< Meet 'The Brothers' Who Shaped U.S. Policy, Inside And Out

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TERRY GROSS, HOST:

This is FRESH AIR. I'm Terry Gross. In 1953, for the first and only time in American history, two brothers were appointed to head the overt and covert sides of American policy. President Eisenhower appointed John Foster Dulles secretary of state, and Allen Dulles director of the CIA. According to the new book "The Brothers," by my guest Stephen Kinzer, their actions helped set off some of the world's most profound long-term crises.

Kinzer writes that they did as much as anyone to shape America's confrontation with the Soviet Union. They helped topple governments they thought unfriendly to American interests in Guatemala, Iran and the Congo. They helped lead the U.S. into war in Vietnam. John Foster Dulles died in 1959. President Kennedy replaced Allen Dulles, after the covert operation Dulles recommended to overthrow Fidel Castro ended disastrously in the Bay of Pigs.

Stephen Kinzer worked at the New York Times as bureau chief in Turkey, Germany and Nicaragua. His previous book, "Regime Change," examined 14 places where the U.S. was the decisive factor in overthrowing the government. [POST-BROADCAST CORRECTION: The title of Kinzer's previous book is "Overthrow: America's Century of Regime Change from Hawaii to Iraq."] Stephen Kinzer, welcome back to FRESH AIR. How is it possible that two brothers became secretary of state and director of the CIA?

STEPHEN KINZER: Many people asked that question even at the time. This was the first time in history that two brothers ran the overt and covert sides of American foreign policy. They both became close to Eisenhower during his presidential campaign, and he named them both; one right before he took office, and the other right after he took office.

It was an arrangement that was fraught with danger from the beginning not just because of who the brothers were, but for the fact that they were brothers. They'd grown up together, of course, and had come to develop a very intimate relationship. They also saw the world in precisely the same way.

What this meant is that when they were making a decision about carrying out

some great. earth-shattering operation, they never had to consult anyone else. Under other circumstances, you might have had the half-dozen Latin America experts of the CIA, and the half-dozen guys from the State Department; and they would sit around a table and try to figure out if this was a good idea or not. But having the two brothers meant that you never had to consult anyone else. They served as a reverberating echo chamber for their own shared certainties.

GROSS: It's the kind of opposite of the "team of rivals" approach.

KINZER: These people really were not rivals. They were peas in a pod, at least ideologically and politically.

GROSS: So the way you describe it, John Foster Dulles, as secretary of state, plotted a new kind of war; and then Allen Dulles, as head of the CIA, waged those wars covertly. So describe what their working relationship was when plotting to overthrow leaders they thought opposed what was in America's best interest.

KINZER: We have very little written record of the relationship between the two of them. And the reason is, they would speak on the phone several times a day; they would meet after work sometimes or on weekends; and it just took a wink or a nod, sometimes literally, for these huge operations to be carried out. They had the full blessing of President Eisenhower, and they didn't do anything behind his back. But he gave them, more or less, free rein, and they functioned as kind of two jaws of a serpent that are kind of not connected but working towards the same goal. Foster Dulles would provide the diplomatic backdrop and the political motivation that American citizens would hear, and then Allen would carry out the operation secretly.

GROSS: What were the major coups or overthrows they engineered?

KINZER: I think the main theme of this book that is new is that during the 1950s - which according to most histories, was a period of peace in the world - actually, we were involved in a continual secret war. Nobody noticed it because it was covert. I use this phrase monsters to describe the enemies that the Dulles brothers struck out against. That's a word that John Quincy Adams used in a famous speech, when he said America does not go abroad in search of monsters to destroy. But the Dulles brothers did.

They saw enemies everywhere, and they waged one war after another, in a sense merging these into one single conflict. The first two monsters they struck out against were people against whom they had grudges from their days as corporate lawyers. Their job was to protect the interests of big American corporations in foreign countries, and in 1951they failed twice.

Two of their major clients were attacked by foreign leaders, and they couldn't do anything to protect their clients. In Guatemala, the United Fruit Company, which was a longtime client of the Dulles brothers, was affected by a land reform law.

And around the same time, the government of Iran nationalized its oil industry, and the oil company that they nationalized had used as its financial agent a bank that the Dulles brothers represented and on whose board Allen Dulles sat.

So this represented an unaccustomed failure for the Dulles brothers. They developed deep grudges against President Arbenz of Guatemala and Prime Minister Mosaddegh of Iran. They carried those grudges into office, and within the first 18 months of their terms in office, they had disposed of both of those leaders. So those were the first two.

Then they began developing new ideas of who the real monsters in the world were. In my book I talk about their efforts to foment civil war in Indonesia; their terribly tragic decision to get involved in Vietnam, which led to the entire American war there; and their actions against Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba in The Congo and Fidel Castro in Cuba.

There were some others that they were interested in trying to topple, like Nassir in Egypt and Nehru in India, all of them believers in neutralism, which was a horrible concept to the Dulles brothers, but those operations didn't succeed, and we are now living with the legacies of both their failed operations and their successful ones.

GROSS: Yeah, we'll get to some of the legacies a little bit later. When you say neutralism, they saw the world as divided between communism and the free world, and if a country was neutral, why was that a bad thing?

KINZER: Actually, President Sukarno asked that question to Foster Dulles, and Dulles told him our policy is global. He even used the word immoral to describe the concept of neutralism. He believed that everything that happened in the world during the 1950s was part of the Cold War.

For example, it wasn't conceivable to him that land reform in Guatemala could be a project that Guatemalans had designed to deal with a Guatemalan situation. He just assumed that it had been ordered by the Kremlin. They had this view of the world, which I think was implanted in them from a very young age, that there's good and evil, and it's the obligation of the good people to go out into the world and destroy the evil ones.

GROSS: Well, you say that there was, like, a missionary background that they were from, and you think that that contributed to that view of good and evil. Can you talk about that a little bit?

KINZER: The Dulles brothers came from a long line of missionary Calvinists. They grew up in a parsonage. Their father was a clergyman. And they had missionaries for dinner very often. They had to go to services every day, three on Sundays and take notes about the services so they could discuss the sermons with their father. They sang hymns at home and spent a lot of time in prayer.

The particular religious tradition they came out of, Presbyterian Calvinism, was one that did see the world in these two ways, that there were good Christians, and then there were heathens and savages. Christians, under this doctrine, did not have the luxury of sitting at home and hoping for the triumph of good. They had to go out into the world and make sure good triumphed.

When you have that view about your religion, it's a very small step to applying the same schema to politics. You think there are good and evil leaders in the world, good and evil regimes in the world. And this is a very different concept than the concepts that many cultures and many other peoples have.

It's a widespread belief in many parts of the world that every person and every government is made up of good and evil impulses, and they come out in different proportion depending on circumstances. But the Dulles brothers didn't believe that. They had grown up in a religious tradition that saw a division between good and evil, and when they came to political power, they saw the world that way.

GROSS: Both Dulles brothers were partners in the law firm Sullivan & Cromwell that represented a lot of multinational corporations, including United Fruit. What did the Dulles brothers see as the role of the multinational corporation in world politics, in world stability?

KINZER: Sullivan & Cromwell calls itself a law firm, but it's a very unusual law firm. If a client really needed a contract drawn up or needed to be represented in a courtroom, they could do that, but that's not what Sullivan & Cromwell was really about. That firm, of which John Foster Dulles was the managing partner for decades and where Allen also worked, had a specialty.

The specialty was pressuring small and weak countries to accept rules, laws, regulations that made it easy for American corporations to operate in those countries. That was Foster Dulles' job. He traveled around the world and discussed ways to pressure little countries so that big American companies could work there freely.

They began to identify the interests of large American multinational corporations with the interests of the United States. By the time they got into power, they saw no difference between the two, and in fact this was really the number one way that they decided which countries were good and which countries were evil.

The good ones were the ones that gave free rein to American corporations. The evil ones were the ones that sought to tax or restrict or regulate or otherwise bother foreign capital. They carried that view into office, and the monsters they set out to destroy were all people who wished to regulate the freedom of American capital to operate in their countries. That was a cardinal sin in the eyes of the Dulles brothers.

GROSS: Let's talk more about the world view that the Dulles brothers shared. We talked about their kind of missionary background, how they both represented

corporate interests before they had fulltime careers in government. And they were also fervently anti-communist. How did they become obsessed with communism?

KINZER: I think the real reason is that they saw, quite correctly, that Marxism, Bolshevism, communism, had emerged as the principal threat to the power of multinational corporations in the world. They were very worried about radical change. They felt that the world could go crazy if it didn't allow business to function freely.

As far as they were concerned, conditioned by their decades defending the biggest American multinational corporations, the world economy, the security and happiness of all the world's people, depended on the ability of American corporations to function freely in the world. That communism would not only seek to restrict American corporations but that it actually doubted the efficacy of the entire concept of private enterprise and multinational corporate activity was something horrifying to them.

The Dulles brothers not only saw a danger coming from the Soviet Union, which of course was a nuclear-armed state at the height of the Cold War and for many years afterward, they also saw an equal danger coming from countries all over the world that were embracing what we now see as simple nationalism. Countries that emerged and decided they didn't want to side with the United States in the Cold War and didn't want to be involved in the Cold War seemed to the Dulles brothers to be tools of the Kremlin.

GROSS: And as you point out, while they were seeing the world as divided in between communists and Democratic or communism and anti-communism, that other parts of the world were seeing it as colonial and post-colonial because there were so many countries after World War II that were emerging as independent states.

KINZER: I see in the end that the Dulles brothers made three historic miscalculations. You just mentioned one of them. They completely failed to understand the nature of third world nationalism. You had hundreds of millions of people in Africa, Asia and even in Latin America emerging from colonialism. They were looking for a place in this tumultuous world.

The Dulles brothers couldn't see that. They assumed that all these neutralist and nationalist movements were part of the Kremlin strategy. Their second big miscalculation was their refusal to engage with the Soviet leadership in the period after Stalin died. Very soon after Stalin's death, the new leader in the Kremlin, Malenkov, approached Western diplomats and said he wanted to have a summit with the Western leaders.

Prime Minister Churchill of England and Prime Minister Laniel of France wanted to do it, but Foster Dulles absolutely refused. He felt that even to sit at a table

with the Soviets would help destroy the entire paradigm of the Cold War, the paradigm of conflict.

And I think the third big misjudgment they made was they had no concept of what we now call blowback. They had no idea that operations that seemed successful at first might have terrible long-term effects that wouldn't even be visible for decades, or even generations.

GROSS: If you're just joining us, my guest is Stephen Kinzer, a former reporter for the New York Times who's written a lot about the secret history, the covert history, of the United States. And his new book, "The Brothers," is about John Foster Dulles and Allen Dulles, and Their Secret World War, as he describes it. Let's take a short break here, and then we'll talk some more. This is FRESH AIR.

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GROSS: If you're just joining us, my guest is Stephen Kinzer, and he's written extensively about covert operations and regime change in countries around the world that were orchestrated by the United States. His new book is called "The Brothers: John Foster Dulles, Allen Dulles, and Their Secret World War," and it's about the period when Foster Dulles was the secretary of state, and Allen Dulles was the director of the CIA, and together they orchestrated regime change in places including Guatemala, Iran and Indonesia.

The first leader that the Dulles brothers basically overthrew was Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddegh in Iran. Why was Iran their first target?

KINZER: The prime minister of Iran, Mohammad Mosaddegh, and the parliament of Iran decided in the early 1950s to nationalize their oil industry. That was a challenge not only to the oil industry worldwide but to the entire economic system by which the world was ruled. That system was based on the idea that corporations in rich countries had the right to extract resources from poor countries and find markets in poor countries.

And it also assumed that those companies should have the right to operate in those countries under rules that they themselves set. So Mosaddegh's nationalization of the oil industry was profound. In addition, it directly affected a key Dulles brothers client, that was the Schroder Bank, which was a bank on which Allen Dulles served as a board member, and both of the brothers represented it.

So that bank lost a huge client in Iran when Mosaddegh nationalized his oil industry. As a result, they saw Mosaddegh as a challenge to the stability of the world. Why? Because he didn't allow large international companies, in this case Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, to operate freely in Iran. The Dulles brothers were terribly afraid of the precedent this might set.

They could not let anyone get away with tinkering with the system that allowed

large corporations to operate freely in weak countries. They saw Mosaddegh as a challenge, and they felt that if they let him get away with it, the entire edifice of the way the world economy was run might crumble.

GROSS: The story of how the American CIA covertly helped overthrow the prime minister in Iran is a long, complicated story, which you've told in another - which you told in great detail in another one of your books. But just say a few words about how the Dulles brothers worked together to coordinate this.

KINZER: What would happen, and this happened in Iran and almost simultaneously in Guatemala, Is that John Foster Dulles would make speeches to the American people explaining that dangerous forces were at work in Country X. He wouldn't say what we were going to do about it. In fact he always denied that we had done anything about it.

But while he was creating the public climate in which Americans would come to sense Country X as an enemy, his brother would be actively working to bring down that government. Foster Dulles' role was to tell Americans that huge numbers of people in Iran opposed Mosaddegh, or huge numbers of people in Guatemala opposed Arbenz. That wasn't true in either case.

However, when Allen Dulles and the CIA brought those governments down, Foster Dulles was then able to complete the circle by going on television and saying the people of Country X have done just what we thought they might do. They've risen up to overthrow their tyrant. So he was certainly not above distorting what had really happened, and in fact he specifically said in his television address after the overthrow of the Guatemalan government the problem was solved by the people of Guatemala themselves.

This was completely untrue; he knew that. The problem had been solved by Allen Dulles. But Americans didn't know that and didn't realize it for decades.

GROSS: Stephen Kinzer will be back in the second half of the show. His new book is called "The Brothers: John Foster Dulles, Allen Dulles, and Their Secret World War." I'm Terry Gross, and this is FRESH AIR.

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GROSS: This is FRESH AIR. I'm Terry Gross, back with Stephen Kinzer. His new book, "The Brothers," is about the only time in history when two brothers controlled the overt and covert sides of American foreign policy. In the 1950s, during the Eisenhower administration, John Foster Dulles was head of the State Department and Allen Dulles directed the CIA. Kinzer writes about how the brothers escalated the Cold War, led the U.S. to overthrow governments they considered unfriendly - in Guatemala, Iran and the Congo - and helped lead us into war in Vietnam. Kinzer has worked as The New York Times' bureau chief in Turkey, Nicaragua and Germany.

So, you were explaining that, you know, one of the reasons why the Dulles brothers were interested in overthrowing the leaders of Guatemala and Iran was that they had corporate interests there. The Dulles brothers used to be corporate lawyers, representing a very large company who represented, you know, multinational corporations that had interests in these countries. And these interests - you know, United Fruit, the oil industry - they were being threatened in Latin America and Iran, respectively.

But what about Vietnam? We didn't have a lot of, like, multinational interests in Vietnam. Why did he want to intervene there? Why did the brothers want to intervene there?

KINZER: By some standards, Vietnam might be the darkest mark against John Foster Dulles, in particular. In 1954, as the French were collapsing in Vietnam and losing that great battle at Dien Bien Phu, world leaders gathered in Geneva to discuss the future of Vietnam. John Foster Dulles led the American delegation. At that meeting, it became clear that all the other Western powers - particularly the French and the British - realized that they had lost the war to Ho Chi Minh, that Ho Chi Minh was unbeatable, very popular, very powerful, and that there was no alternative but to give up. Actually, Churchill put it very well: The loss of the fortress must be faced.

But John Foster Dulles refused to accept this. He was the only one of the major players at the Geneva Conference of 1954 who decided we can still fight Ho Chi Minh. And, in fact, when it became clear at the conference that nobody else would support him, John Foster Dulles left. It was the only time in American history that an American secretary of state has abandoned a major world conference in the middle. So, he came home and told Allen Dulles: Those Europeans don't know how to handle Asian communists. We can do it. And he sent Allen to start a major covert operation that led to American involvement in Vietnam.

GROSS: They had - the Dulles brothers had success in regime change in Guatemala and Iran. Obviously, they failed in Vietnam. What was different about Vietnam, compared to what they were used to?

KINZER: I think here was the big difference: They were able to succeed in Iran and Guatemala because those were democratic societies. They were open societies. They had free press. There were all kinds of independent organizations. There were professional groups. There were labor unions. There were student groups. There were religious organizations. When you have an open society, it's very easy for covert operatives to penetrate that society and corrupt it.

Actually, one of the people who happened to be in Guatemala at the time of the coup there was the young Argentine physician Che Guevara. Later on, Che Guevara made his way to Mexico and he met Fidel Castro. Castro asked him:

What happened in Guatemala? He was fascinated. They spent long hours talking about it, and Che Guevara reported to him what I just said: The CIA was able to succeed because this was an open society. It was at that moment that they decided: If we take over in Cuba, we can't allow democracy. We have to have a dictatorship. No free press, no independent organizations, because otherwise, the CIA will come in and overthrow us. And, in fact, Castro made a speech after taking power with Arbenz sitting right next to him, and said: Cuba will not be like Guatemala.

Now, Ho Chi Minh was not establishing an open society. Whether he had learned that lesson from Arbenz or that was just his conviction is beside the point. But the fact is he had a dictatorship. He had a closed, tyrannical society, and that made it much more difficult for the CIA to operate. So we find this irony, that if Mossadegh and Arbenz had been the tyrants that the Dulles brothers portrayed them as being, the Dulles brothers wouldn't have been able to overthrow them. But the fact that they were democrats, committed to open society, made their countries vulnerable to intervention in ways that Vietnam - and particularly North Vietnam then - were not.

GROSS: What did you read about or by Castro and Che Guevara that made you understand that one of the reasons why Castro became a dictator was to prevent covert operators from the United States in succeeding and overthrowing him?

KINZER: We have several indications and reports from biographies of Che Guevara. But we also have the diaries of Hilda Gadea, the girlfriend of Che Guevara, who was with him during all this period, and they talked about it among themselves. The key lesson that they learned from both Guatemala was: you cannot build a social reform project in Latin America in a democratic context, because the Americans will come in and crush you. If you want to have a radical reform project, you have to do it in the framework of dictatorship. And that not only had a terrible effect on Cuba, but it inspired a whole generation of radicals in Latin America to adopt that perspective. And that drowned Latin America in a sea of blood during that period.

GROSS: So we were talking earlier about how Eisenhower supported the Dulles brothers in their regime change, but Foster Dulles died during the Eisenhower administration in 1959. When JFK became president, he replaced Allen Dulles as director of the CIA. What soured President Kennedy on Allen Dulles?

KINZER: Only 48 hours after President Kennedy was elected, he announced that he was going to keep Allen Dulles on as director of the CIA. That lasted until the Bay of Pigs fiasco, which was the first project that Allen Dulles developed for Kennedy. After that disaster, Kennedy famously asked his aides: How could I have been so stupid? And shortly thereafter, he fired Allen Dulles.

But I found something in my research about the Bay of Pigs operation that I don't think has...

GROSS: Which was an anti-Fidel Castro operation aimed at Cuba.

KINZER: The Bay of Pigs operation - which was aimed at overthrowing Fidel Castro, was the first one that Allen Dulles prepared for President Kennedy. And I discovered during my research that Allen Dulles was almost completely absent from the planning of this operation. He didn't attend most of the meetings. He never wanted to look at the documents. He didn't really know what the plan was. He didn't hear about complaints from people involved in the CIA who thought the plot wasn't going to work. He wasn't even in Washington on the day of the invasion. I think, based on what we know about Allen over the next few years, that he was already beginning a psychological and mental fade. A few years after that, he was found wandering around on the streets of Georgetown, not knowing how to get home. So it may be that while Allen Dulles' assistants were organizing the Bay of Pigs project, Allen was already suffering from the beginnings of dementia.

GROSS: Is the dementia idea something that you've just speculated yourself? Have other people speculated about that? How much weight do you give that as a possibility?

KINZER: I haven't seen anyone else speculate on it. But when you look at the record, it's quite striking. This was the first big operation that Allen Dulles prepared for President Kennedy, yet he never attended the key meetings. And afterwards, other people around the operation came to wonder about this. We have a William Bundy quote in which he said: "I had the feeling that by then, he was slowing down a little. He wasn't quite the man I had known. He hadn't been as much on top of the operation as I expected."

We have a case of one of his aides coming in and trying to ask him key questions on how to direct this operation, and all he wanted to do was talk about the Washington Senators baseball game. He was so distracted and not even in Washington on the day of the operation, that it leads you to speculate - and then when you see what had happened to Allen Dulles just a couple of years later, I think putting those together, you see that there has to be a reason why Allen Dulles, who personally directed operations up until then, by this time decided he didn't need to be present.

GROSS: What had happened to him by a couple of years later?

KINZER: He had a young relative who was taking care of him at this point, and later on, she wrote he was suffering from what we would today call Alzheimer's. Whether he was in the early stages of that at the end of his tenure at the CIA, nobody knows. But certainly, his distracted approach to the Bay of Pigs - a huge operation that, under normal circumstances, he would have monitored from day to day and hour to hour - suggests that, as William Bundy said, he wasn't quite the man I had known.

GROSS: If you're just joining us, my guest is Stephen Kinzer, a former reporter for The New York Times. His new book is called "The Brothers: John Foster Dulles and Allen Dulles, and Their Secret World War." And it's about the covert operations they waged together to overthrow different leaders around the world.

Let's take a short break here, and then we'll talk some more. This is FRESH AIR.

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GROSS: If you're just joining us, my guest is journalist Stephen Kinzer, and we're talking about his new book "The Brothers: John Foster Dulles and Allen Dulles, and Their Secret World War." And it's about the period when Foster Dulles was secretary of state and his brother Allen Dulles was the director of the CIA, and together they orchestrated regime change in such places as Iran, Guatemala, Vietnam - where it didn't work out quite like they were expecting - the Congo and Cuba, where it also didn't work out like they were expecting.

How do you think the world might have looked different if the Dulles brothers hadn't worked together to plan the regime changes that you write about in your book?

KINZER: Let's just consider a few examples. We mentioned the Vietnam War. It's quite possible - I would say even likely - that had the Dulles brothers not been there or had acted differently, there never would have been an American involvement in Vietnam at the cost of a million lives and more than 50,000 Americans.

Guatemala would not have suffered 200,000 dead over a period of 35 years in the civil war that broke out after they intervened in Guatemala and destroyed democracy there. Iran fell under royal dictatorship, and then more than 30 years of fundamentalist religious rule as a result of the Dulles brothers operations.

Had they not intervene in Iran, we might've had a thriving democracy in the heart of the Muslim Middle East all these decades. And I can hardly wrap my mind around how different the Middle East might look under those circumstances.

And finally, let's look at the Congo. A horrific war has been unfolding there somewhat out of the public eye in which literally millions of people have died over the last quarter century. The Congo seemed like it might have been on its way to some form of democracy immediately after gaining independence from Belgium in 1960. But, Patrice Lumumba, its elected leader, was overthrown and assassinated in an operation directed by the Belgian and American secret services. So, you look around the world and you see these horrific situations that still continue to shake the world, and you can trace so many of them back to the Dulles brothers.

GROSS: So you've just described some of the things that you think might have been different, had it not been for the Dulles brothers. This is a really big

question, but do you think the world would be a calmer, more peaceful place than it is now. Or do you - having studied the world and world politics in the way that you have - think that chaos and war are inevitable?

KINZER: I don't believe a peaceful world is something we can ever realistically look forward to. Nonetheless, I think that those of us who make a business out of analyzing what happens in the world sometimes tend to overlook a very important factor, and that is the influence of individuals. We like to think that everything that happens in the world is the result of forces and processes, ideologies.

But I, as a foreign correspondent, have been up close to so many world leaders, from Daniel Ortega to Slobodan Milosevic. I see that their private psychology is decisive in shaping their worldview and shaping the world. The private psychology of the Dulles brothers was key to shaping their worldview, and when they came into power, they were able to use the ideas that they had developed in ways that shook the world.

So, I do believe that a different secretary of state and a different CIA director might have produced very different results, and without the Dulles brothers, the world might well have been a more peaceful place in the 60 years since then.

GROSS: There's one part of your book - and I forget which Dulles brother it is - but you say that he really helped stir up anti-communist fear in America, and that he wanted Americans to be afraid of communism. And I wasn't sure whether you meant he wanted Americans to be afraid of communism because he thought that communists were worthy of that fear and we should be alerted to the truth, or if you were implying that that fear would be useful to him in what he wanted to accomplish. So, let's start with which Dulles brother it was.

KINZER: John Foster Dulles preached this idea that you had to maintain hostility, otherwise, you lose the coherence of your society. This was not a new idea. Many historians - Arnold Toynbee being one example - have come up with this idea that countries need enemies. If you don't have an enemy, you should find one or make one.

Otherwise, your society becomes very loose. People start to complain about things that are happening at home. People don't have a sense of unity, a sense of national purpose. So it was very important for him to maintain the paradigm of conflict. That's why these civil defense drills became so popular during the 1950s. You had to go and learn how to hide in your basement when the Soviet bombers came.

John Foster Dulles even arranged for the nuclear bomb tests in the Nevada desert to be transmitted on television, so we could see what the Soviets were planning for us. There used to be a clock in which we would tell - in which the Dulles brothers would tell Americans how many minutes it was going to take for

a nuclear missile from the Soviet Union to hit us.

First it was 30. Then it became 25 and 20. And we were living in kind of a state of fear. I can tell you that I myself was a victim of this when I was a little boy in school. I came home and told my mother we needed to build a fallout shelter in the basement. And she laughed at me. She told me this was foolish. This was when I first realized my mother must be, if not a traitor, crazy.

(LAUGHTER)

KINZER: And so I actually went out, and I think if you go into the crawl space of my basement you'll still find some old cans of food and forks and knives that I hid in there because my mother was too foolish to do what was necessary to protect the family. But I was going to do it. So even I was falling victim to this, and I think I'm probably not alone in America.

GROSS: So you've written about the world as a daily journalist and as a book author who could spend several years writing a book and tracking down secret documents, and so on. Does being a daily journalist and being a book author give you different worldviews?

KINZER: It does. On the other hand, if I hadn't been a New York Times foreign correspondent for 20 years, I probably wouldn't have gotten into this business. When I show up in a country that I don't know - this happened to me, for example, the first time I went to Iran - the first thing I ask myself and the people around me is: Why is this country like this? Why is this country rich and powerful? Why is this country poor and miserable?

The more I ask those questions, the more I'm driven back to look into history. When I was working for the New York Times, I was reporting news. But now that I have left the New York Times, I guess I can tell this secret: I never was really interested in news. I'm interested in olds, if you want to call it that. I'm not so interested in what's happening today. I was always interested in two other things.

One is: What happened yesterday? What created the situation that just happened today? And the other thing is: What's going to happen tomorrow? What is the meaning? What is the implication for the future of what's happening now? So, as a daily newspaper reporter, I did get a little frustrated at only being able to focus on what happened today, and I tried to fight against that.

In fact, I once had one of my friends on the foreign desk at the New York Times tell me a story. He said I overheard two editors talking about one of your articles, and one said to the other: Do you think Kinzer will ever write a story about something that happened less than 100 years ago?

(LAUGHTER)

KINZER: That was an exaggeration, but it's true. I always tried to look for the

historical reasons why today's events happen. Now, as a book writer, I'm able to concentrate fully on that.

GROSS: Well, Stephen Kinzer, I want to thank you so much for joining us on the show. Thank you.

KINZER: It's great to be with you, Terry.

GROSS: Stephen Kinzer's new book is called "The Brothers: John Foster Dulles, Allen Dulles, and their Secret World War." You can read the introduction on our website: freshair.npr.org. This is FRESH AIR.