

# JFK Assassination Plot Mirrored in 1961 France

:Part I

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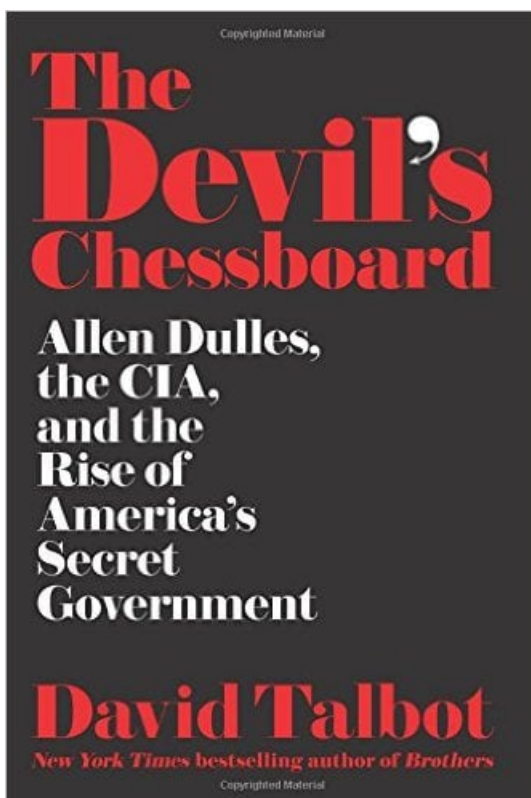
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*As you watch, perhaps with alarm, as thousands of refugees from Muslim countries make their way through Europe in a seemingly endless parade, you may be wondering if some of them will end up living near you, and how this might affect your life.*

*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.*

*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 first 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](#). by David Talbot, HarperCollins Publishers, 2015.*

## PLOTS, PANIC, AND RUMORS OF CIA INVOLVEMENT

It was Cuba that created the first fracture between Kennedy and his national security chain of command. But while the Bay of Pigs was still dominating the front pages, the CIA mucked its way into another international crisis that required the president’s urgent attention. The Cuba invasion has all but erased this second crisis from history. But the strange events that occurred in Paris in April 1961 reinforced the disturbing feeling that President Kennedy was not in control of his own government.

Paris was in turmoil. At dawn on Saturday morning, April 22, a group of retired French generals had seized power in Algiers to block President Charles de Gaulle from settling the long, bloody war for Algerian independence. Rumors quickly spread that the coup plotters were coming next for de Gaulle himself, and that the skies over Paris would soon be filled with battle-hardened paratroopers and French Foreign Legionnaires from Algeria. Gripped by the dying convulsions of its colonial reign, France braced for a calamitous showdown.

After de Gaulle was elected president in 1958, he sought to purge the French government of its CIA-connected elements. Dulles had made heavy inroads into France’s political, cultural, and intelligence circles in the postwar years.

The threat to French democracy was actually even more immediate than feared. On Saturday evening, two units of paratroopers totaling over two thousand men huddled in the Forest of Orleans and the Forest of Rambouillet, not much more than an hour outside Paris. The rebellious paratroopers were poised for the final command to join up with tank units from Rambouillet and converge on the capital, with the aim of seizing the Élysée Palace and other key government posts.

By Sunday, panic was sweeping through Paris. All air traffic was halted over the area, the Metro was shut down, and cinemas were dark. Only the cafés remained open, where Parisians crowded anxiously to swap the latest gossip.



Général Maurice Challe Photo credit: Screenshot [Entertainment-Education WebTV / YouTube](#)

News that the coup was being led by the widely admired Maurice Challe, a former air force chief and commander of French forces in Algeria, stunned the government in Paris, from de Gaulle down.

Challe, a squat, quiet man, was a World War II hero and, so it had seemed, a loyal Gaullist. But the savage passions of the war in Algeria had deeply affected Challe and left him vulnerable to the persuasions of more zealous French officers. He had promised Algeria's French settlers and pro-French Muslims that they would not be abandoned, and he felt a soldierly responsibility to stand by his oath, as well as by the memory of the French servicemen who had lost their lives in the war. In his radio broadcast to the people of France, the coup leader explained that he was taking his stand against de Gaulle's "government of capitulation ... so that our dead shall not have died for nothing."

De Gaulle's enemies in Paris and Washington were also convinced that the French president's awkward steps toward granting Algerian independence threatened to create a "Soviet base" in strategic, oil-rich North Africa.



Richard M. Bissell, Jr., the CIA's Chief of Covert Action in 1961 who helped run ZRRIFLE, an "Executive Action" program. Photo credit: [CIA.GOV](https://www.cia.gov)

De Gaulle quickly concluded that Challe must be acting with the support of US intelligence, and Élysée officials began spreading this word to the press. Shortly before his resignation from the French military, Challe had served as NATO commander in chief, and he had developed close relations with a number of high-ranking US officers stationed in the military alliance's Fontainebleau headquarters. Challe and American security officials shared a deep disaffection with de Gaulle.

The stubborn, seventy-year-old pillar of French nationalism was viewed as a growing obstacle to US ambitions for NATO because he refused to incorporate French troops under allied command and insisted on building a separate nuclear force beyond Washington's control. De Gaulle's enemies in Paris and Washington were also convinced that the French president's awkward steps toward granting Algerian independence threatened to create a "Soviet base" in strategic, oil-rich North Africa.

In panic-gripped Paris, reports of US involvement in the coup filled newspapers across the political spectrum. Geneviève Tabouis, a columnist for *Paris-Jour*, zeroed in directly on Dulles as the main culprit in an article headlined "The Strategy of Allen Dulles."

Other news reports revealed that Jacques Soustelle — a former governor-general of Algeria who joined the Secret Army Organization (Organisation de l'Armée Secrète, or OAS), a notorious anti-de Gaulle terrorist group — had a luncheon meeting with Richard Bissell in Washington the previous December.

De Gaulle's foreign ministry was the source of some of the most provocative charges in the press, including the allegation that CIA agents sought funding for the Challe coup from multinational corporations, such as Belgian mining companies operating in the Congo.

### "WE WILL NOT FAIL AS WE DID IN CUBA"

Ministry officials also alleged that Americans with ties to extremist groups had surfaced in Paris during the coup drama, including one identified as a "political counselor for the Luce [media] group," who was heard to say, "An operation is being prepared in Algiers to put a stop to communism, and we will not fail as we did in Cuba."

Stories about the CIA's French intrigues soon began spreading to the American press. A Paris correspondent for *The Washington Post* reported that Challe had launched his revolt "because he was convinced he had unqualified American support" — assurances, Challe was led to believe, "emanating from President Kennedy himself." Who gave these assurances, the *Post* reporter asked his French sources? The Pentagon, the CIA? "It's the same thing," he was told.

Dulles was forced to issue a strong denial of CIA involvement in the putsch. "Any reports or allegations that the Central Intelligence Agency or any of its personnel had anything to do with the generals' revolt were completely false," the spymaster declared, blaming Moscow for spreading the charges.

C.L. Sulzberger, the CIA-friendly *New York Times* columnist, took up the agency's defense, echoing Dulles's indignant denial. "To set the record straight," Sulzberger wrote, sounding like an agency official, "our Government behaved with discretion, wisdom and propriety

during the [French] insurrection. This applies to all branches, [including] the CIA.”

Years later, investigative reporter Carl Bernstein exposed the ties between Sulzberger and the CIA. “Young Cy Sulzberger had some uses,” a CIA official told Bernstein. “He was very eager, he loved to cooperate.” (Bernstein conveniently left unexamined the long history of cooperation between the CIA and his own former employer, *The Washington Post*.)

But *The New York Times’s* Scotty Reston was more aligned with the sentiments of the Kennedy White House. Echoing the charges circulating in the French press, Reston reported that the CIA was indeed “involved in an embarrassing liaison with the anti-Gaullist officers.”

Reston communicated the rising fury in JFK’s inner circle over the CIA’s rogue behavior, in the wake of the Bay of Pigs fiasco and the French escapade: “All this has increased the feeling in the White House that the CIA has gone beyond the bounds of an objective intelligence-gathering agency and has become the advocate of men and policies that have embarrassed the Administration.”

## DEEP HISTORY OF CIA IN FRANCE

Allen Dulles was once again making his own policy, this time in France. There was a long history of acrimony between Dulles and de Gaulle, dating back to World War II and the complex internal politics of the French Resistance.

As OSS chief in Switzerland, Dulles favored a far right faction of the Resistance that was opposed to de Gaulle. In his war memoirs, de Gaulle accused Dulles of being part of “a scheme” that was determined to “silence or set aside” the French general. Pierre de Bénouville, a right-wing Resistance leader on Dulles’s OSS payroll, was later accused of betraying Jean Moulin, de Gaulle’s dashing representative in the French underground, to the Gestapo.

After he was captured, Moulin was subjected to brutal torture before being beaten to death — by the notorious war criminal Klaus Barbie, according to some accounts.

After de Gaulle was elected president in 1958, he sought to purge the French government of its CIA-connected elements. Dulles had made heavy inroads into France’s political, cultural, and intelligence circles in the postwar years. According to some French reports, during his visits to Paris the spymaster would set himself up at a suite in the Ritz Hotel, where he would dispense bags full of cash to friendly politicians, journalists, and other influential figures. Some were wined and dined and enticed with beautiful Parisian call girls.

De Gaulle was particularly determined to shut down the secret “stay-behind army” that Dulles had organized in France — a network of anti-Communist militants with access to buried arms caches who were originally recruited to resist a potential Soviet invasion but were now aligned with the rebellious generals and other groups plotting to overthrow French democracy.

De Gaulle ordered his young security adviser, Constantin Melnik, to shut down the murky, stay-behind network of fascists, spooks, and criminals, which Melnik agreed was “very dangerous for the security of France.”

But Melnik, who was trained at the RAND Corporation, a leading think tank for the US national security complex, was another admirer of Dulles, and the stay-behind under-ground

continued to operate in France. Melnik — who was the son of a White Russian general and the grandson of Czar Nicolas II's personal physician, who was executed along with the imperial family — was as passionately anti-Soviet as his US security colleagues.

In May 1958, when de Gaulle returned to power in Paris after a twelve-year absence, Dulles flew to Paris for a face-to-face meeting with the legendary Frenchman to see if their differences could be resolved. Dulles had great confidence in his personal powers of persuasion. But the proud de Gaulle refused to see the spymaster, handing him off to one of his close associates, Michel Debré.

*A formal dinner was organized for Dulles and Jim Hunt, the CIA station chief in Paris, which was also attended by Melnik. Dulles seemed unfazed by de Gaulle's slight. But, as French journalist Frédéric Charpier later commented, "Upon returning to the Ritz Hotel, Dulles drew some lessons from the evening, which confirmed his fears. De Gaulle promised to be a tough and hostile partner who was sure to put an end to the laissez-faire attitude which up until then had characterized the [French government]."*

World leaders defied Allen Dulles at their peril — even leaders like Charles de Gaulle, whose nation's warm, fraternal relations with the United States dated back to the American Revolution. After Dulles flew home to Washington, the CIA's reports on de Gaulle took a sharper edge. At a National Security Council meeting convened by Eisenhower in September 1958, gloomy prognostications were made about the French leader's ability to settle the Algerian crisis to America's satisfaction.

The possibility of overthrowing de Gaulle and replacing him with someone more in tune with US interests was openly discussed, but the idea was discarded at that point as too risky. However, by the time Kennedy took office in January 1961, the CIA was primed for a power switch in Paris.

French President Charles De Gaulle and the Six-Year War Video credit: [National Archives / Archive.org](#)

Next: [Part 2](#).

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