

JFK Assassination Plot Mirrored in 1961 France: After Failed Coup, De Gaulle Launched Purge of Security Forces

Part III

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As you watch, perhaps with alarm, while thousands of refugees from Muslim countries make their way through Europe in a seemingly endless parade, you may be wondering if some of them will end up living near you, and how this might affect your life.

If you step back and look at the bigger picture, you will see the situation in reverse: how much the dominating presence of those from the western world has affected the daily lives of people living in Muslim countries.

What the colonial powers have done in Muslim countries is well known. Less well known are the machinations of Allen Dulles and the CIA in one of these colonial powers, France.



President Charles de Gaulle Motorcade. Photo credit: Gnotype / Wikimedia (CC BY-SA 3.0)

Without the knowledge or consent of President John F. Kennedy, Allen Dulles orchestrated the efforts of retired French generals, rightwing French, Nazi sympathizers, and at least one White Russian, to overthrow Charles de Gaulle, who wanted to give Algeria its independence. Dulles et al feared an independent Algeria would go Communist, giving the Soviets a base in Africa.

And there was another reason to hang onto Algeria: its natural resources. According to the [US Energy Information Administration](#), it is “the leading natural gas producer in Africa, the second-largest natural gas supplier to Europe outside of the region, and is among the top three oil producers in Africa.”

We note with great interest that the plot to bring down Charles De Gaulle — the kind of people involved, the role of Allen Dulles, the motive behind it — all bear an eerie similarity to the circumstances surrounding the assassination of John F. Kennedy. But that is another story.

As we have said earlier, Dulles’s job, simply put, was to hijack the US government to benefit the wealthy. And in this fascinating series of excerpts from David Talbot’s new biography on

Dulles, we see how his reach extended deeply into the government of France.

WhoWhatWhy Introduction by Milicent Cranor

This is the third of a three-part series of excerpts from Chapter 15 (“Contempt”) of [The Devil’s Chessboard: Allen Dulles, the CIA, and the Rise of the American Secret Government](#). HarperCollins Publishers, 2015. Go [here](#) and [here](#) to see Parts 1 and 2. Previously, we presented excerpts from Chapter 20, and to see them, go [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#).

PURGES AND MORE PURGES

After the failed coup, de Gaulle launched a new purge of his security forces. He ousted General Paul Grossin, the powerful chief of SDECE, the French secret service, and he shut down its armed unit, the 11th Choc (Shock Battalion), which he suspected of being a breeding ground for the coup. Grossin, who was closely aligned with the CIA, had told Frank Wisner over lunch that the return of de Gaulle to power was equivalent to the Communists taking over in Paris.

The 11th Choc had grown into a dangerously unhinged killing unit, targeting representatives of the Algerian independence movement and their European supporters, even on the streets of France.

Those branded enemies of the French empire were gunned down, blown up, or poisoned by SDECE’s action arm. Aided by ex-Nazi agents of Reinhard Gehlen’s organization, the 11th Choc’s assassination campaign reached the point where “liquidations [were] an almost daily routine,” according to Philippe Thyraud de Vosjoli, a veteran SDECE agent who served as the liaison to the CIA.

Shortly after pushing out Grossin, de Gaulle also jettisoned his security adviser, Constantin Melnik, Dulles’s close ally. Late into his life, Melnik continued to insist that the CIA was always a friend to de Gaulle — which would have come as a surprise to the French president.

Writing in his 1999 memoir, *Politically Incorrect*, Melnik flatly declared, “I can testify that ... despite suspicious yelping by Gaullist camp followers ... the CIA always was a faithful ally of General de Gaulle, even of his often torturous Algerian policies.” After de Gaulle dumped Melnik, Dulles — who by then had also been fired — immediately offered to hire him for a new private intelligence agency he was planning in the Third World. But Melnik declined, instead pursuing a career in French publishing and politics.

Continuity in Washington was no longer the new president’s concern. Shaken by the traumatic events in Cuba and France, JFK was ready to remake his government.

For the rest of his ten-year presidency, which ended with his retirement from politics in 1969, de Gaulle continued to take strong counter-measures against forces he regarded as seditious threats. In 1962, he expelled CIA station chief Alfred Ulmer, a gung ho veteran of Dulles’s Cold War battlegrounds. In 1967, de Gaulle evicted NATO from France to regain “full sovereignty [over] French territory” after discovering that the military alliance was encouraging Western European secret services to interfere in France’s domestic politics.



Parade of the 13th DBLE Legionnaires through Roman ruins in Lambaesis, Algeria.

Photo credit: [Richard Bareford / Wikimedia](#)

THE DAY OF THE JACKAL

Following the Algiers putsch, de Gaulle remained an assassination target — particularly during the explosive months before and after he finally recognized Algerian independence in July 1962. The most dramatic attempt on his life was staged the next month by the OAS — an ambush made famous in the Frederick Forsyth novel and movie *The Day of the Jackal*.

As de Gaulle's black Citroën sped along the Avenue de la Libération in Paris, with the president and his wife in the rear seat, a dozen OAS snipers opened fire on the vehicle. Two of the president's motorcycle bodyguards were killed — and the bullet-riddled Citroën skidded sharply. But de Gaulle was fortunate to have a skilled and loyal security team, and his chauffeur was able to pull the car out of its spin and speed to safety, despite all four tires' being shot out. The president and his wife, who kept their heads down throughout the fusillade, escaped unharmed.

DE GAULLE'S OWN SECRET ASSASSINS

The French president demonstrated that he was willing to fight fire with fire. According to de Vosjoli, de Gaulle loyalists in SDECE even recruited their own secret assassins — including a particularly violent group of Vietnamese exiles — who blew up cafés in Algeria frequented by enemies of de Gaulle and kidnapped, tortured, and murdered other OAS combatants deemed a threat to the president. Democracy in France in the early 1960s was sustained as the result of a vicious underground war that the old French general was willing to fight with equal ferocity.

Because of the severe security measures he took, Charles de Gaulle survived his tumultuous presidency. He died of a heart attack the year after he left office, just short of his eightieth birthday, slumping over quietly in his armchair after watching the evening news.

A SUBJECT TO AVOID

President Kennedy met with de Gaulle on his state visit to Paris at the end of May 1961, a

month after the failed coup. The president and First Lady were feted at a banquet in Élysée Palace, where the old general — dazzled by Jackie — leaned down closely to hear every breathy word she spoke to him, in fluent French.

During the three-day visit, the two heads of state discussed many pressing issues, from Laos to Berlin to Cuba. But Kennedy and de Gaulle never broached the touchy subject of the coup, much less the CIA's involvement in it. As French journalist Vincent Jauvert later observed, "Why wake up old demons who had barely fallen asleep?"

KENNEDY'S GENTLE PURGES

Kennedy knew that he would have to resume wrestling with those demons as soon as he returned home. He would have to decide how deeply to purge his own security agencies, as de Gaulle had already begun to do in France. Kennedy knew there would be steep political costs involved in taking on the CIA and Pentagon. But, as Walter Lippmann had told Schlesinger, "Kennedy will not begin to be President until he starts to break with Eisenhower."

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A few weeks after the Bay of Pigs and the foiled French coup, JFK asked Jackie to invite Dulles for drinks or tea at the White House. Charlie Wrightsman and his wife were also dropping by, and Kennedy wanted to make a point. The Florida tycoon had self-righteously told Kennedy that he was not going to be seeing his old friend Dulles during his trip to Washington — his way of snubbing the spymaster for bungling the job in Cuba.

The president was "disgusted" by Wrightsman's disloyalty to Dulles, according to Jackie, so he went out of his way to include the disgraced CIA leader in the White House's get-together. By now, enough time had elapsed since the disasters of April, and with Dulles on his way out, Kennedy was feeling magnanimous toward the Old Man.

"[Jack] was so loyal always to people in, you know, trouble," the First Lady later recalled. "And he made a special effort to come back from [the Oval Office] and sit around with Jayne and Charlie Wrightsman, just to show Charlie what he thought of Allen Dulles. And, I mean, it made all the difference to Allen Dulles. I was with him about five [or ten] minutes before Jack got there. He just looked like, I don't know, Cardinal Mindszenty on trial," she said, referring to the Hungarian prelate who was sentenced to life in prison after being found guilty of treason by a Soviet-run show trial.

By mid-January 1962, the "retired" spymaster was writing an old comrade, "As you know, I am not much of a believer in either retirement or long vacations." The house on Q Street was already on its way to becoming the seat of a government in exile. Dulles had been deposed, but his reign continued.

You know, just a shell of what he was. And Jack came and talked — put his arm around him ... Well, wasn't that nice? It was just to show Charlie Wrightsman. But it shows something about Jack. I mean, he knew [that] Dulles had obviously botched everything up. [But], you know, he had a tenderness for the man.

SLOW BURNING FURY

But “poor Allen Dulles,” as Jackie took to referring to him, was likely untouched by the president’s gesture. The CIA director’s resentment of Kennedy was growing by the day, as his fingers slowly lost their grip on power. Feeling the young man’s arm wrapped paternally around his shoulder would have chilled Dulles, not warmed him. The spymaster had served every president since Woodrow Wilson. And now, here he was, being comforted by this weak pretty boy who did not belong in the same company as the great men who preceded him. It was appalling that he, Allen Dulles, should be consoled by such a man.

Though Dulles himself kept his fury carefully concealed, his most loyal aides and political allies freely vented their feelings against the Kennedy White House on the Old Man’s behalf. Howard Hunt, who worked as the CIA’s political liaison with the volatile Cuban exile community on the Bay of Pigs, called Dulles and Bissell “scapegoats to expiate administration guilt.”

Hunt, whose anti-Communist passions equaled those of his militant Cuban compadres, was deeply moved by the way his boss comported himself during his slow fadeout at the CIA. “As a member of Dulles’s staff,” Hunt remembered, “I lunched in the Director’s mess, seeing him return from each [Taylor] Committee session more drawn and gray. But on taking his place at the head of the table, Mr. Dulles’s demeanor changed into hearty cheerfulness — a joke here, a baseball bet there, came from this remarkable man whose long career of government service had been destroyed unjustly by men who were laboring unceasingly to preserve their own public images.”

The summer following the Bay of Pigs, Prescott Bush — the CIA’s man in the Senate — and his wife, Dorothy, invited Dulles to dinner at their Washington home. The spymaster showed up with John McCone in tow — the Republican businessman and former Atomic Energy Commission chairman Kennedy had just privately tapped as Dulles’s replacement. Bush, who was still unaware that Dulles had been officially deposed, was surprised to see McCone, “whom,” he later recalled in a letter to Clover, “we had not thought of as a particular friend of Allen’s. But Allen broke the ice promptly, and said that he wanted us to meet his successor. The announcement came the next day.”

The dinner conversation around the Bush family table that night was awkward. “We tried to make a pleasant evening of it,” Bush wrote, “but I was rather sick at heart, and angry too, for it was the Kennedy’s [sic] that brot [sic] about the fiasco. And here they were making Allen seem to be the goat, which he wasn’t and did not deserve. I have never forgiven them.”



President John F. Kennedy Presents the National Security Medal to Allen Dulles, retiring director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

Photo credit: [Robert Knudsen. White House Photographs. John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, Boston](#)

On November 28, 1961, Dulles was given his formal sendoff at the CIA, in a ceremony held at the agency's brand new headquarters, a vast, modernist complex carved out of the woods in Langley, Virginia. It was a day of clashing emotions for Dulles. The gleaming new puzzle palace, which Dulles had commissioned, was seen by many as a monument to his long reign — but he would never occupy the director's suite. Now some agency wits were snidely christening the Langley edifice "The Allen Dulles Memorial Mausoleum."

President Kennedy was gracious in his farewell remarks, as he bestowed the agency's highest honor — the National Security Medal — on Dulles. "I regard Allen Dulles as an almost unique figure in our country," he told the crowd gathered in a sterile, fluorescent-lit theater, including a somber-faced Clover and Eleanor Dulles, and an equally stern-looking General Lemnitzer and J. Edgar Hoover, who almost certainly were wondering when they would be next to go. "I know of no man," the president continued, "who brings a greater sense of personal commitment to his work — who has less pride in office — than he has."

This last piece of flattery was particularly overblown, as Kennedy well knew, because there were few men in his administration brimming with as much self-admiration as Allen Dulles. The departing CIA director had made sure that invitations to his medal ceremony were sent out to a who's who list of Fortune 500 executives, including the chiefs of General Electric, General Motors, Ford, DuPont, Coca Cola, Chase Manhattan, US Steel, Standard Oil, IBM, CBS, and *Time Life*. He kept copies of all the flowery farewells that poured in from the corporate world, including letters from 20th Century Fox movie mogul Spyros Skouras, and conglomerate tycoon J. Peter Grace, who wrote, "It is almost unbelievable that one family could produce two men of the caliber of yours and your late, sorely missed, brother."

But, after the ceremony, Dulles looked a bit lost and forlorn as he waved to Kennedy's departing helicopter from the front steps of the headquarters he would never occupy. The following day was even more melancholy for Dulles as JFK swore in McCone at the old CIA building on E Street.

Clover dropped him off at the ceremony in the family car, since Dulles was no longer entitled to a CIA limousine and driver. “Clover, I’ll be home later in a taxi,” the Old Man told his wife as he climbed out of the car. He was overheard by Lawrence “Red” White, the agency’s efficient, nuts and bolts administrator, who insisted that Dulles be driven home in an official car. Dulles made a show of protesting but accepted the kind gesture — one of the few bright spots in what colleagues described as a very dark day for the espionage legend. “His morale,” White recalled, “was pretty low on his last day as DCI [Director of Central Intelligence].”

Retired at home in Georgetown, the old spymaster’s funereal mood did not lift as Kennedy proceeded to rid his administration of remnants of the fallen Dulles dynasty. First to go were the Dulles deputies most closely associated with the Bay of Pigs, Dick Bissell and Charles Cabell.

Then Attorney General Bobby Kennedy, his brother’s vigilant watchman, tracked down Eleanor Dulles, who was still working quietly on German affairs in Foggy Bottom, and had Secretary of State Rusk fire her. “I don’t want any more of the Dulles family around,” the attorney general was heard to say. Eleanor took it hard. “It was silly, I suppose,” she later remarked. “I was 66 years old, and a lot of my friends asked why I should want to go on working. Well, I had psychological and financial reasons. My job at State was a valuable thing to cling to. Besides, I had debts. I had put two children through college, and I needed a salary.”

Over at the Pentagon, JFK had already begun to purge Dulles Cold Warriors like Arleigh Burke, who was drummed out of the Navy in August. Next to go was Lemnitzer, who was replaced as Joint Chiefs chairman by Maxwell Taylor in November, the same month Dulles himself was shown the door.

Kennedy took further steps to signal that the Dulles era was over and that the CIA would no longer be allowed to run wild; he placed overseas agents under the control of US ambassadors and shifted responsibility for future paramilitary operations like the Bay of Pigs to the Pentagon. It was the Kennedy brothers, not the Dulles brothers, who now ran Washington.

IN EXILE, DULLES RULES

Dulles found it hard to adjust to life on the political sidelines. “He had a very difficult time to decompress,” said Jim Angleton, his long time acolyte. But it soon became clear that the Dulles dynasty was not entirely dismantled.

In truth, the Kennedy purge had left the ranks of Dulles loyalists at the CIA largely untouched.



James Jesus Angleton was CIA Counterintelligence Chief from 1954 to 1975. Photo credit: Unknown

Top Dulles men like Angleton and Helms remained on the job. And the Old Man's shadow knights never abandoned their king. They continued to call on him in Georgetown, with Angleton visiting two or three times a week. They consulted with him on agency affairs, as if he were still DCI, and not John McCone. They collaborated with him on plans for books and film projects. They continued to kneel before Allen Dulles, their banished commander, and kiss his ring. And soon, Dulles began to emerge from his gloomy refuge, ready for action.

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Appel du général Challe (1961) Guerre d'Algérie.
Video credit: [Entertainment-Education WebTV / YouTube](#)

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