

French dissidents helped in planning

By Bob Wiedrich
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Congressional leaders have been secretly told of Central Intelligence Agency involvement in a plot by French dissidents to assassinate the late French President Charles DeGaulle.

In the past two weeks, a CIA representative disclosed sketchy details of the scheme while telling Capitol Hill leaders what they can expect to learn as several Congressional committees begin separate probes of the international American intelligence apparatus.

While admittedly vague in specifics, the briefing definitely established that such a plan had at least been discussed a decade ago by persons in the CIA.

This much, however, was disclosed during the briefing:

Sometime in the mid-1960s — probably 1965 or 1966 — dissident Frenchmen in the DeGaulle government made contact with the CIA to seek help in a plot to murder the French leader. Who instigated the contact was not made clear.

Attempts on DeGaulle's life by extreme right-wing opponents in 1961 and 1962 failed.

According to the CIA briefing officer, discussions were held on how best to eliminate DeGaulle, by then a thorn in the side of the Johnson administration because of his ouster of American military bases from French soil and his demands that the United States forces be withdrawn from the Indochina war.

The plan is said to have evolved after discussions between CIA personnel and the dissident French. There is, however, no evidence the plot got beyond the talking stage.

A hired assassin armed with a poison ring was to be slipped into a crowd of old soldiers while DeGaulle hosted a reception for them.

The killer would make his appearance late in the day when it could be presumed DeGaulle's hand would be weary and perhaps numb from shaking hands.

The assassin would clasp DeGaulle's hand in friend-



CHARLES DE GAULLE
A peaceful death

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ship and DeGaulle would fail to detect the tiny pin prick of poison penetrating his flesh.

The executioner would then stroll off to become lost in the crowd as the poison coursed through DeGaulle's veins either to his heart or brain, depending on the deadly potion used. How quickly death would have come was not divulged, if that was even discussed at the time.

The scheme bears striking parallels to the plot of Frederick Forsyth's "Day of the Jackal," a fictional account of an attempted assassination of DeGaulle during a 1963 celebration of the World War II liberation of Paris.

The novel was published in 1971, well after French dissidents are believed to have contacted the CIA with their deadly, real-life proposal.

In the vague outline presented the congressional leaders, there is no hint of what the CIA's actual role might have been had the plot reached fruition.

Further, no evidence was offered demonstrating that President Johnson either knew of discussions of the plot or approved of them.

Disclosure of the DeGaulle assassination scenario makes the late general the most powerful foreign leader to crop up in what appears to have been a CIA "hit list" fashioned during the administrations of Johnson and Kennedy.

Other schemes reportedly linked by the Rockefeller Commission include the murder of Dominican Republic Dictator Rafael Trujillo in 1961 and the 1963 killing of South Vietnamese chief Ngo Dinh Diem and his brother.

The French dissidents' motive for the purported DeGaulle execution plot is abundantly clear.

Previous attempts on his life — a firebombing and a machinegun ambush — were believed to have been spawned by the terrorist Secret Army organization composed of French army officers and former Algerian settlers who blamed DeGaulle for — in their view — having dishonored France by his retreat from the North African colonies.

The motives of the CIA personnel who apparently at least entertained the assassination plot are less clear, but there is no doubt DeGaulle was then out of favor with Washington.

He had announced his intention to withdraw from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in early 1966 and had ordered the ouster of all American military forces and NATO headquarters from France.

He had also started a series of critical statements on the Vietnamese War in 1963, calling for neutrality in Indochina and an end to foreign intervention.

By 1966, DeGaulle had made it clear he blamed the United States for the Vietnamese fighting. He demanded that Americans disengage their forces and leave Vietnamese to resolve their own affairs.

He had also jolted American foreign policy by declaring a grand design for a United Europe under French leadership.

On Nov. 9, 1970, Charles DeGaulle — out of power after electoral reverses — died of a heart attack while watching television in his country home in the village of Colombey - les Deux - Eglises.

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