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Allen Dulles and the Politics of

Three years after his resignation as Director of Central Intelligence, Allen Dulles was asked by a friend if he would have been willing to "take the heat" during the U-2 and Bay of Pigs affairs—to state publicly, and falsely, that he alone had been ultimately responsible for any errors of secret service committed in those times of crisis.

"I've always felt," he replied, "that I should assume full responsibility for anything the Agency has done. I should shield and protect the President in any way I can."

Were he alive today, Dulles might well stand before the Church Committee and solemnly swear that he had never discussed CIA assassination plots

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with Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy. Given his personal ethic as a public servant in seven presidential administrations, it is entirely conceivable that he would protect the reputations of those chief executives, even if it were personally embarrassing, or to the detriment of his beloved intelligence service.

But it is inconceivable that Dulles would have hidden such sensitive state secrets from the President. "I am under his orders," Dulles would often say. "He is my boss."

No plots for political murder could have gone forward in CIA without a "gentleman's agreement" between the CIA chief and his "boss." Nor was Dulles one to shy away from raising the question with the man on high if, under extreme circumstances, he felt the practice of assassination might serve the national interest.

He had struggled with this issue even before he took charge of CIA.

As chief of the OSS office in Switzerland during World War II, Dulles was approached by dissident Germans

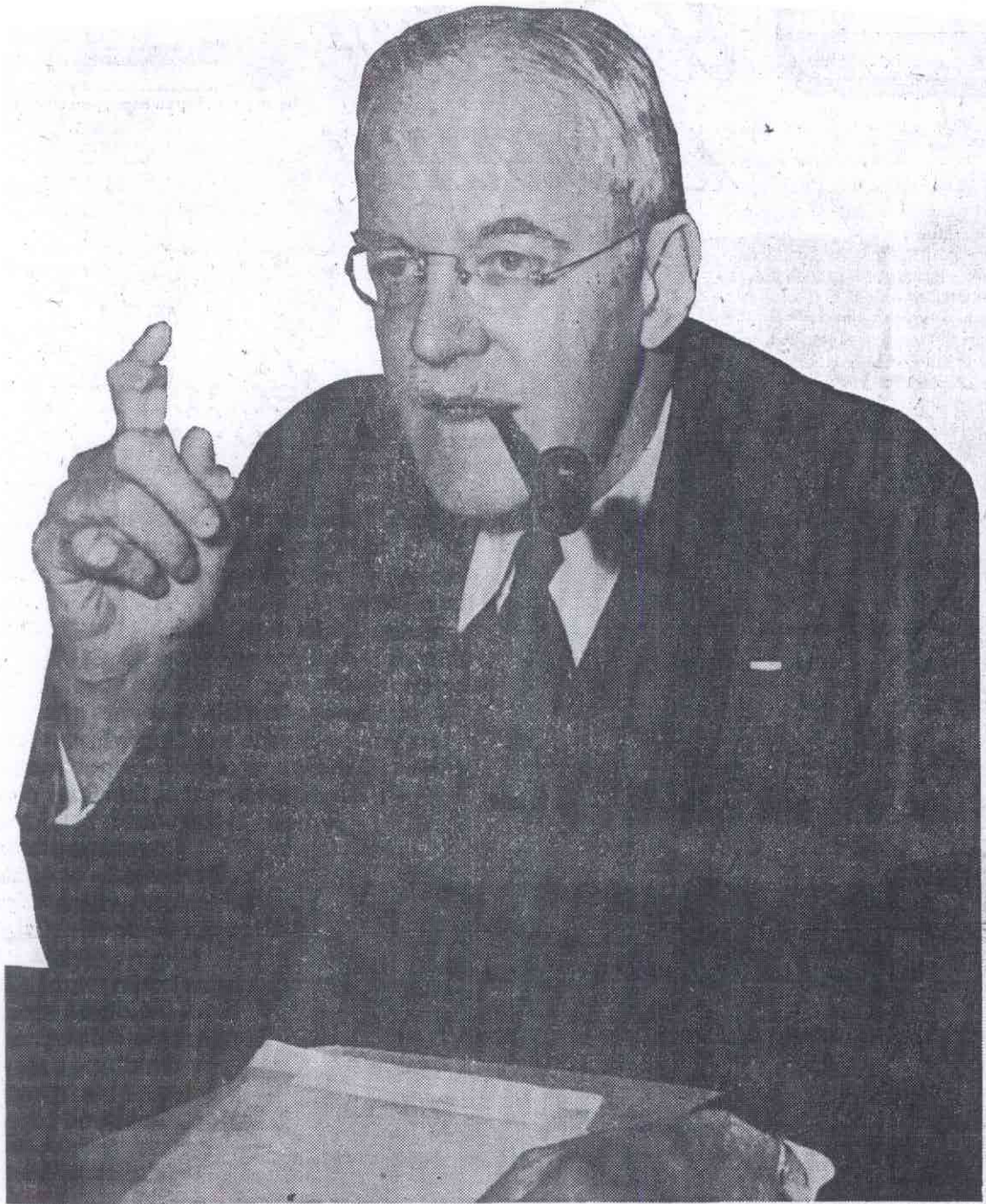
Assassination

of the Third Reich who proposed to cut short the life of Adolf Hitler. With Washington's knowledge and approval, he gave an encouraging wink to their efforts. The plot ended, of course, in failure.

Reflecting, after the war, on that experience, he told an audience of the New York Bar Association that, in a totalitarian state, assassination might be the only means available to overthrow a modern tyrant. Those words were spoken in 1947—weeks before the Central Intelligence Agency came into existence. Six years later, Dulles became its director.

Early in his regime, a visiting West German general suggested to an assembled group of CIA executives that the Agency "liquidate" East Germany's Communist strongman Walter Ulbricht. An immediate objection was heard from Richard Helms, the future CIA director, then one of Dulles' top aides. Political murder, said Helms, was simply not a viable practice for an intelligence service. But Dulles cut him short: "Don't take my people too seriously," he told the general. "We're prepared to consider anything."

Others at the table tried to suppress a grin. They knew Dulles would never give serious thought to having Ulbricht killed; but he was always eager to establish the reputation of his Agency (particularly among conspirators of the Old World) for sinister expediency and derring-do.



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In reality, assassination was then considered "counter-productive" by most practitioners of secret service. When CIA overthrew the left-wing Arbenz regime of Guatemala in 1954, extreme care was taken to insure that President Arbenz and his top advisers should escape unharmed, lest they acquire political immortality through martyrdom.

The question was raised anew in 1957, after the Suez debacle, when Egypt's Nasser was Washington's bete noir of the day. After a dinner party at the home of Walter Lippmann, as the men were segregated for brandy and cigars, conversation turned to the "Nasser problem."

"Allen," said one of America's leading foreign correspondents with tongue-in-cheek, "can't you find an assassin?" Dulles' face assumed a deadly serious expression. Leaning back in a large leather chair, he struck a match, lit his pipe, took a few puffs, then replied, "Well, first you would need a fanatic, a man who'd be willing to kill himself if he were caught. And he couldn't be an outsider. He'd have to be an Arab." Dulles stopped and shook his head in apparent consternation. "It

would be very difficult to find just the right man."

Most of the listeners were astounded. The usually-discreet Mr. Dulles, having delivered a reasoned response to a morbid jest, had shown his serious consideration of political murder...

It wasn't long before Fidel Castro outshone Nasser as leading political villain in Washington's eyes. At President Eisenhower's direction, CIA worked out a plan, on the Guatemala model, for Castro's overthrow. The object of the operation, as it followed a complex and confusing course of development in the year preceding the Bay of Pigs disaster, was to provoke a general insurrection throughout the island.

Dr. Richard Bissell, then chief of CIA's Clandestine Services and Dulles' technical alter-ego, presented to the director a scholarly dissertation on how this political upheaval was to be accomplished. In Bissell's academic scenario, the revolt would receive an enormous boost from Castro's demise. The Cuban dictator seemed more the dynamic "evil genius" of his regime than Guatemala's Arbenz had ever been; his removal from the scene thus presented a certain grisly logic. With

the Cuban Army bereft of its commander and thoroughly demoralized, the insurgents would, in theory, have an open field.

There was much about the final Cuban plan, particularly the military details of a half-baked invasion strategy, that Dulles never fully grasped. But he did take a personal interest in Bissell's blueprint for revolution. Castro's assassination was integral to that blueprint. Dulles understood that. And when he finally gave his nod to political murder, it could be only because he had himself received a green light—tacit or explicit—from Dwight Eisenhower and John Kennedy.

Dulles might "consider anything" if he felt it would preserve and protect the imperial power of the United States. But he was too politically astute, too dedicated to American representative government, to allow his Agency to become a "rogue elephant," hatching plots abroad without the sanction of the nation's highest elected official.

Allen Dulles liked to remind his aides that he and they served at the pleasure of the President. If his CIA committed acts seen in hindsight, as morally reprehensible the final responsibility must be sought in the Oval Office.