper.

Catapulted into the White House by the death of President Franklin D. Roosevelt on April 12, 1945, Truman knew nothing about the development of the atomic bomb or the intentions of his Soviet allies. He needed information to use his power.

“When I took over,” he wrote in a letter to a friend years later, “the President had no means of coordinating the intelligence from around the world.” Roosevelt had created the Office of Strategic Services, under the command of General William J. Donovan, as America’s wartime intelligence agency. But Donovan’s OSS was never built to last. When the new Central Intelligence Agency arose from its ashes, Truman wanted it to serve him solely as a global news service, delivering daily bulletins. “It was not intended as a ‘Cloak & Dagger Outfit’!” he wrote. “It was intended merely as a center for keeping the President informed on what was going on in the world.” He insisted that he never wanted the CIA “to act as a spy organization. That was never the intention when it was organized.”

His vision was subverted from the start.

---



“In a global and totalitarian war,” General Donovan believed, “intelligence must be global and totalitarian.” On November 18, 1944, he had written to President Roosevelt proposing that the United States create a peacetime “Central Intelligence Service.” He had started sketching his plan the year before, at the behest of Lieutenant General Walter Bedell Smith, chief of staff to General Dwight D. Eisenhower, who wanted to know how the OSS would become part of the military establishment of the United States. Donovan told the president that he could learn the “capabilities, intentions and activities of foreign nations” while running “subversive operations abroad” against America’s enemies. The OSS had never been stronger than thirteen thousand members, smaller than a single army division. But the service Donovan envisioned would be its own army, a force skillfully combating communism, defending America from attack, and serving up secrets for the White House. He urged the president to “lay the keel of the ship at once,” and he aimed to be its captain.

Nicknamed “Wild Bill” after a fast but errant pitcher who managed the New York Yankees from 1915 to 1917, Donovan was a brave old soldier—he had won the Congressional Medal of Honor for heroism in the trenches of France during World War I—but a poor politician. Very few generals and admirals trusted him. They were appalled by his idea of making a spy service out of a scattershot collection of Wall Street brokers, Ivy League eggheads, soldiers of fortune, ad men, news men, stunt men, second-story men, and con men.

The OSS had developed a uniquely American cadre of intelligence analysts, but Donovan and his star officer, Allen W. Dulles, were enthralled by espionage and sabotage, skills at which Americans were amateurs. Donovan depended on British intelligence to school his men in the dark arts. The bravest of the OSS, the ones who inspired legends, were the men who jumped behind enemy lines, running guns, blowing up bridges, plotting against the Nazis with the French and the Balkan resistance movements. In the last year of the war, with his forces spread throughout Europe, North Africa, and Asia, Donovan wanted to drop his agents directly

into Germany. He did, and they died. Of the twenty-one two-man teams that went in, only one was ever heard from again. These were the kinds of missions General Donovan dreamed up daily—some daring, some deluded.

“His imagination was unlimited,” said his right-hand man, David K.E. Bruce, later the American ambassador to France, Germany, and England. “Ideas were his plaything. Excitement made him snort like a racehorse. Woe to the officer who turned down a project, because, on its face, it seemed ridiculous, or at least unusual. For painful weeks under his command I tested the possibility of using bats taken from concentrations in Western caves to destroy Tokyo”—dropping them into the sky with incendiary bombs strapped to their backs. That was the spirit of the OSS.

President Roosevelt always had his doubts about Donovan. Early in 1945, he had ordered his chief White House military aide, Colonel Richard Park, Jr., to conduct a secret investigation into the wartime operations of the OSS. As Park began his work, leaks from the White House created headlines in New York, Chicago, and Washington, warning that Donovan wanted to create an “American Gestapo.” When the stories broke, the president urged Donovan to shove his plans under the rug. On March 6, 1945, the Joint Chiefs of Staff formally shelved them.

They wanted a new spy service to serve the Pentagon, not the president. What they had in mind was a clearinghouse staffed by colonels and clerks, distilling information gathered by attachés and diplomats and spies, for the benefit of four-star commanders. Thus began a battle for control of American intelligence that went on for three generations.

### **“AN EXTREMELY DANGEROUS THING”**

The OSS had little standing at home, and less inside the Pentagon. The organization was barred from seeing the most important intercepted communications from Japan and Germany. Senior American military officers thought an independent civilian intelligence service run by

Donovan, with direct access to the president, would be “an extremely dangerous thing in a democracy,” in the words of Major General Clayton Bissell, the assistant chief of staff for military intelligence.

These were many of the same men who had slept through Pearl Harbor. Well before dawn on December 7, 1941, the American military had broken some of Japan’s codes. It knew an attack might be coming, but it never imagined Japan would take so desperate a gamble. The broken code was too secret to share with commanders in the field. Rivalries within the military meant that information was divided, hoarded, and scattered. Because no one possessed all the pieces of the puzzle, no one saw the big picture. Not until after the war was over did Congress investigate how the nation had been taken by surprise, and not until then was it clear that the country needed a new way to defend itself.

Before Pearl Harbor, American intelligence covering great swaths of the globe could be found in a short row of wooden filing cabinets at the State Department. A few dozen ambassadors and military attachés were its sole sources of information. In the spring of 1945, the United States knew next to nothing about the Soviet Union, and little more about the rest of the world.

Franklin Roosevelt was the only man who could revive Donovan’s dream of a far-seeing, all-powerful American intelligence service. When Roosevelt died on April 12, Donovan despaired for the future. After sitting up half the night grieving, he came downstairs at the Ritz Hotel, his favorite haunt in liberated Paris, and had a gloomy breakfast with William J. Casey, an OSS officer and a future director of central intelligence.

“What do you think it means for the organization?” Casey asked.

“I’m afraid it’s probably the end,” Donovan said.

That same day, Colonel Park submitted his top secret report on the OSS to the new president. The report, fully declassified only after the cold war ended, was a political murder weapon, honed by the military and sharpened by J. Edgar Hoover, the FBI director since 1924; Hoover despised Donovan

and harbored his own ambitions to run a worldwide intelligence service. Park's work destroyed the possibility of the OSS continuing as part of the American government, punctured the romantic myths that Donovan created to protect his spies, and instilled in Harry Truman a deep and abiding distrust of secret intelligence operations. The OSS had done "serious harm to the citizens, business interests, and national interests of the United States," the report said.

Park admitted no important instance in which the OSS had helped to win the war, only mercilessly listing the ways in which it had failed. The training of its officers had been "crude and loosely organized." British intelligence commanders regarded American spies as "putty in their hands." In China, the nationalist leader Chiang Kai-shek had manipulated the OSS to his own ends. Germany's spies had penetrated OSS operations all over Europe and North Africa. The Japanese embassy in Lisbon had discovered the plans of OSS officers to steal its code books—and as a consequence the Japanese changed their codes, which "resulted in a complete blackout of vital military information" in the summer of 1943. One of Park's informants said, "How many American lives in the Pacific represent the cost of this stupidity on the part of OSS is unknown." Faulty intelligence provided by the OSS after the fall of Rome in June 1944 led thousands of French troops into a Nazi trap on the island of Elba, Park wrote, and "as a result of these errors and miscalculations of the enemy forces by OSS, some 1,100 French troops were killed."

The report personally attacked Donovan. It said the general had lost a briefcase at a cocktail party in Bucharest that was "turned over to the Gestapo by a Rumanian dancer." His hiring and promotion of senior officers rested not on merit but on an old-boy network of connections from Wall Street and the Social Register. He had sent detachments of men to lonely outposts such as Liberia and forgotten about them. He had mistakenly dropped commandos into neutral Sweden. He had sent guards to protect a captured German ammunition dump in France and then blown them up.

Colonel Park acknowledged that Donovan's men had conducted some successful sabotage missions and rescues of downed American pilots. He said the deskbound research and analysis branch of OSS had done "an outstanding job," and he concluded that the analysts might find a place at the State Department after the war. But the rest of the OSS would have to go. "The almost hopeless compromise of OSS personnel," he warned, "makes their use as a secret intelligence agency in the postwar world inconceivable."

After V-E Day, Donovan went back to Washington to try to save his spy service. A month of mourning for President Roosevelt was giving way to a mad scramble for power in Washington. In the Oval Office on May 14, Harry Truman listened for less than fifteen minutes as Donovan made his proposal to hold communism in check by undermining the Kremlin. The president summarily dismissed him.

All summer long, Donovan fought back in Congress and in the press. Finally, on August 25, he told Truman that he had to choose between knowledge and ignorance. The United States "does not now have a coordinated intelligence system," he warned. "The defects and the dangers of this situation have been generally recognized."

Donovan had hoped that he could sweet-talk Truman, a man he had always treated with cavalier disdain, into creating the CIA. But he had misread his own president. Truman had decided that Donovan's plan had the earmarks of a Gestapo. On September 20, 1945, six weeks after he dropped America's atomic bombs on Japan, the president of the United States fired Donovan and ordered the OSS to disband in ten days. America's spy service was abolished.