



< How Two Brothers Waged A 'Secret World War' In The 1950s

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ARUN RATH, HOST:

This is ALL THING CONSIDERED, from NPR West. I'm Arun Rath.

Is it possible to trace many of America's current foreign policy problems all the way back to the 1950s, and to connect them to just two men? They were American pioneers when it comes to using covert operations to overthrow foreign governments, and the blowback from those operations is still being felt today. One served as secretary of state; the other, as CIA chief. They shared power in the Eisenhower administration. They shared a worldview and they shared a last name, Dulles.

STEPHEN KINZER: These two brothers were among the most privileged siblings ever to emerge in the United States. I really see them as vessels of American history.

RATH: Stephen Kinzer was a longtime foreign correspondent for The New York Times, and his latest book is called "The Brothers: John Foster Dulles, Allen Dulles, and Their Secret World War."

KINZER: The Dulles brothers are especially interesting not just because of themselves but because of the forces they represent. A couple of the most important ones were missionary Protestantism and corporate power. These were two forces, very potent that came together in their lives.

They came from a long line of missionaries; and they were brought up with this idea that there's good and evil in the world, and that Christians do not have the right to sit at home and wait while this battle unfolds. They have to go out and actively help good defeat evil.

Later on in life, the Dulles brothers became partners at Sullivan & Cromwell, a unique repository of global power that's much more than a New York law firm. There, they learned the ways that American power can be applied abroad for the benefit of multinational American corporations. That's what they spent decades doing.

RATH: That power being applied in what kind of ways?

KINZER: John Foster Dulles was a young associate, still in his 20s at Sullivan & Cromwell, when one of the partners called him in and said: We've got a problem in Cuba. There's been an election. And the liberals, who want to limit the power of American companies in Cuba, have won.

So John Foster Dulles got on the train. He went to Washington. He went to see his uncle, the secretary of state. And he told his uncle: We need to send two warships to Cuba and land Marines in Cuba, to force the liberals to call off their revolution demanding that the election be recognized.

Those warships were sent. The next day, they began a six-year occupation of Cuba. That all began because of a threat to American companies that were represented by the Dulles brothers.

RATH: Can you talk about how they ended up bringing everything that they brought to the Eisenhower administration?

KINZER: The remarkable thing about the Dulles brothers in power was that they functioned so closely together that no other kinds of consultation were necessary in order to launch these terribly far-reaching operations. For example, the Dulles brothers had not even come into office when they started hatching their plan for overthrowing the government of Iran.

Now, under normal circumstances, there might be some kind of a meeting between the senior officials at the CIA and the senior officials at the State Department, but that kind of consultation never happened. John Foster Dulles and Allen Dulles carried out operations together. It was the only time in American history that siblings controlled the overt and covert sides of American foreign policy. You'd have Foster Dulles setting the diplomatic background for some covert operation, and then Allen Dulles carrying out the operation behind the scenes.

RATH: What would be their criteria for deciding who to go after? Like, why go after Sukarno and not Nehru, say?

KINZER: They actually detested Nehru and wanted to try to undermine him, but he seemed too powerful. But in my book, I focus on six of the targets that the Dulles brothers went after. I call them the six monsters. They started out in 1953, overthrowing Mosaddegh in Iran; and then in 1954, President Arbenz in Guatemala. After that, John Foster Dulles became the principal instigator of American involvement in Vietnam by deciding Ho Chi Minh had to be crushed.

Following that, he went after Sukarno, in Indonesia; Lumumba, in the Congo; and Fidel Castro, in Cuba. So they never stopped one operation without starting another one. We thought the world was at peace then. But now, looking back, you can see that the Dulles brothers were waging a constant war during the 1950s, and we're paying the price of the blowback of that war right now.

RATH: My guest is journalist and author Stephen Kinzer. His new book is about the politically influential Cold War pair of John Foster and Allen Dulles. It's called "The Brothers." Now, did Eisenhower turn a blind eye to all this, or was he complicit? Was he behind it?

KINZER: Eisenhower's role is completely fascinating. The fact is, Eisenhower fully supported covert action. And, I think, although Eisenhower never spoke about this since in those days you wouldn't admit that you supported covert action, there would've been a couple of good reasons for Eisenhower to be as strongly supportive

of covert action as he was. One is, covert action played a very important role in World War II, including the cracking of German codes. Nobody knew that at the time, of course, but Eisenhower - being the allied commander - would've been aware of all these operations.

So he would've come out of World War II with a great appreciation for what covert action could do. And I think secondly, Eisenhower would've seen covert action as a kind of a peace project. That is, it's a way to avoid going to war. If he saw a crisis that he thought he could resolve by secretly overthrowing a leader he didn't like, he went ahead and did that.

RATH: The legacy, the sort of fingerprints of the Dulles brothers, we've heard diplomats complaining over decades about being associated with the CIA - American diplomats. It's - and we saw Iran in 1979 that Iranians, one of the reasons they went after the American embassy is because they believed CIA activity was going on from there. Are there other ways in which we're still feeling kind of a hangover or blowback from this?

KINZER: If you see what, for example, has happened in Iran over the 60 years since the Dulles brothers intervened to crush Iranian democracy, if you look at the horrors that descended on Guatemala and on the Congo, you realize those can be traced back to interventions from the Dulles brothers. And even - most scary is the Vietnam War, when you look back on that. If John Foster Dulles himself - just alone - had decided, I don't like Ho Chi Minh but the Churchill government is right, the French government is right, we can't stop him, let's just give it up and turn our attention somewhere else; we could've avoided the entire American involvement in Vietnam.

RATH: Well, you say in your introduction, the story is rich with lessons for the modern era. So do you think we're learning these lessons, finally?

KINZER: I wouldn't have thought that during the time that I was writing this book. But now that it's coming out and I'm seeing what's happened, particularly in the reaction to the Syria bombing, I'm beginning to wonder if maybe something profound isn't changing in the minds of at least some Americans. People are looking at each other and saying, I can't get a job and my leaders are telling me I should be focusing on fixing Syria. I think the disconnect that that represents, is slowly dawning on some Americans. Maybe we finally are burying John Foster Dulles and Allen Dulles.

RATH: Stephen Kinzer is the author of "The Brothers: John Foster Dulles, Allen Dulles and Their Secret World War." Stephen, thank you so much.

KINZER: Enjoyed talking to you. Thanks.

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