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## From the Shadows of the Cold War: the Rise of the CIA

By Ben Terrall  
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Veteran journalist David Talbot, founder and former editor-in-chief of Salon, doesn't skim over the surfaces of things. With the help of his long-time associate and ace researcher Karen Croft, he digs deep and keeps digging. *Season of the Witch*, his history of San Francisco in the late 1960s-early '80s, is a must-read for anyone interested in the aftermath of the '60s Bay Area counter-culture.

Talbot's new book, *The Devil's Chessboard: Allen Dulles, the CIA, and the Rise of America's Secret Government*, is equally essential reading, especially for readers with even a passing interest in post-WW2 U.S. foreign policy.

The longest running director of the CIA (1952-1961), Dulles helped coordinate extremely bloody coups throughout the world. Not surprisingly, he comes off as a nasty piece of work. He and his brother John Foster Dulles both worked with the prestigious Wall Street firm Sullivan and Cromwell, which made a fortune representing cartels that were part of the Nazi war machine (John Foster Dulles went on to become Eisenhower's Secretary of State). The Dulles brothers

were quite cozy with Nazi higher ups in the '30s and remained staunch apologists for Hitler well into the the '40s.

Readers of Christopher Simpson's excellent histories *Blowback* and *The Splendid Blond Beast*, which Talbot cites extensively, will be familiar with much of the history of U.S. intelligence recruitment of Nazis but Talbot adds plenty of interesting, albeit horrific, information. Talbot writes, "Like many convicted Nazi criminals in the early Cold War years, a number of the Nuremberg defendants sentenced to prison were later the beneficiaries of politically motivated interventions and early releases; few of the many thousand convicted Nazis were still in prison after 1953. A number of those interventions on behalf of fortunate war criminals could be traced to the quiet stratagems of Allen Dulles."

Dulles insisted that in the post-war world, "you can't run railroads without taking in some [Nazi] party members," but he didn't stop at efficiently run trains: Reinhard Gehlen, Hitler's intelligence chief on the Eastern Front and an avid proponent of torture, was set up as the head of West Germany's new intelligence apparatus. Among Gehlen's colleagues in his new post was Dr. Franz Six, in Talbot's words "an intellectual architect of the Final Solution as well as one of its most enthusiastic enforcers." Gehlen's placement was controversial in Washington, but what Talbot calls "the Dulles faction within the national security establishment" had his back, and prevailed.

In Talbot's words, "The Cold War in the West was, to an unsettling extent, a joint operation between the Dulles regime and that of Reinhard Gehlen. The German spy chief's pathological hatred of Russia, which had its roots in Hitler's Third Reich, meshed smoothly with the Dulles Brothers' anti-Soviet absolutism. In fact, the Dulles policy of massive nuclear retaliation bore a disturbing resemblance to the Nazis' exterminationist philosophy..." Thanks to Dulles and his colleagues, other prominent Nazi officials wound up providing their services to such stalwart U.S. allies as Franco in Spain and Pinochet in Chile.

Dulles was nothing if not industrious, and the book provides plenty of page-turning narrative focusing on some of the coups that Dulles was involved with. Starting with the overthrow of the Guatemalan government of Jacobo Arbenz (a bete noir of the Dulles-connected multinational United Fruit for his focus on land and labor reforms), Dulles's operations moved from one country to another, destabilizing governments and coordinating the assassination or exile of any leader that threatened U.S. corporate interests. In addition to Guatemala, the book lays out the history of CIA actions in Iran, Congo, and Vietnam.

*The Devil's Chessboard* also shows that one of the first cases of "extraordinary rendition" took place under Dulles's watch. On March 12, 1956, Jesus de Galindez, a lecturer in Spanish and Government at Columbia University, was snatched off the streets of New York. Friends and colleagues never saw him again. Galindez's crime was being an outspoken critic of Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo, whose friends in the CIA made sure Galindez was delivered to the Dominican Republic. Galindez was tortured to death by Trujillo underlings.

*The New Republic* printed a letter about the abduction in which one of Galindez's students, Marina Joy, stated, "There is no hope ... Everybody who has some sense of responsibility and a

feeling for democracy and freedom should be concerned.” (Presciently, in 1955 Galindez told an FBI informant that “since John Foster Dulles entered into the picture, the United States has started to write the blackest pages of its international relations. Never before in the history of the world has one single Government more efficiently supported dictatorial powers in free nations.”)

Talbot and Croft combed through a decent-sized library of books for the details that pack *The Devil's Chessboard*. Other sources include interviews with surviving Dulles colleagues and relatives (especially his daughter Joan Talley, who at 90 remains aghast at her father's behavior); testimony of John F. Kennedy administration insiders and others on the scene at the time of the JFK assassination; and the papers of Dulles, his wife, and his mistress.

Though he had a soft spot for mass murderers, Dulles didn't have much love to share with his family. In letters to his wife Clover he openly discussed his conquests of other women, one of whom eventually made friends with Clover (the two women also shared a psychoanalyst: Carl Jung). In a diary she left for her children, Clover was unsparing in her dissection of Dulles. She wrote, “It took me a long time to realize that when he talks it is only for the purpose of obtaining something. ... He has either to be making someone admire him, or to be receiving some information worth his while; otherwise he gives one the impression that he doesn't talk because the person isn't worth talking to.”

Their son Allen Jr. returned from the Korean war with shrapnel in his head that left him brain damaged. Dulles's response, as Joan Talley told Talbot, was to submit his son to treatments by doctors associated with the infamous mind control program MKULTRA (launched at the same time the CIA falsely claimed that North Korea was conducting similar sorts of testing). Talbot characterizes the experiments performed on the younger Dulles as “unspeakable.”

In both *The Devil's Chessboard* and his 2007 book *Brothers: The Hidden History of the Kennedy Years*, Talbot stresses John F. Kennedy's more progressive tendencies. Talbot doesn't deify Kennedy: he acknowledges that JFK was a masterful practitioner of realpolitik who often contradicted himself from one day to the next, depending on which group he was speaking to. This was especially true on Cuba policy. Talbot argues that JFK initially went along with the ill-fated Bay of Pigs invasion because he was boxed in by hawks in his administration. But in Talbot's eyes JFK's refusal to provide air support for the Bay of Pigs anti-Castro fighters rankled both the rabidly right wing Cuban exile community and the Dulles circle in the CIA. The book makes a convincing case that though the Kennedy brothers were never consistent on their line toward Cuba, and did indulge in gratuitous sword rattling, they never went far enough for right wingers in Florida and Washington, who saw them as traitors; the most deranged of JFK's national security adversaries, Air Force chief Curtis LeMay, would have preferred nuclear annihilation of Castro's island nation.

Talbot emphasizes the importance of French reporter Jean Daniel's presence in Cuba at the time of the assassination. Daniel was an emissary from JFK sent to advance back-door peace negotiations, and said that when word of the murder reached Castro, the Cuban leader noticeably crumpled at the news, then said Kennedy could have become one of the greatest U.S. presidents. (For a more critical view of JFK and the leftward policies he may have been planning, see Noam Chomsky's *Rethinking Camelot*.)

Talbot writes, “Over the final months of JFK’s presidency, a clear consensus took shape within America’s deep state: Kennedy was a national security threat. For the good of the country, he must be removed. And Dulles was the only man with the stature, connections, and decisive will to make something of this enormity happen. He had already assembled a killing machine overseas. Now he prepared to bring it home to Dallas. All that his establishment colleagues had to do was to look the other way – as they always did when Dulles took executive action.” So much for mincing words.

Among the assortment of damaged characters Talbot connects to the JFK assassination are William Harvey, a CIA killer based in Italy who, Talbot discovered, flew to Dallas shortly before the assassination (the CIA has ignored Talbot’s Freedom of Information Act request for the travel vouchers of Harvey and other CIA operatives). Talbot also cites intelligence sleazeball Howard Hunt’s deathbed confession to an assassination researcher about Hunt’s role in JFK’s murder.

Over the years there have been periods of increased pressure on the CIA to disclose information about its operations. To appease its critics the Agency has occasionally released carefully chosen (and often heavily redacted) documents. One, written at the time of the anti-Arbenz coup but not made public until 1997, was titled “A Study of Assassination.” The passages from this document Talbot quotes show exactly what the CIA stands for. “The simplest tools are often the most efficient means of assassination,” it explained. “A hammer, axe, wrench, screw driver, fire poker, kitchen knife, lap stand, or anything hard, heavy, and handy will suffice.” For those disturbed by such advice, the manual advised, “Murder is not morally justified ... Persons who are morally squeamish should not attempt it.”

*The Devil’s Chessboard* (a reference to the Dulles brothers’s favorite board game) belongs on the shelf next to CIA books by Alexander Cockburn and Jeffrey St. Clair, Gary Webb, Phillip Agee, and Michael Levine. The book has largely been ignored by mainstream reviewers, which is not surprising given the long history of corporate media fealty to CIA officials (see the mainstream U.S. press’s long-running demonization of Gary Webb). But *The Devil’s Chessboard* has become a bestseller anyway. That’s very good news – the book deserves to be widely read.