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Stasi Files and GDR Espionage Against the West

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On the author

Dr. Bernd Schäfer was born in Kaiserslautern in the Federal Republic of Germany in 1962. During the 1980s, he studied History, Catholic Theology and Political Science at the Universities of Tübingen, Germany and Vienna, Austria. From 1989 to 1991 he was John M. McCloy Fellow at Harvard University, where he obtained a Masters of Public Administration degree in 1991. Following two years as dissertation fellow at the German National Merit Foundation, he became in 1993 a fellow at the Commission of East German Catholic Episcopate, working on GDR and the Catholic Church. In 1997 he defended his Ph. D. thesis “State and Catholic Church in the GDR 1945-1989” at the Martin-Luther-Universität, Halle. From 1998 to 2001 he was a fellow at the Hannah Arendt Institute for Research on Totalitarianism. Since then, he has worked on “American Triangular Diplomacy, 1969-1976” at the German Historical Institute, Washington DC.

This paper is based on a lecture Dr. Schäfer gave at the Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies in February 2002.

Stasi Files and GDR Espionage Against the West

The Seizure of Stasi Buildings in 1989/90 and the Stasi Records Law of 1991

The East German experience of 1989 was in many ways different from the downfall pattern of other Warsaw Pact countries' regimes. Concerning the legacy of a repressive regime's intelligence files, the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) was even unique. Attempts by its intelligence agency "Ministry for State Security" (Ministerium für Staatssicherheit - Stasi) to burn their files without having the capacity to conceal smoking chimneys, were met by civic resistance groups all over the GDR entering and seizing Stasi buildings. Such targeted and persistent attacks on a central nerve center of communist regimes were without analogies in the countries of the Soviet bloc.

Between 4th and 7th December 1989 the Stasi buildings in all district cities and most of the county towns all over the GDR were stormed and seized by spontaneously arranged citizens' committees. All remaining files and documents were secured and sealed. Those were the days when the Central Committee of the "Socialist Unity Party" (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands/ - SED), the GDR's communist party, had disbanded itself and the GDR's financial wizard for acquiring capitalist hard 'valuta' currency, Alexander Schalck-Golodkowski, feared for his life in the GDR and defected to the West, where he got debriefed by West Germany's

intelligence service. After December 7 only the Stasi headquarters in Berlin were still in business, since people living in the GDR's former center of power did not dare to enter the huge compound. Finally on 15 January 1990 there were efforts made to negotiate a takeover combined with simultaneous pressure from outside demonstrators. They resulted in the seizure of still remaining, quite comprehensive central files as well.

In the following months leading toward German unification in October 1990, citizens' committees in East Germany oversaw the dismantling of the Stasi. They regarded its files as property of the public and fenced off all attempts by the West German government to close them forever or at least move them to the West German Federal Archive with its strict archival guidelines and then across-the-board 30-Years-Rule. The first freely elected East German parliament passed a law on handling and accessing the files in August 1990. The German Unification Treaty created a special body to administer the files headed by Joachim Gauck until new regulations would have been passed by all-German parliament after unification. The final "Law on the Files of the State Security Service of the former German Democratic Republic" was then codified on 20 December 1991 and came into effect a few days later on 1 January 1992.¹ When the new "Authority of the Federal Envoy for the Materials of the Ministry for State Security of the former GDR",² which soon became popularly known as 'Gauck

Authority', officially began its work at the same day, it had at its disposal files at a length of altogether 180 kilometers designed for public use.

Since 1992 all individual German or foreign citizens, on which the Stasi had created files, are entitled to apply for checking and reading them in the newly established federal authority. According to the Stasi records law, academic and other researchers, as well as the press, were granted the right to see all non-personal files, personal files of Stasi informers and the surveillance files of so-called "people of contemporary history". The latter clause for prominents was very generously interpreted and affected various intellectuals and politicians of all kinds, down to many lower-ranking officials in East and West Germany. Recently this clause was overturned by the Federal Administrative Court after former Federal Chancellor Helmut Kohl had issued a lawsuit to deny public access to his Stasi files. In the wake of the court's decision, the Federal Authority on the Stasi files, meanwhile headed by Marianne Birthler, was temporarily required to block further access to some of its papers on prominents and to blacken many names from copies handed out until then without such deletions. In all likelihood the German Parliament will take up this issue and amend the current Stasi Records Law in the near future, though without fully returning to *status quo ante*.

The Foreign Intelligence Files

The so-called "foreign intelligence lines" within the Stasi consisted of the Berlin center of the "Hauptverwaltung Aufklärung" (HVA) and the Departments XV in the fifteen district Stasi headquarters all over the GDR. In

October 1989 approximately 5.000 full-time employees worked for these "foreign intelligence" units, among them 4.000 in Berlin. Compared to the 1950s the number of officers was ten times as high at the end of the GDR and had tripled since the heydays of detente in 1972. If one also includes the signal intelligence people and the military and administrative staff of the intelligence service of the Ministry of Defense, roughly 10.000 people within the GDR worked in "foreign intelligence". In relation to the overall population this was by any proportions a world record. Only the KGB and the CIA were numerically somewhat stronger, but they operated from countries with more than two hundred million people compared to the 16.5 million population of the GDR. In 1988 these foreign intelligence officers directed about 3.000 agents of various status and intensity in the FRG alone. Agents from other foreign countries are significantly lower than this number.³ So far the latter are not fully accounted for unless the CIA will let us know the full scope of the files it acquired in 1992 ('Rosenholz').⁴

Besides this human intelligence, the Stasi had an ever-increasing capacity and capability of signal intelligence. At least since the mid-1970s it could listen not just into every phone conversation between West and East Germany. It also targeted certain objects and individuals in West Berlin and West Germany and tapped their lines whenever they became busy. Those conversations were recorded, transcribed, summarized and sometimes even analyzed. As a matter of fact the Stasi was able to target basically every phone conversation originating from West Berlin or within West Germany, including government lines in the far away Western federal capital of Bonn in the Rhineland.

The “Rosenholz” File Cards

In 1985 Stasi Minister Erich Mielke, still preparing for emergency measures against a nuclear attack from the West, ordered to microfilm all 317.000 personal file cards with the real names of all HVA agents and 77.000 file cards with codewords of HVA operations. In addition, on his order also computerized forms had to be prepared on each individual agent holding some basic information on the nature of the contact. Whereas the paper file cards were destroyed in early 1990, one microfilm copy had apparently made it to the KGB. From there supposedly the CIA obtained the films in 1992 and brought them to its center in Langley for scrutiny. According to another rumor a former Stasi Major General sold it to the CIA for 1.5 million U.S. dollars.⁵

It took a while for German authorities to find out about this coup. Finally there was an arrangement set up for West German intelligence officers to travel to the United States and transcribe during many weeks in 1993 the information in these films concerning West German agents only. The West German service called this operation on the more or less friendly territory of Northern Virginia “Rosenholz”. As a result of this operation, back in Germany many agents were identified, but the trials they were put on produced comparatively minor sentences. Besides formal facts like in which period a particular agent worked for the Stasi, what his code-name was, whether he used technical devices to communicate with his handlers in East Berlin and the number of pages in his destroyed working file, there was not much substance to sentence somebody on this basis to a significant term in prison.

Sharing this assessment, the United States FBI felt the need to produce additional evidence. In the cases of the rather minor American Stasi agent couple Kurt Stand and Teresa Squillacote, identified by the microfilms, they launched a so-called “sting operation” to prove

the couple’s ongoing willingness to spy for communist causes, in this case for South Africa. Since Mrs. Squillacote, who worked at that time in the Pentagon, fell into this trap, the U.S. Government built a case mostly on that recent incident and sentenced the couple to very harsh 21 respectively 17 years in prison in accordance with U.S. law on delivering classified government material to a foreign power.⁶ Their sentences alone almost exceed the ones for all convicted West German HVA spies combined.

The SIRA Tapes

Some of these sentences in West Germany might have been higher, had the decoding of the so-called SIRA tapes not occurred in 1998 but somewhat earlier. This “System Information Recherche Aufklärung” (SIRA) consisted of computerized databases, in which the HVA put the headlines of almost every single “information” obtained by its different agents together with other statistical data including evaluating grades on an information’s value. These electronic tapes were destroyed in the early 1990s, but copies turned up later with the former East German army where the ‘Gauck-Authority’ discovered and decoded them in many years work.

For the period between 1969 and 1989 there have been 4.500 different „sources“ with codenames identified, although this number is not identical with the actual number of individual agents.⁷ Some codenames were used to conceal electronic sources. In other cases the number of “informations” attributed to certain agents might not match their actual output. Anyway, a fraction of the printed “information” left over in 1990 might now be traced to individual agents since the SIRA tapes contain the call numbers of these “informations”.

The whole SIRA tapes complex could be appropriately described as an excellent archi-

val finding aide or a decent library catalogue – but without any files or books to order. A very important aspect of the SIRA tapes was their discovery and decoding as such. It finally made the CIA in 1999 to accept a trade with the German government to deliver CD-ROMs with ‘Rosenholz’ file cards and forms to Germany and obtain in turn copies of the SIRA tapes. Together these two sources contribute to an assessment of the intensity and value of various HVA agents.

GDR Espionage Against the West

As a reflection of a period of increasing cold war tensions, in 1980 the HVA listed among ten complexes of intelligence gathering at the first position: “Military policy, military planning and intentions, military potential of NATO, USA, FRG, other main imperialistic powers and the PRC“⁸. The second position was reserved for “armament research and armament production in the USA and other NATO countries, particularly development and production of new strategic weapons and weapon systems“. Only on third position there was the actual “policy of USA, NATO and FRG vis-à-vis the member states of the socialist community“.⁹

Of the eighteen HVA departments only four were assigned to monitor and infiltrate specific countries respectively their institutions: Department I (Federal Republic of Germany/FRG government), II (FRG parties and institutions), XI (USA) and XII (NATO and European Community). Besides the latter two all other departments were more or less focused on the FRG anyway, for instance Department IV (Military Espionage). Actual Stasi

intelligence on policy and strategy developed in the USA itself was almost negligible. Knowledge about the U.S. was almost exclusively limited to the military theater of West Germany and consisted of mostly short-living human and technical sources in the U.S. Military in West Berlin respectively West Germany or of a staff member from the U.S. Embassy in Bonn.

Penetration of West German Government and Intelligence Services

The HVA, on the other hand, was very successful in placing agents in the Federal Chancellery as well as in various ministries of the Federal Government.¹⁰ Since those agents were mostly serving in administrative staff functions, they were excellent in delivering secret documents and internal information. However, with very few exceptions, they were not themselves involved with decision making. In 1988, for instance, the Stasi had two agents connected to the center of FRG executive power - a female technical assistant in the Federal Chancellery and a political scientist working for government affiliated think tanks. Of course there had been the famous case of Günter Guillaume, a “sleeper agent” of the HVA emigrating to West Germany in the 1950s and rising through the ranks of the Social Democratic Party right into the staff of Chancellor Willy Brandt after 1969. Identified in 1974, he was arrested and later traded for Western agents to the GDR. Guillaume, who contributed to the down-fall of Brandt by also spying on him during his vacations in Norway, provided the GDR with a wealth of information on Brandt’s policies and personality, but in the end politic-ally burned the very politician the HVA so desperately wanted to keep in office during the debate over the no-confidence vote in the German parliament of May 1972. Brandt had survived this motion by just one

vote. After the political opposition had bought some members of Brandt's coalition to defect him, the Stasi was very likely instrumental in buying two CDU parliamentarians to secretly vote for Brandt, maybe the only case when the Stasi really influenced German politics. Nevertheless six months later in November 1972 Brandt won an overwhelming election victory without any help by the Stasi.

With regard to other federal ministries, the Stasi had recruited between one and two lower-ranking division heads as well as female technical assistants and people working in affiliate institutions of almost every department. Particularly affected were the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, where the Stasi had obtained the cooperation of a few minor diplomats, and the Ministries of the Interior, Economic Affairs and Intra-German Relations. Agents within these institutions provided a wealth of documents and information for the GDR. It might be fairly concluded, however, that their actual influence on shaping or changing political strategies and events in the West was very much limited. Such active involvement also was not part of their assignments given from East Berlin. They were just expected to collect as much information as possible without arousing any suspicion of being affiliated with or sympathetic to East German causes.

Thus it was up to the East German political decision makers to use the massive insights into the FRG provided by the HVA for furthering the interests of the GDR. But if it comes to an analysis of the actual East German advantages stemming from the espionage on the West German government, there is not this much left to say. Obviously it hasn't contributed to an enlightening of the mindset or at least a refining of political strategies of the East German communists. This was mostly due to the rigid ideological framework and the Byzantine power structures in the GDR

politburo, but also to the problem of making use of all this clandestine information without compromising or identifying the valuable Stasi sources in the West.

But there should be no downplaying of the successes and achievements of East German intelligence at all. Those are becoming easily evident if one shifts the focus from surveillance or influencing the FRG Government to the operational influence on the three West German intelligence services. Since the late 1960s the HVA effectively could monitor and thwart all relevant West German intelligence efforts on GDR territory.¹¹ These Eastern intelligence coups were never matched by any similar Western penetration of Eastern services.

Already in the 1950s the KGB was able to recruit as an agent the leader of the counter-espionage division against the USSR in the FRG's foreign intelligence service BND.¹² Detected and arrested in 1961, Heinz Felfe was later traded to the GDR in exchange for Western agents. Never detected were two Stasi top agents in the BND working there from the early 1970s up to 1989. Alfred Spuhler worked in the division of sources from communist countries; Gabriele Gast worked in the analysis department and later became deputy of the Soviet Union division.

With Hans-Joachim Tiedge's defection to the GDR in 1985, the domestic intelligence service BfV¹³ unexpectedly lost a high-ranking division head. Only in 1989 did it become aware of the espionage activity of Tiedge's subordinate Klaus Kuron from the so-called 'countermen operations division', who had offered the Stasi his services in 1982. Even worse hit was the West German military intelligence service MAD¹⁴, whose deputy chief, Colonel Joachim Kruse, worked for the Stasi from 1973 until his death in 1988.

Espionage against NATO

The East German intelligence success story continues when we proceed to military espionage against the German Ministry of Defense, the German Federal Army and NATO Headquarters. Following the Soviet model of KGB and GRU, the GDR had founded and created two separate foreign intelligence services, both working on military matters: The “Military Intelligence Service” (Militärischer Nachrichtendienst/ MilND) integrated in the East German Ministry of Defense and the political intelligence of the HVA within the Ministry for State Security. Omitting institutional history details of these two services since the 1950s, we might base the following analysis of GDR military espionage on the combined forces of the two services.¹⁵

By its partners in the Warsaw Pact, MilND was assigned West Berlin, FRG, Benelux and Denmark as explicit areas of operation. It also organized the service of military attaches in GDR embassies worldwide, recruiting them and sometimes additional embassy personnel as their informers. Relying not just on human intelligence, information was also gathered to a great extent by signal and electronic sources. Presenting intelligence findings right to the military leadership, the MilND’s analyses were blunt, filled with ideological phrases and had the tendency to overstate the strength of the enemy in order to justify and increase the defense budget (sounds like a familiar pattern to Western defense analysts). In 1989 it employed 1146 soldiers and civilians in all its GDR facilities. At that time it directed 293 agents worldwide, among them 138 in the FRG.

But MilND never was really independent. When the West German intelligence service had been successful to hire MilND officers at highest levels up to 1958, the Defense Ministry’s intelligence service soon came under the control of the Stasi, which secretly

penetrated its fraternal partner service to a high degree, treated it like a subordinate and dependent body and ‘stole’ a lot of its intelligence. There was a lot of double work, but combined the results of military intelligence were even more impressive than the respective record of each service seen in isolation.

The HVA as the political intelligence branch was assigned within the Warsaw Pact the targeting of West Berlin, the FRG, USA and other NATO countries. It presented its intelligence information to the political leadership in less ideological language than the military counterparts. In 1988 Department IV of the HVA (Military Espionage) directed 74 FRG citizens as agents¹⁶, whereas Department XII, in charge of infiltrating NATO and EU, had 72 agents on these institutions on file.¹⁷

It would consume some considerable time and space to tell the stories of all the highly valuable agents within the German Ministry of Defense, the German Federal Army and the U.S. Armed Forces in West Germany and Berlin, all of them having obtained from time to time also NATO documents for East Berlin and Moscow. A focus on the sources known to have operated for the GDR services in Brussels is quite revealing in a sense. Although MilND and HVA could never place sources with nuclear target planning decision makers or within the operational process of the Supreme European Command of NATO in Belgium, from 1967 to 1989 it gathered an ever increasing flow of documents from Brussels primarily from these sources:

* Between 1967 and 1979 Ursula Lorenzen alias “Michelle“ worked as an Assistant to the British Director for Operations in NATO’s General Secretariat. She had been recruited in 1962 in West Germany by an East German “romeo“ agent with the codename of “Bordeaux“, whom she later married. They worked closely together in Brussels before the GDR called them back abruptly in 1979, af-

ter a Stasi officer had defected from East Berlin to West Germany.

* Rainer Rupp, a student from West Germany, had been recruited by the HVA as an informant in 1968 and given the codename ‚Mosel‘. In 1972 he married the British citizen Ann-Christine Bowen, whom he recruited for the HVA himself as “Kriemhild“. She worked as a secretary in the NATO Integrated Communications System Management Agency at that time. In early 1975 she switched to Plans and Policy in the International Staff of NATO and in 1977 to Office of Security in NATO Headquarters. In that year Rupp himself finally made it into NATO bureaucracy by becoming a country rapporteur in the Directorate for Economics of NATO General Secretariat. When “Michelle“ had to be withdrawn in March 1979, the HVA activated Rupp to fill the gap and he delivered. He even inherited “Michelle’s“ now vacant internal Stasi identification number, a highly unusual procedure. Now named “Topas“, he delivered in the next ten years nearly 2500 “informations“ to East Berlin, for instance documents on every NATO summit and each meeting of the Defense Planning Council and much, much more. Every six to eight weeks he was on duty in the Situation Center of NATO HQ and reported from there. As a result NATO defense planning in Brussels was absolutely transparent for Moscow in those years. Rupp was even considered to early warn the Warsaw Pact of a supposed NATO first strike for which HVA provided him with ‚technology‘.

If one wants to know more on some GDR double work on NATO, here are the sources of MilND:

* Between 1973 and 1980 a Belgian secretary, codename “Weiler“, recruited by GDR-Romeo “Valentin“ whom she later married, worked in the French Language Staff in NATO General Secretariat and delivered documents matching HVA-„Michelle“ of the

same period. In 1980 the GDR called the couple back to prevent detection.

* In 1987 the former West German signal officer and diplomat „Cherry“, having worked for MilND for many years, e.g. in the German embassy in Vienna with its extensive materials on the ‘Mutual and Balanced Force Reduction (MBFR)’ negotiations, was finally transferred to Brussels as member of the German Delegation to NATO. From his work as a signal officer, he could deliver about 800 pages of documents monthly.

Almost all this wealth of intelligence on NATO obtained by the East German services went right to Moscow. Only the Soviet Union was capable of evaluating, assessing and applying information from those documents for the purpose of developing their own military strategy and, moreover, of using it to advance military technology at home and within the Warsaw Pact. For Soviet State Holidays the Stasi prepared leather-bound booklets for the KGB with cover letters by Minister Mielke and some exquisite original documents from NATO. In certain cases affected socialist partners in Eastern Europe got selected documents (except Romania). The analysis departments in HVA and MilND were deliberately small and understaffed, and despite the overwhelming amount of intelligence raw material the GDR leadership proved unable to develop a sense for the inner sophistication of NATO strategies and armaments.

Paradoxically (or logically?) the superb quantity and quality of documents obtained from NATO since the late 1960s not only scrapped adventurous war scenarios of the Warsaw Pact from the 50s and 60s.¹⁸ It also encouraged the Soviet Union to follow a more aggressive strategy of seeking superiority in some fields. Furthermore, in the political context of superpower confrontation, it substantially increased Moscow’s fear of a Wes-

tern nuclear first strike in the early 1980s. This Soviet ‘War Scare’ phenomenon “Wrjan“ (Veroiatnost Raketno-Iadernogo Napadeniia i.e. “Likelihood of Nuclear Missile Attack”)¹⁹ and the assessments of threats and threat perceptions subsided in the Soviet Union in the late 1980s and led to a change of doctrine. It would be fascinating to assess the role intelligence from GDR agents within NATO may have played during those years. Due to their activities, the Soviet Union knew all too well the real strategies and planning of NATO and had two basic options at hand. Both of them it pursued for some time – either to exploit the weaknesses of NATO by going for superiority or to acknowledge its military strength and go for negotiation and accommodation.

For both opposing strategies the material from GDR intelligence proved to be vital. Through the channels of these agents, who absolutely were no ‘mediators’ at all, NATO finally and inadvertently provided to the Soviet Union the background for changes in military strategy implemented in the late Gorbachev era, which were based on a modified assessment of a potential threat posed by NATO to the USSR and the Warsaw Pact. In the pre-Gorbachev period, however, the East German agents would have delivered significant and substantial advantages to the USSR in a military crisis situation. Indeed they were everything else but ‘messengers of peace’, as the GDR’s official propaganda heralded its Stasi agents on foreign soil.

Notes

¹ Cf. A. James McAdams, *Judging the German Past*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

² “Der Bundesbeauftragte für die Materialien des Ministeriums für Staatssicherheit der ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik“.

³ Jens Gieseke, Mielke-Konzern, *Die Geschichte der Stasi 1945-1990*, DVA: Stuttgart 2001, p. 201-2.

⁴ See chapter 2b below.

⁵ John O. Koehler, *Stasi. The Untold Story of the East German Secret Police*, Westview Press: Boulder 2001, p. 245.

⁶ United States vs. Squillacote, Nos. 99-4088, 99-4099.

⁷ Gieseke, Mielke-Konzern, p. 204-5.

⁸ FRG = Federal Republic of Germany, PRC = People’s Republic of China.

⁹ Helmut Müller-Enbergs (Hg.), *Inoffizielle Mitarbeiter des Ministeriums für Staatssicherheit. Teil 2: Anleitungen für die Arbeit mit Agenten, Kundschaftern und Spionen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, Ch. Links: Berlin 1998, p. 542-3.

¹⁰ See Müller-Enbergs, *Inoffizielle Mitarbeiter*, pp. 199-203.

¹¹ See Gieseke, Mielke-Konzern, p. 209-10; Müller-Enbergs, *Inoffizielle Mitarbeiter*, pp. 217-225.

¹² BND = Bundesnachrichtendienst (Federal Intelligence Service).

¹³ BfV = Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz (Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution).

¹⁴ MAD = Militärischer Abschirmdienst (Military Shielding Service).

¹⁵ See for details of this chapter extensively: Walter Richter, *Der Militärische Nachrichtendienst der DDR und seine Kontrolle durch das Ministerium für Staatssicherheit*, Peter Lang Publishing: Frankfurt/New York, 2002; Heinz Busch, *Die Militärspionage der DDR*, Manuskript, 2001.

¹⁶ Müller-Enbergs, pp. 211-214.

¹⁷ Gieseke, Mielke-Konzern, p. 214; Müller-Enbergs, pp. 231-233.

¹⁸ See the website of the Parallel History Project on NATO and Warsaw Pact: www.isn.ethz.ch/php.

¹⁹ Cf. Ben B. Fischer, *A Cold War Conundrum: The 1983 Soviet War Scare*, Center for the Study of Intelligence: Washington D.C., 1997.

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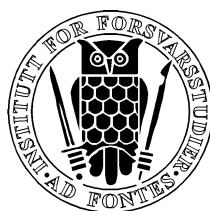
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