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Consequences of the Death or Assassination of De Gaulle

Submitted by the
DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

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Abstract:

The abstract contains a brief summary of the report and is intended to provide a quick reference to the information contained in the report.

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CONSEQUENCES OF THE DEATH OR ASSASSINATION OF DE GAULLE

THE PROBLEM

To assess the consequences for the internal political situation in France and the effect on French foreign policies of de Gaulle's death by assassination or natural causes within the next few months.

CONCLUSION

A constant threat of assassination hangs over de Gaulle. But we believe that while some disorders might follow his assassination, the succession would take place normally, as if the President had died of natural causes. We do not believe plotters have extensive military backing and without such backing a coup attempt would almost certainly fail. The most likely successor to de Gaulle would be a "notable" of the Fourth Republic, who would not have de Gaulle's unique authority. Relations with France's allies would probably improve, but many Gaullist foreign policies would continue to have strong support and any basic alterations in foreign and defense policies would probably come slowly.



DISCUSSION

1. A constant threat of assassination hangs over President de Gaulle, who has already experienced two attempts on his life since coming to power in 1958. The end of the French-Algerian war has loosed on French soil thousands of lawless, bitter, and disgruntled European expatriates from Algeria, including many veterans of the OAS, who have lived by violence for months and who still regard de Gaulle with loathing. Spokesmen of the OAS have declared the assassination of the President to be the first step in a long-range strategy to change the political climate in France and eventually to reconstitute the French presence in Algeria. There are probably some military officers who feel that assassination of de Gaulle would be a patriotic gesture against a man who in their opinion had dishonored the French military establishment.

2. The assassination of de Gaulle could come about as an act of vengeance by an individual or a small group of malcontents, or it could be part of a plot by elements of the OAS. In the latter case, the plotters might attempt to seize power on de Gaulle's death, in the belief that they could rally a substantial number of supporters among dislocated settlers from Algeria and army officers to carry out a coup attempt once they had disposed of de Gaulle and possibly some of the Ministers most closely identified with his policies. We believe that such an undertaking would almost certainly fail because the OAS has little popular support in France and would receive little support from the military. An-

other motive—one with a longer range objective—would be the hope to set in motion political deterioration which would lead eventually to a rightist dictatorship. This more distant hypothesis cannot be dismissed out of hand, but it falls beyond the scope of this Estimate.

3. Most military officers, even those who harbor deep resentments against de Gaulle, probably view the loss of Algeria as a closed, even if a sordid, chapter in French history. They would almost certainly be unwilling to identify themselves with a coup involving the possibility of widespread violence unless it was in a cause which would arouse patriotic responses among at least the rightwing of French politics. Algeria is no longer such a cause. In any event, they would fear that only extremists on right and left could profit from such violence. In the absence of military involvement, the security forces alone would be quite sufficient to eliminate quickly any momentary success that clandestine plotters might achieve, such as the seizure of some public buildings. By the same token security forces would be likely to restrain any demonstrations that might be mounted from the left in protest against the assassins.

4. While some disorders might follow the assassination, we believe the succession would take place normally, as if the 71-year-old President had died of natural causes. Assuming no change in present constitutional procedures, the President of the Senate, Gaston Monnerville, would assume de Gaulle's functions and would shortly thereafter call for

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election of a permanent successor.¹ Monnerville, a cautious but dedicated republican, would probably use his powers in such a way as to insure that the succession process operated smoothly and that the transition was accomplished with a minimum of political tension.

5. Under such comparatively tranquil circumstances the probable choice of the conservative-dominated electoral college would be a "notable" of Fourth Republic vintage, such as Antoine Pinay. If the domestic atmosphere should become highly charged, or if some dangerous external crisis should develop over Berlin or the safety of the remaining French settlers in Algeria, a Gaullist or a military figure might be chosen. On the whole, however, we believe the domestic atmosphere would be relatively calm and that external factors would not play a decisive role in the choice.

6. Any successor to de Gaulle would, of course, be unable to command the unique authority enjoyed by his predecessor, and at least initially he would almost certainly try to compensate for his relative weakness by displaying a more charitable and cooperative attitude toward Parliament. This would probably mean that the Premier's role would be expanded. The Premier, in turn, would probably prove more responsive to the evident wishes of his parliamentary majority.

¹ For the purpose of this estimate it is assumed that the present constitutional provision for the succession will remain in force. The text of this provision is attached at Annex. De Gaulle is currently considering constitutional changes which would affect the succession. There is speculation that he is considering popular election of the President and possibly the establishment of an office of Vice President. Without knowledge of what these changes will be it is impossible to estimate at this time what effects they might have on the judgments expressed in this paper.


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7. Superficially, the arrangements described above would appear to constitute a continuation of the de Gaulle regime under the command of a less imposing leader. However, essential ingredients of the old formula would be lacking. Because the new President would not enjoy de Gaulle's sweeping popularity, he would probably refrain from throwing his personal prestige into any political crisis with Parliament or against any powerful special interest groups. He would lack the aura of indispensability which has made other leaders reluctant to attack de Gaulle. Finally, he would find himself falling heir to the many problems which remained unresolved during the long agonies of the search for an Algerian solution. In this category are such issues as the small farmers' virtual revolt against government authority, the *pied-noir* problem in the south, and wage and price problems.

8. Under these pressures, a successor regime would probably in time drift back toward some of the political and parliamentary practices that were hallmarks of the Third and Fourth Republics. Constitutional changes might be adopted which aimed at redressing the balance of power between Parliament and President, although it is unlikely that the Presidential system would be entirely abandoned. Even though the constitution were not amended, some of the more arbitrary powers which de Gaulle has exercised would probably wither away from disuse. But these relationships would be worked out over time, and much would depend on the men who held office, and on the degree to which the parties could win back their old roles. If the drift back toward the multiparty system resulted in a return to governmental instability, this would give the OAS-type plotters their best chance of a comeback.

9. In general, the relative strengths of France's major political parties would tend to remain much as they are now. However, two trends would probably soon become evident as

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domestic political issues began to dominate the political scene. Factionalism would increase inside the UNR, with various party figures trying to win advantages in the struggle to inherit de Gaulle's mantle. At the same time, all parties would probably become increasingly assertive as they saw the opportunity to improve their parliamentary positions by appealing to the voters on bread-and-butter issues. Over the short run, however, we doubt that dramatic political changes would occur, or that dynamic new political movements would be established, or that there would be a polarization of political forces between right and left.

Foreign Policies

10. De Gaulle's successor would lack his unique authority at home, be preoccupied with the evolution of the domestic scene, and would lack his intense and highly personal approach to foreign affairs. Assuming that the most likely successor would be a "notable" of the Fourth Republic, any probable successor would almost certainly display a more forthcoming attitude towards the US and toward NATO, at least on the surface. Moreover, the balance of political forces in the Parliament is such that it would probably give backing to a more flexible approach to relations with France's allies. Only in the case of the election of some such nationalistic figure as Debré, which we consider highly unlikely, would relations with France's allies fail to improve.

11. However, French nationalism has been greatly revived under de Gaulle and he will have left behind him legacies that few Frenchmen will be willing to forfeit. The great financial investment already made in the *force de frappe* and the French belief that this has given them great political advantage will almost certainly inhibit any early turning away from the achievement of an independent

French nuclear capability. Strong temptations may develop to curtail certain aspects of the program, but the desire to make France "first on the continent" will probably operate to preserve its main lines. The current Parliament has already moved away from its earlier interest in perfecting a "NATO deterrent force" and has been giving more attention to the idea of a "European *force de frappe*," which would exclude US participation. Interest in this objective would probably increase under the new circumstances, although we believe any such project is far from realization.

12. The departure of de Gaulle would also stimulate hope of eventual European political union among the strong body of integrationists in the center parties, but we do not believe negotiations over the UK's entry into the Common Market would be made significantly easier by that fact. In fact, the relatively greater political pressure which special interest groups, particularly the peasants, could apply on the new government would, if anything, probably cause it to maintain its position on strict terms for UK entry.

13. Finally, it seems likely that any new regime would hesitate to make significant changes in foreign policy, even if it were inclined to do so, until such time as the mood of the country had been tested by elections. Many Gaullist foreign policies will continue to have strong popular support and a new President and his Premier would probably hesitate to change them for some time to come. In short, while France would probably conduct its relations with its allies in a more flexible and friendly manner, any basic alterations in the content of foreign and defense policies would probably come slowly and only after a successor government had carefully assessed the mood of the country and the balance of political forces.



ANNEX

MACHINERY OF THE SUCCESSION

Under the present terms of the Constitution the President is named by an electoral college, of some 80,000 electors, comprising the members of Parliament, the members of the General Councils and of the Assemblies of the Overseas Territories, as well as elected representatives from all French municipal councils. The controlling constitutional article on the succession reads as follows:

“In the event that the Presidency of the Republic has been vacated, . . . the functions of the President of the Republic, with the exception of those provided for by Articles 11 and 12 below, [the President’s powers to initiate constitutional amendments and dissolve the Assembly] shall be temporarily exercised by the President of the Senate. In the case of a vacancy, . . . the voting for the election of a new President shall take place, except in case of *force majeure* officially noted by the Constitutional Council, twenty days at the least and fifty days at the most after the beginning of the vacancy . . .”

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