Volume VII, Number 3 September 8, 1966 35c

see p 30 Letter NYU Law School professor

The New York Review of Books

CDC

Allen Dulles and the Nazis

The Double Dealer

The Secret Surrender
by Allen W. Dulles.
Harper & Row, 288 pp., $5.95

Gar Alperovitz

John F. Kennedy concluded after the Bay of Pigs that the reappointment of Allen Dulles as Director of the CIA had been a mistake. We are told, however, that he still could not understand how a man so intelligent and so experienced could be so wrong.[1] Dulles's account of his part in arranging the surrender of German armies in Italy sixteen years earlier offers important clues; it also illuminates the way in which Dulles helped set in motion the events that we know as the Cold War.

This is not his intent, of course. Dulles was wartime OSS Chief in Switzerland. During March and April 1945 a leading Nazi in Italy, SS General and *Obergruppenführer* Karl Wolff got in touch with him. Dulles's book is a detailed account of how this "contact" was used to facilitate the surrender of German forces in Italy a few days before V-E Day. The publisher promises the book will convey "the breathless excitement of a fictional thriller." However, it contains no sex, little sadism, only an occasional episode in the woods at a Swiss villa. There is excitement in this tale, but to sense it one must know a good deal more than Dulles tells about its bearing on the great issue of 1945: whether the World War II alliance could be followed by peaceful relations among the Great Powers.

Hitler was sure it could not, and, of course, in the end he was right. Convinced that disputes between the Allies could save the Third Reich, he and his subordinates tried to foment trouble during the last months of the war. His underlings maneuvered both to curry personal favor with the Americans and British and to save Germany from the Russians. Wolff made his approaches to Dulles in Switzerland. Wolff's SS boss, Himmler, suggested a deal to Count Bernadotte: "In order to save as great a part of Germany as possible from a Russian invasion I am willing to capitulate on the Western Front in order to enable the Western Allies to advance rapidly towards the east." This bait was offered all over Europe; the trouble, of course, lay in the hook, and Dulles knew it: "It would have been a simple matter for the Germans to let word leak to the Russians that some secret negotiations were going on . . . that the Allies were running out on them."

IT WAS A "REAL DANGER." Yet it was a risk Dulles was willing to take; he begged Washington to let nothing interfere with his efforts to produce the surrender of a million men. Washington was dubious. The Germans had been ordered to fight to the last man. Talk of surrender was high treason, and Hitler was hanging Generals on the slightest evidence of insubordination. The only result of bargaining talks would be to arouse Soviet suspicions. So Dulles's first request for permission to open a channel to the Germans was refused.

Dulles was not put off. More to the point, his chief "unofficial" assistant in such matters, a naturalized citizen of German origin, was "not the kind of man to give up easily." Dulles trusted Gero von S. Gaevernitz, and he especially trusted Gaevernitz's judgment of the Nazis. Gaevernitz (who did much of the work on Dulles's book) seems to have made the most of his favored position to urge the wisdom of dealing with Wolff. An alibi was soon devised to cover Dulles in Washington. He would be able to say that he was "only trying to arrange a prisoner exchange"; and Gaevernitz and Dulles tentatively opened communications with Wolff.

Dulles chose an inopportune moment; for the Nazi interest in these talks seemed to confirm known Nazi designs at the time: American and British armies were racing into Germany from the West, while the best units Hitler could muster were being deployed against the Red Army. Hitler's tactics added meaning to Churchill's warning that "the Russians may have a legitimate fear of our doing a deal in the West to hold them back in the East." (Probably Churchill's main aim was to avoid giving Stalin an excuse for making separate surrender deals elsewhere in Europe.) As Dulles's communica-

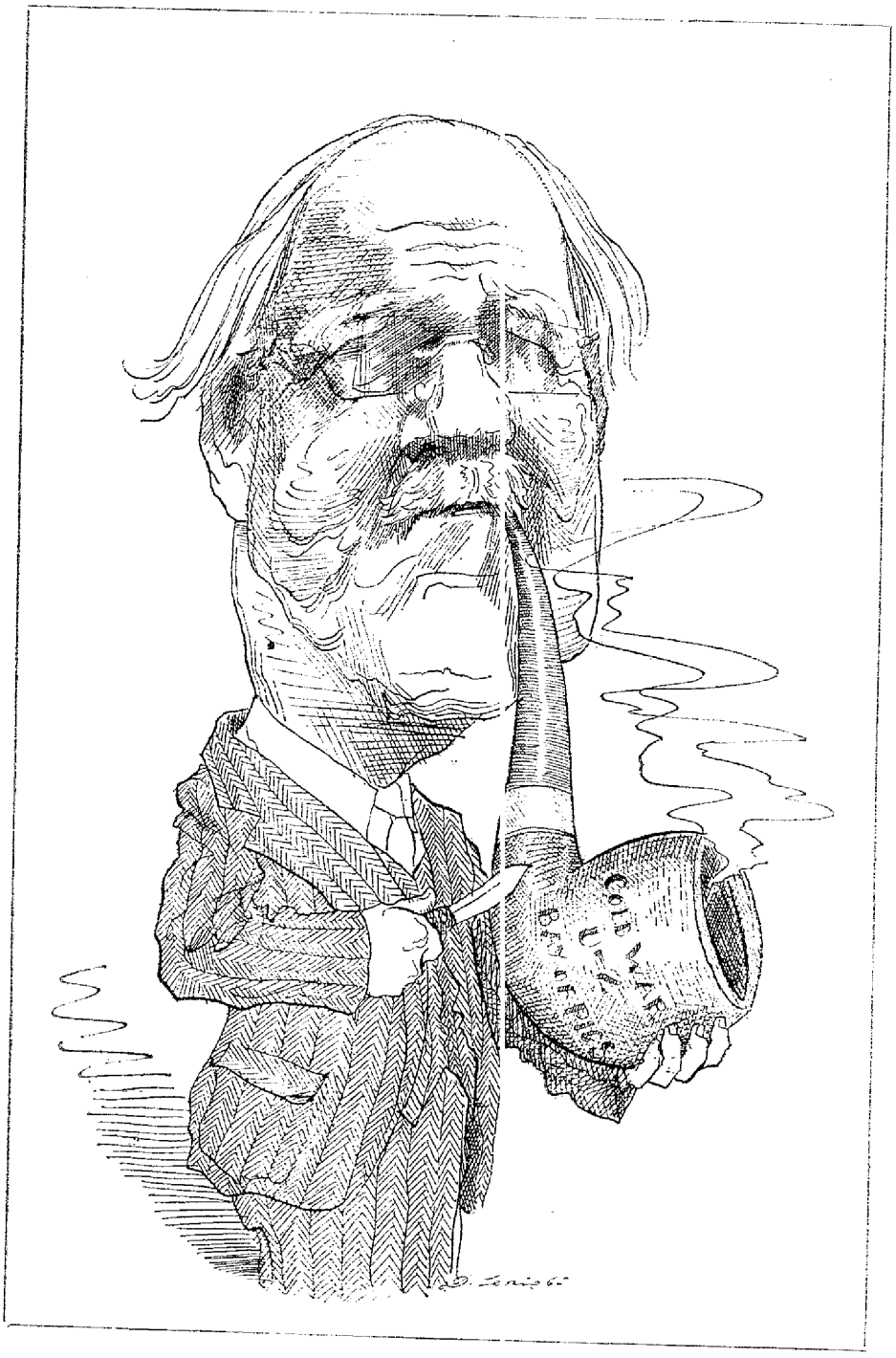
[1] Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *A Thousand Days*, Houghton, Mifflin, pp., 276, 290.

tions with Wolff went forward, the Prime Minister felt that in order to eliminate Soviet suspicions, the Russians would have to be allowed to participate.

On March 8, 1945 Dulles met with Wolff. The Russians, however, were not invited, and all hell broke loose. Ambassador Harriman was treated to a blast of Molotov's temper: "The Soviet Government sees not a misunderstanding, but something worse . . ." Stalin cabled directly to Roosevelt that, on the basis of these talks, the Germans were moving three divisions from Northern Italy to the Soviet front! Roosevelt replied that Dulles was merely opening a channel of communications; if and when surrender discussions took place, the Soviet Union would be represented. Now the Russians were incredulous. Stalin replied that his advisers were certain surrender talks had taken place; they believed they had already produced an agreement "to open the front to the Anglo-American troops and let them move east."

We do not know, specifically, whether the Nazis used Dulles's talks to divert troops to the east, or to divide the Allies by spreading this fear; nor does Dulles enlighten us much on either point. He admits that Wolff spent two suspicious periods with Hitler and Himmler in Berlin during the course of the talks, but for the most part Dulles is content to take Wolff's word that he was acting in good faith. That the talks had the profoundly grave effect Hitler desired, however, is now beyond doubt. Their effect was made far more serious at precisely this time by British tactics on the Polish issue, which, quite unlike Churchill's approach to surrender talks, were so violently anti-Soviet that Roosevelt felt London was "perfectly willing for the United States to have a war with Russia at any time and . . . to follow the British program would be to proceed to that end."

DULLES DOESN'T TELL US much about this either, but it is not too much to say that the suspicions arising from these events in early 1945 set in motion the first important hostilities of the Cold War.[2] Stalin raised major doubts that the alliance would be transformed into a postwar organization by announcing that Molotov would not come to the April 25, 1945 San Francisco U.N. Charter-writing Conference. Historians have generally attributed Stalin's displeasure to the fact that the Soviet-sponsored Government of Poland had not been invited to the Conference, but Dulles's book provides evidence that far more fundamental suspicions were involved. Stalin's cables amounted to an open accusation of betrayal by Roosevelt. In Washington, counter-fears and counter-accusations erupted. Roosevelt's responding cable



was strong: *"I am certain that there were no negotiations . . . at any time* . . . Frankly, I cannot avoid a feeling of bitter resentment toward your informers, whoever they are, for such vile representations of my actions or those of my trusted subordinates."

It is a commonplace today that CIA maneuvering often gives substance to Moscow's worst fears about American policy. *The Secret Surrender* shows that this destructive tradition began with the CIA's wartime predecessor, the OSS. The book gives substance to Stalin's charge in 1945 that what can only be called surrender talks were held; and it shows that the solemn pledges Roosevelt offered at the time were false. Whether the President was aware of what was going on we do not know. But we do now know that the talks Roosevelt disavowed nevertheless took place. Dulles's book presents us with facts showing how ridiculous was the American claim that negotiations with the Nazis would not involve the issue of surrender.

Indeed it was impossible to avoid the issue. That was why such high ranking men as Generals Lemnitzer and Airey of the Allied Command came to Switzerland to meet *Obergruppenführer* Wolff. (And why, of course, Stalin wanted to send his own generals.) On March 9, things had progressed so far that Dulles felt emissaries might meet to sign an agreement "within days." Dulles reports exchanges on a variety of points related to surrender. He even tells us how his man Gaevernitz personally raised the broader question of surrender of the entire Western front. And he describes communications with the Nazis involving proposals to maintain "a modest contingent" of forces in German military hands as an "instrument of order" for the postwar period. Dulles writes that when Lemnitzer and Airey met Wolff, "We all realized that this was a major decision . . . It was the first occasion during the entire war when high-ranking Allied officers and a German general had met on neutral soil to discuss a German surrender . . ."

Not much came of all this, but Stalin, we must belatedly admit, was right when he urged Roosevelt to accept Soviet representatives at the talks in order to preclude suspicions. Some admitted as much in 1945. By early April Field Marshal Alexander realized that the Germans were probably using the talks to drive a wedge between the Allies. Finally, at the end of April, Washington also came to its senses and categorically ordered Dulles to break off all contact with the Germans. Moscow was informed that Soviet representatives were invited to be in on the next round of talks in Italy.

IN RETROSPECT, it is obvious that there had been little real possibility of surrender in Italy so long as Hitler lived. This fundamental judgment had been made correctly by many at the time. But Dulles has not as yet shown he understands it, though even he is forced lamely to admit it was only Hitler's death on April 30 that permitted the surrender to take place.

What had been gained by two months of dickering with the Nazis? A mere six days. The fighting in Italy halted on May 2; the total collapse of the Third Reich was recorded on the evening of May 7-8. What had been lost? It is impossible to know precisely, but insofar as the possibility of peace depended on trust and mutual confidence, that possibility had been damaged. *The Secret Surrender* reminds us that the Cold War cannot be understood simply as an American response to a Soviet challenge, but rather as the insidious interaction of mutual suspicions, blame for which must be shared by all.

Why had Roosevelt agreed to exclude the Russians? There was little to gain, unless, in fact, a deal detrimental to them really was being made. Dulles hints that "the impelling reason" was a desire to use the talks to gain control of Northern Italy and the then vital port of Trieste. Other available evidence suggests that some of the White House staff had this in mind, although it appears the President himself believed the talks involved only preliminary arrangements for future surrender negotiations. Undoubtedly, an overriding problem was the illness of Roosevelt; the main cables, we now know, were not written by the President. But the most important factor, in my judgment, was the behavior of the "trusted subordinates" who Roosevelt told Stalin could not be in error about the talks. These were the men who maneuvered the President into the affair. One was Dulles's boss, OSS Chief William Donovan, a man "enthusiastic" about the negotiations. The other was Allen Dulles.

Dulles's actions must be understood, if not condoned, in the light of his conception of patriotism. A footnote in his book describes his respect for the "patriotic insubordination" of Swiss military men willing to break their oaths of office to follow dictates of conscience. Clearly, Dulles would like to think of himself as such a man. He is a patriot, but an insubordinate one, a man willing to withhold information, cut corners, mislead, disobey orders,

[2] See Appendix I of my *Atomic Diplomacy: Hiroshima and Potsdam* for details of the events described here and in the remainder of this review.

advocate, and deceive in order to achieve what he personally happens to think best for America. Too strong a statement? Dulles himself tells us that he "limited" his reporting to Washington in order to avoid a high level decision he knew would be against his making contact with Wolff; it would "cramp my freedom of action and decision." When one of Wolff's top men met with Dulles's assistant to discuss surrender, Dulles reported only the "bare facts" that the contact had been made. He did not want to "create the impression we were engaged in any kind of high-level negotiations requiring policy decisions. . . ." Still not revealing that surrender had already been discussed, he couched requests for instructions in "very general" and misleading terms so as to obtain permission to continue discussions with the Germans while his superiors would remain ignorant of his real intentions.

DULLES ALSO DESCRIBES how he took it upon himself to decide "it was worth the gamble to see Wolff, in full recognition of the fact that considerable risks were involved." He tells us that even after receiving direct and categorical orders to break all contact with the Germans immediately, he permitted his chief subordinate to meet with Wolff. How does Dulles explain all this? "An intelligence officer in the field is supposed to keep his home office informed of what he is doing," he admits—hastening to add, however: "That is quite true, but with some reservations, as he may overdo it. If, for example, he tells too much or asks too often for instructions, he is likely to get some he doesn't relish . . ." It is not difficult to understand why, in 1961, after Dulles's vague and misleading advocacy of the Bay of Pigs invasion, Kennedy reluctantly concluded he simply could not "estimate his meaning when he tells me things."[3]

Larger questions of statesmanship have always been beyond Dulles. In 1945 he believed so deeply in his surrender talks that he was willing to deceive his government in order to gain time, until all would see the opportunities he thought he saw so clearly. Such must have been the patriotic "reservations" which led him to withhold information, to disobey orders, and thereby contribute to the disruption of Allied relations. All one can do with untrustworthy subordinates, as Kennedy discovered, is fire them, as he fired Dulles. But the firing often comes too late: Dulles's secret surrender prefigured such other zealously advocated Cold War intelligence operations as the U-2 incident and the Bay of Pigs invasion. All three served to destroy hopes of cooperation and to poison the international atmosphere. How, asked John Kennedy, could a man so intelligent be so wrong? The answer can be found in a view of reality that has characterized the Cold War, a view so certain it can do no wrong, think it will surrender both the national interest and simple honesty to its myopic conception of patriotism. □

[3] *A Thousand Days*, p. 276