Paris—French intelligence services have routinely undertaken covert operations in foreign countries, been involved in the assassination of political enemies, and employed agents who spied for them without being formally armed. Such activities have been commonplace in the history of the French nation.

Yet there has been nothing comparable here to the U.S. Senate's attempt to delineate the political responsibility for the kinds of sins laid at the door of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency. There have been inquiries here into the conduct of the French services, but they have been carried out quietly, if at times brutally, and always with the top figures of the regime carefully insulated from the repercussions. An important layer of the insulation consists of the multiplicity of French institutions that provide cover for the services. These include the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Interior, the Police, the Gendarmerie, the Republican Guard, the National Gendarmerie, the Préfectures, the Préfecture of Police, and a host of other agencies and departments.

In wartime De Gaulle's followers got into the habit of not placing too fine a point on the legal niceties. The Free French movement based in the English Channel from Nazi-occupied France to join the Gaullist resistance movement. A number of bodies of presumed intelligence agents were suspected of being involved in the activities of the resistance movement. The French services were able to operate in this way because of the dual nature of the French state, which allowed for a certain degree of latitude in the conduct of its foreign policy.

Under Giscard, the Sécurité Interieure (SDECE), the French equivalent of the CIA, is now working more closely with the CIA and other Western intelligence agencies than under De Gaulle. The French services are also putting more of their resources into straight commercial and economic espionage and monitoring of Communist countries.

In the past, the French services were involved in intelligence activities related to the activities of French colonies in Africa. Under Giscard, there is a much more realistic approach to what a small service can do, and a much more hardheaded economic approach to what French intelligence can do to support the goals of the French government.

The French services are also involved in the activities of the National Front for the Liberation of Angola, which is supported by the French government without any official government imprimatur. This support, said to be directed by the chief operative on Africa and the reputed boss of France's dirty tricks sector under both De Gaulle and Pompidou, is going directly to the smaller liberation front for the Cabinda enclave, known as FLEC, based in Gabon.

These operations represent more than the kind of routine covering of bets that intelligence services often make. They are part of a larger strategy to support the goals of the French government in Africa.

The proliferation of French intelligence activities grew up under Gen. Charles de Gaulle, who encouraged security services that paralleled government agencies and were loyal only to him and not to the formal bureaucraty. Faced at different times with serious threats of civil war from both left and right, De Gaulle did not want a concentration of power in any one security service. Yet he was not one to pay attention to the details of the daily operation of government.

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Jacques Foccart, center, long linked to French intelligence operations in Africa, looks on during a 1968 meeting between President Hamani Diori of Niger and President Charles de Gaulle at Elysee Palace.

The post-World War II history of France's intelligence services has been stained by repeated scandal, internal intrigue and cooperation with criminal elements that makes the known CIA links to the Mafia look small. But no political body here has had the independence or strength to run a full-scale inquiry similar to the Senate intelligence committee's report on the CIA.

Such a body would also have extreme difficulty in coming up with documents or witnesses. Foccart carted off several truckloads of documents after the deaths of De Gaulle and Pompidou and some of the key figures in scandals brought to public light have died violent deaths.

The four major French intelligence services are:

1. SDECE founded after World War II with help from American intelligence, the service is known as the "swimming pool" by the French because of the proximity of its headquarters to the Tourelles swimming pool on the outskirts of Paris. The service is formally part of the ministry of defense but has a direct line of communication to the presidency through one of Giscard's advisers and coordinates closely with Giscard's interior minister, Michel Poniatowski. Like De Gaulle's interior ministers, Poniatowski is probably the key man in security and intelligence policy decisions.

2. The service's 2,000-man force has an official budget of about 45 million a year, but experts say that it can draw on $50 million hidden elsewhere in the budget in any given year. Agents' expense accounts are reportedly severely scrutinized by finance ministry officials delegated to the swimming pool.

Most of its agents abroad appear to operate under diplomatic cover as military attaches in embassies. In the past, much of their work has been confined to traditional intelligence-gathering, while covert operations were left to Foccart's network.

Gabon, with an eye on Cabinda's oil reserves, or with outstanding political or other debts for Foccart's help during the De Gaulle and Pompidou days. It is a graphic demonstration of the personalization of power by the Gaullists outside the channels of government.

Foccart, 64, was elbowed out of his job as presidential adviser shortly after Giscard was elected in 1974 and now runs a large export-import company here. His network of informants and operatives is still largely intact, although diplomats report that the apparatus no longer receives any substantial amount of government money.

SDECE's interests in Angola seem to be largely strategic, although there is a healthy dose of economic self-interest involved. The French share American concern about the spread of Communism and Soviet influence in Africa, and are interested in building their influence in Zaire and maintaining it in South Africa, which is also helping the National Front and its ally UNTA.

Foccart's operation is believed, however, to have major commercial implications. It is said to be largely financed by the sizable private treasury Foccart can put together from French companies with interests in...
The service maintains that it only operates abroad. But a secret SDECE report released by The Washington Post shows SDECE surveillance of French dissidents and foreign leftists in France and what appears to be routine distribution of such reports to the ministry of the interior, the national police and the interior ministry's domestic counterespionage agency.

The May 1972 report concerns meetings in Toulouse between French intellectuals and leftists from Cuba, Brazil and Uruguay identified by the service as Communist agents. Reflecting a deep-rooted French distrust of secret services, governments here have avoided naming profes- sionals spies to head SDECE. High-ranking military men, whose disputes with their career cloak and dagger deputies have produced much of the in- formation that has leaked out about the service, have usually held the post.

Pompompiere, the aristocratic Col. Alexandre de Marenches, 55, in 1970 to clean up and revitalize the service, has been able to head SDECE. A retired general, he is considered a secret service as in return for

De Marenches has also intensified com- mercial spying. A French source who usually offers no compliments to the service says that the French were kept fully informed of secret American negotiating proposals during this year’s “deal of the century.” When American and French manufacturers competed to sell jet fighters to four smaller European nations.

The service has also inten- cernentations on recruiting graduates of France’s most prestigious universities to fill lower level vacancies and has brought military men into the top ranks of the service’s operational branches to exert more control.

The Directorate of Territorial Surveillance comes under Pontiós’s direct control and handles counterespionage inside France. There is strong evidence that the DST taps the phones of the embassies not only of all Communist nations, but also of Israel, key former French colonies and probably the United States and Britain.

“We know our phones are tapped,” said a diplomat in an embassy where electronic tests have been run.

The DST was also im- portant to tap the offices of France’s leading satirical newspaper, Le Canard Enchaîné, which has published exposes on the French police, intelligence, arms dealings and other sensitive subjects.

The DST turned over to Foccart’s network lists of suspected dissidents in Marseilles, Grenoble and Lyons during the upheavals of May 1968 as part of a plan to root out middle-ranking troublemakers in soccer stadiums or camps, according to well-protected documents published by the French press last year.

Indications have emerged recently that the source of these documents was a former journalist named Dominique Calzi, who says he was a member of Foccart’s “parallel” police and was able to make off with copies of many of its documents.

Calzi, who was jailed on long-term charges shortly after the leaks about the DST lists appeared, published his own account last month of that incident and of more than a dozen other major scandals, according to former Foccart’s men of the Ben Barka kidnapping, gold and drug smuggling, the kidnapping in West Germany of Col. Antoine Argoud, a top leader of the military men who rebelled against De Gaulle over Algeria, and of murdering African exile leader Félix Mounié in Geneva in 1969.

The Civil Action Service is the formal name of Foccart’s network, known by its French initials, SAC, or more popularly as: “Les Barbouzes” (the false beards).

According to Calzi and other French sources, Foccart built his network out of the strong-arm “order” section of De Gaulle’s postwar political movement, the authoritarian-inclined Rally of the French People. Originally conceived by De Gaulle and Foccart as a means to infiltrate the state services and prepare the way for taking power, the unofficial service grew rapidly during the Algerian war and became the chief instrument of dirty tricks during De Gaulle’s rule.

At its height in recent years, SAC had 120 full-time staff “directors” and could call on 23,000 “correspondents” ranging from dedicated Gaulist war veterans to the most violent thugs in the Marseilles underground, according to Calzi.

Foccart’s men were placed in key positions on development boards and agencies channeling government funds to Black Africa, giving them life-and-death powers over the weakest regimes and, if often said, the chance to gather large kickbacks from cooperative regimes for SAC’s treasury and that of the Gaulist Party generally.

SAC frequently intervened to pluck criminals from prison for important missions like the Argoud kidnapping and a number of murders Calzi pins on SAC operatives. He charges that drug operations, holdings and blackmail were routine ways for SAC to build up its treasury and to reward criminals for political operations.

The General Informa- tion (RG) section of the national police has frequently worked closely with all three of the other services. Its primary mission is internal political espionage. It appears to be the least trusted of the intelligence services, partly because it is highly politicized without having declared exclusive allegiance to De Gaulle and his successors.

Following the established tradition of the pre-De Gaulle era, agents appear not to be above trying to curry favor with opposition groups of today that might be in power tomorrow.

“Sure, we knew the RG was spying on us during the campaign,” says a Socialist

De Marenches has been able to reestablish fairly good working relations with the American agency, according to French and foreign sources.

DE MARENCHEs has also intensified commercial spying. A French source who usually offers no compliments to the service says that the French were kept fully informed of secret American negotiating proposals during this year’s “deal of the century.” When American and French manufacturers competed to sell jet fighters to four smaller European nations.

De Marenches is concentrating on recruiting graduates of France’s most prestigious universities to fill lower level vacancies and has brought military men into the top ranks of the service’s operational branches to exert more control.

The DST was also implicated in an attempt to tap the offices of France’s leading satirical newspaper, Le Canard Enchaîné, which has published exposes on the French police, intelligence, arms dealings and other sensitive subjects.

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“Sure, we knew the RG was spying on us during the campaign,” says a Socialist...
Foccart’s operatives got their men in his office and the blinds drawn when we discussed campaign plans. Anyway, we were getting information from the RG, too, so the regime could not be too confident of its information on us.

But a more expert and detached observer of that campaign recalled: “Yes, the Socialists were getting a little information, but they couldn’t have been getting much because an RG agent infiltrated their top planning staff and they didn’t know it until it came out in the papers.”

A ministry of interior official described the section’s functions “as a kind of public opinion poll, that’s all. They are just there to let the government know what the people are thinking politically, so we can have a good idea of what we should do.”

NEXT: How The Chinese Spy

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A Fruitless Search
For M. DeMarenches

PARIS—The following are excerpts from two telephone conversations in search of S D E C E, France’s Service de Documentation Exterieure et de Contre Espionage (Service of External Documentation and Counter Espionage), the French CIA, headed by Col. Alexandre de Marenches.

Operator: Hello, Minister of Defense, Operator 46.

Reporter: Could I have the office of Mr. De Marenches?

O: Hmm. How do you spell that? I don’t have any name like that on my list. I’ll give you information. Hold on.

Second Operator: Hold on.

Third Operator: Hold on.

R: Excuse me, could you tell me the number I should call or the name of the office?

O: No, I’m not authorized to tell you the name. Hold on.

Secretary: Hello.

(The conversation produces a promise of a reply to the reporter’s request for an interview. The secretary tells the reporter to call back in two days.)

R: Fine. What number should I call, or what is the name of your office?

S: No, just call the switchboard again, and you will find us.

Two days later, the reporter contacts a Capt. Dulin, aide to De Marenches.

Dulin: You know, Col. De Marenches has never seen a journalist and will not now. In Washington, you seem to do things differently, but in France, I assure you, we don’t do things that way. Besides, we could tell you nothing, nothing at all.

R: Could you just tell me what laws authorize the existence of S D E C E?

Dulin: Well, I have never heard of any and I doubt that they exist. In any event, if they do, I don’t know them. One other thing—please tell us when you propose to publish this article. We will read it closely.” —Jim Hogland