

US Remains at Risk, Speakers Tell Raleigh Spy Conference

By Rick Smith

David Ignatius, a ground-breaking reporter in espionage coverage — and author of five spy novels highly praised by members of the intelligence community — is worried about the CIA.

Speaking at the Fifth Raleigh Spy Conference, Ignatius warned that so-called intelligence reforms put in place following the 9/11 terrorist attacks have left the Agency and the United States vulnerable to terror attacks and espionage by other enemies.

“To be honest, I’d blow up the CIA — get rid of it,” *The Washington Post* columnist told the crowd in his closing keynote address. Rather than keep the CIA as it exists under the National Director of Intelligence, the CIA’s headquarters in Langley, VA, should be “turned into a theme park,” he said.

In an address that covered his career dating from the 1970s that included his interview as a young reporter with legendary CIA counterintelligence chief James Angleton, Ignatius said the CIA had degenerated from a “robust, well-wired organization” capable of penetrating Yasser Arafat’s inner circle to an organization today that is encumbered by bureaucracy, “an administration that doesn’t like it” and is “risk adverse.”

His calls for change would not be unwelcome in Langley, said Brian Kelley, a 40-year CIA counterintelligence veteran who was also a guest speaker.

“Some in the CIA would agree with him,” said Kelley, who was exonerated by the FBI after a tortuous three-year investigation that targeted him as a Soviet “mole.” The actual spy turned out to be the FBI’s own Robert Hanssen. “To separate the clandestine service is necessary to get us out from the bureaucracy. I’m not sure how it would work, but he is not alone in saying this.”

A strong CIA is needed as much now as ever, added Tennent “Pete” Bagley, an Agency veteran of the 1960s and ’70s who was the case officer charged with handling alleged Soviet KGB defector Yuri Nosenko. Nosenko came to the US with the story that the Soviets had no ties to John F. Kennedy assassin Lee Harvey Oswald. Bagley never believed him.

In his new book *Spy Wars*, Bagley relates how he ultimately failed to convince the CIA leadership that Nosenko was an instrument in a KGB deception operation. He told the conference he believes that the Agency’s failure to pressure Nosenko for his true knowledge of all Soviet efforts — such as “turning” cryptologists and running unidentified moles — is being felt today.

“I don’t want to see those traitors escape justice,” he said. “There is always a continuum in espionage, so the spies of the past have roots in the future.”

Although retired for 30 years, Bagley, 82, also insisted in an interview that the Cold War continues with Russia. Under Vladimir Putin, the Russian spy services are as active as ever, he said. On a recent visit to Moscow he met a former KGB rival who said the hate didn’t die with the collapse of the Berlin Wall.

“He looked me straight in the eye and said, ‘We are STILL working against you,’” Bagley said. “Was I surprised? Not at all.”

The Raleigh Spy Conference drew a host of former and current intelligence operatives and members of the public to hear additional speakers, including former *Time* magazine Bureau Chief Jerrold Schecter and CIA chief historian David Robarge.

“The world is a more dangerous place than ever,” Robarge told Metro in an interview. “There is no balance in terror that prevents the worst from happening, as there was between the Soviet Union and the United States.

“The worst,” he warned, “could happen tomorrow.”

Go to www.raleighspyconference.com for more information and biographies of conference speakers.