

BRUDERORGANE: THE SOVIET ORIGINS OF EAST GERMAN INTELLIGENCE

Benjamin B. Fischer

The East German foreign intelligence service, the Hauptverwaltung A (Main Directorate A, hereafter HV A), is the stuff of legends. “It was probably the most efficient and effective service on the European continent,” claimed Markus Wolf, who headed foreign intelligence for thirty-four years.¹ A boast to be sure, but many observers believe he was the most successful spymaster of the Cold War.

There is no gainsaying the HV A’s feats, but the East Germans had a little help from their adversaries. Officials in Washington, London, and Bonn not only underestimated the HV A’s prowess; they also were largely ignorant of its size, efficiency, and contribution to Soviet intelligence. Warning signs went unheeded. In 1959, for example, an East German defector claimed that the HV A was on its way to becoming the premier espionage service in the Eastern bloc with 2,000–3,000 agents in West Germany.² He was ignored. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) wrote off East Germany as a “backwater” of little or no intelligence interest.³ As a result, the HV A became a stealth weapon of the Soviet KGB (Committee for State Security), flying under the radar of Western intelligence and wreaking tremendous damage in the process. In several espionage trials of HV A agents after the Cold War, presiding judges declared that the information they provided Moscow might have meant the difference between survival and defeat in the event of war, as serious a damage assessment as one can imagine.

Soviet intelligence and its Warsaw Pact allies referred to each other as *Bruderorgane*, brotherly or fraternal services. The HV A, however, was first among equals. “We were Moscow’s prime ally,” Wolf declared. Former Soviet officers, perhaps with grudging respect, have tipped their hats to the East Germans. One declared that the HV A was “even more successful than the KGB.”⁴ Another said that the HV A “had so deeply penetrated the West German government, military, and secret services that about all we had to do was lie back and stay out of Wolf’s way.”⁵ Never one to hide his light under a bushel, Wolf himself once bragged that he had enough West German politicians on his payroll to form his own bipartisan faction in the Bundestag.⁶ Even his former adversaries, with grudging candor but no respect, have acknowledged his successes. German authorities estimated

- 1 Markus Wolf with Anne McElvoy, *Man Without a Face: The Autobiography of Communism’s Greatest Spymaster* (New York, 1997), xi.
- 2 Richard Meier, *Geheimdienst ohne Maske: Der ehemalige Präsident des Bundesverfassungsschutz über Agenten, Spione und einen gewissen Herrn Wolf* (Berlin, 1992), 197–203.
- 3 See Benjamin B. Fischer, “Deaf, Dumb, and Blind: The CIA and East Germany,” in *East German Foreign Intelligence: Myth, Reality and Controversy*, ed. Thomas Friis, Kristie Macrakis, and Helmut Müller-Engbergs (London and New York, 2010), 48–69, 49.
- 4 Christopher Andrew and Oleg Gordievsky, *MORE Instructions from the Centre: Top Secret Files on KGB Global Operations 1975–1985* (London, 1992), 37.
- 5 Oleg Kalugin with Fen Montaigne, *The First Directorate: My 32 Years in Intelligence and Espionage against the West* (New York, 1994), 171.
- 6 “Meisterspion für zweimal A 13,” *Der Spiegel*, January 6, 1992, 32.

that the HV A, by itself, provided some 80 percent of all Warsaw Pact intelligence on the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).⁷

Soviet Origins of German Intelligence

The HV A was a creation of Soviet intelligence. Its organization, bureaucratic culture, and ethos were more Russian than German, making it a hybrid German-Soviet intelligence service. Germans offered technical skills, discipline, and efficiency that the Russians typically lacked. Most important, they had entrée to the other half of the divided German nation just across the border that geographically defined the Cold War. For the East Germans, West Germany was the *Hauptfeind* (main enemy), a country they called simply the *Hauptoperationsgebiet* (Main Operational Area).

German espionage for the USSR, however, did not begin with the Cold War. Its origins reach back to the revolutionary upheavals following World War I. Lenin and his Bolshevik followers believed that their October Revolution in backward Russia, a predominantly peasant country, could not survive without revolutionary upheavals in the industrial West, where the large and well-organized working class would come to their aid. They pinned their hopes above all on Germany and prepared accordingly.⁸ Posters in Moscow declared that “The German October is at the gates.” The moment of truth came in 1923, when the Comintern (Communist International), the general staff of the Soviet world revolutionary movement, and Soviet intelligence funded and incited an uprising led by the German Communist Party (Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands, KPD).⁹

The German proletariat, however, refused to throw off its chains, as Bolshevik theory had predicted. The ill-conceived revolt fizzled, and Germany remained a capitalist country until it became the Third Reich. Not all was lost, however. As one of the top Soviet operatives in Europe noted:

When we saw the collapse of the Comintern’s efforts, we said: “Let’s save what we can of the German revolution.” We took the best men developed by our Party Intelligence . . . and incorporated them into the Soviet Military Intelligence. Out of the ruins of the Communist revolution we built in Germany for Soviet Russia a brilliant intelligence service, the envy of every other nation.¹⁰

7 “Die Gussen kommen,” *Der Spiegel*, March 16, 1992, 129.

8 Bogdan Musial, *Kampfplatz Deutschland: Stalins Kriegspläne gegen den Westen*, 2nd ed. (Berlin, 2008), 26–27, 62–67.

9 Bernd Kaufmann, Eckhard Reisener, Dieter Schwips, and Henri Walther, “Die ‘Revolution’ wird organisiert (1923),” *Der Nachrichtendienst der KPD 1917–1937* (Berlin, 1993), 57–93.

10 David J. Dallin, *Soviet Espionage* (New Haven, 1955), 92.

The KPD created its own covert intelligence service, the KPD-Nachrichtendienst, in 1921. It spied on the Weimar government; the Reichswehr, the small defense force permitted under the terms of the Treaty of Versailles; and other political parties and paramilitary units of rightwing nationalist organizations. After 1923, however, the KPD became increasingly involved in spying for the Soviet Union and facilitating Soviet espionage in Germany and the rest of Europe.¹¹

The trajectory of the KPD intelligence service followed and reflected changes in the USSR. After Stalin rose to power by eliminating the Old Bolsheviks, he foreswore the idea of revolution in Europe and in 1928 set out on a course of “building socialism in one country” as the USSR’s strategic objective. The following year, the Comintern declared that “war and the danger of war” in Europe was imminent. All communist parties were obliged to accept Moscow’s “iron discipline” and join in a *Waffenbruderschaft* (alliance of comrade-in-arms) to defend the USSR as “the center of the world revolution.”¹²

Historians debate whether the Soviet war scare was genuine or contrived, but its impact on the KPD was quite real. In preparation for an impending civil war at home and an “imperialist war” in Europe, the KPD created a new clandestine organization, the Abteilung Militärpolitik (Department of Military Policy), which also was known by cover names such as AM-Apparat, Kippenberger-Apparat after its leader Hans Kippenberger, “Alex,” and “Adam-Apparat.”¹³ Increasingly, the KPD was forced to serve Soviet interests rather than its own and to support the Soviet Union’s forced-pace industrialization and massive armaments buildup.¹⁴ “The KPD-Nachrichtendienst became essentially the product, the main instrument, and ultimately the victim of Bolshevization [more appropriately of Stalinization].”¹⁵ At Moscow’s direction, KPD leaders were purged and replaced with true Stalinists. The Germans’ tragedy was twofold. Many were arrested, tortured, and murdered in Hitler’s concentration camps, and many others who fled to the Soviet Union suffered the same fate during Stalin’s blood purges. Kippenberger was one of first refugees executed in Moscow in 1937.

Germans Spying on Germany for Russia

Germany suffered little damage during World War I. Its industrial infrastructure had not only remained intact; it was the envy of the world, especially in the production of iron and steel, chemicals,

11 Kaufmann et al., “Spionage für die Sowjets,” in *Der Nachrichtendienst der KPD 1917–1937*, 163–66.

12 *Ibid.*, 173.

13 *Ibid.*, 179–80.

14 *Ibid.*, “Spionage für die sowjetische Rüstungswirtschaft,” 200–203.

15 *Ibid.*, 9.

and electricity. Within a few years, with KPD support, the volume of industrial and military-technological secrets purloined and sent to Moscow became “an avalanche” of information on chemical formulas and production methods, blueprints, and prototypes. The effort was so sweeping and so efficient that “Moscow often knew about a new German invention before it went into serial production.”¹⁶

Trials involving industrial espionage linked to the Soviet Union give some indication of the scope and magnitude of the KPD-Soviet effort. In 1928, German courts tried some 300 to 360 cases. In 1930, the number soared to more than 1,000.¹⁷ Even these numbers, however, understate the real situation. Because Weimar Germany maintained good diplomatic and trade relations with the Soviet Union, and also because the Reichswehr was conducting covert military training and weapons R&D there, Berlin often turned a blind eye to such transgressions.¹⁸ Many cases never reached the courts, and some egregious incidents were tried *in camera* and the records sealed so as not to disturb relations with Moscow. Moreover, the German criminal code did not treat industrial snooping as espionage. Hamstrung, the courts could only apply a weak statute on “unfair competition,” which provided for light sentences of one to three months. Finally, in 1932 the Reichstag issued a new law that called for three-year terms in cases of routine industrial espionage and five years if a foreign power was involved. The Nazis replaced it with the death penalty.

16 Dallin, *Soviet Espionage*, 76.

17 *Ibid.*, 76–77.

18 The treaty placed restrictions on the size and armaments of the Germany army or “defense force” (Reichswehr). Weimar Germany and Soviet Russia, the two “pariah countries of Europe,” reached an agreement under which the former conducted research and development of tanks, poison gas, and military aircraft in the latter, far away from the eyes of Entente inspection teams. See Manfred Zeidler, *Reichswehr und Rote Armee 1920–1933: Wege und Stationen einer ungewöhnlichen Zusammenarbeit*, 2nd ed. (Munich, 1994); and Aleksandr M. Nekrich, *German-Soviet Relations: Pariahs, Partners, Predators* (New York, 1997).

19 Dallin, *Soviet Espionage*, 86.

Rabkors and Russia-Goers

In addition to party members who worked in industry, the KPD could call on sympathizers and fellow travelers to acquire information for Moscow. One especially rich source came from the so-called *rabkor* or worker-correspondent movement after the Russian term *rabochii korrespondent*. Instigated by the USSR, communist press organs in Europe and the United States collected information from industrial workers on labor relations and working conditions. The *rabkor* movement, however, was actually a cover for espionage. The KPD was the first party in the West to implement the *rabkor* movement, which by 1928 had several thousand members, many more than Great Britain, France, and the United States.¹⁹ In Germany, the movement was known as *Betriebsberichterstattung* and its practitioners as *Betriebsberichterstatter*, or simply BBs, both terms being literal translations from Russian.

The “best brains” in Soviet military intelligence ferreted out industrial and military secrets to accelerate the USSR’s armaments program.²⁰ The KPD routinely collected classified information on German armaments R&D and production and on the Reichswehr, which it occasionally exposed in the communist press before passing it on to Moscow.

Communists, at least overt members of the KPD, were banned from the army and military industrial and research facilities. Ordinary workers who comprised the basis of the BB movement had neither the access nor the capability for reporting on sophisticated military technology and R&D programs. With guidance from Moscow, however, the KPD found a solution by recruiting German scientists, engineers, and technicians who had no record of communist sympathies or affiliation.²¹ A primary source was the so-called Russia-Goers movement, unemployed Germans who sought work in the Soviet Union. The Soviets pored over applications submitted at their embassy and trade mission in Berlin, looking for suitable candidates. Once recruited, the Germans were steered toward finding jobs in Germany rather than in Russia while spying for Soviet intelligence. A secretary and KPD member at the Soviet trade mission ran a dummy employment agency used to screen and recruit Russia-goers.²²

The German-Soviet Intelligence Hybrid

The KPD worked for three Soviet organizations: the KGB, the Fourth Department of the Red Army (later the Glavnoye Razvedyvatel’noye Upravleniye, or GRU, Russia’s largest foreign intelligence agency), and the Western European Bureau of the Comintern, which was based in Berlin.²³ For security purposes, the Germans referred to the intelligence services as the “two girls” or “Grete” for the KGB and “Klara” for Krasnaya Armiya or Red Army.

German collaborators proved to be essential to the success of Soviet intelligence during the 1920s and 1930s. As one historian observed:

With their proverbial precision, discipline, and incomparable technical skills, the German members of the apparatus were quick to learn the methods of *conspiratsia*; indeed, they improved upon them, and in more than one way outdid their teachers.²⁴

20 For an account of Soviet military espionage, see “5. Military Targets,” in Dallin, *Soviet Espionage*, 112–19; and Kaufmann et al., “Spionage für die sowjetische Rüstungswirtschaft,” in *Der Nachrichtendienst der KPD 1917–1937*, 200–203.

21 Kaufmann et al., “Betriebsberichterstattung,” in *Der Nachrichtendienst der KPD 1917–1937*, 194–200.

22 Dallin, *Soviet Espionage*, 85–86.

23 From 1923 to 1934, Soviet foreign intelligence was reorganized and renamed twice. The more familiar term KGB is used here, although it did not become the official name until 1954.

24 *Ibid.*, 87.

German support to Soviet intelligence “was enormous, exceeding in quantity the contribution of all other non-Russian components of the apparat abroad; in quality it exceeded even the Russian core itself.”²⁵ The HV A saw itself as the heir and lineal descendant of the KPD intelligence service, and, like their predecessors, the East Germans often outperformed Soviet intelligence during the Cold War.²⁶

For all their contributions, however, the German communists received little credit from Moscow, and many of those who fled to the USSR to escape Nazi persecution ended up in the Gulag or KGB execution chambers. Stalin decimated about 70 percent of the KPD exile community. Some of those who survived, however, became Soviet citizens and rose to high ranks in Soviet intelligence and in the Comintern. They returned to their homeland on the coattails of the Red Army in 1945, where they became the founding fathers of East German intelligence.

Present at the Creation

In 1951, Markus Wolf, who was posted to Moscow as the *chargé d'affaires* of the East German embassy, was recalled to East Berlin. There he was summoned to a meeting with Anton Ackermann, the state secretary in the foreign ministry and, more important, a member of the ruling Politburo of the Socialist Unity Party (SED) in the recently established German Democratic Republic (GDR). Ackermann told Wolf that he was being assigned to a new intelligence unit in the ministry, which would report directly to Ackermann himself. An organizing session was held on September 1, 1951, in a safehouse in Bohnsdorf, an East Berlin suburb. HV A officers celebrated that date as the founding of their service.

The new unit’s official name was the Foreign Policy Intelligence Service (Außenpolitische Nachrichtendienst, APN).²⁷ The APN was a clandestine organization; its very title and existence were classified. No one outside of a small circle of officials in the USSR and the GDR had ever heard of it until after the Cold War. Old habits die hard; in his memoir Wolf refused to “break cover” and referred to the APN by its cover name, the Institute for Economic-Scientific Research (Institut für Wirtschaftswissenschaftliche Forschung, IWF).²⁸

The APN/IWF was a new organization, but it did not lack for talent or experience. The founding fathers, all veteran communists from the prewar KPD underground, included Richard Stahlmann

25 Ibid., 92.

26 Bernd Kaufmann et al., *Der Nachrichtendienst der KPD 1917–1937*, 11.

27 The following account of the APN is based on Peter Richter and Klaus Rösler, *Wolfs West-Spione: Ein Insider-Report* (Berlin: Elefant Press Verlag GmbH, 1992), 13–30; Meier, *Geheimdienst ohne Maske*, 145–60; Peter Siebenmorgen, “Staatssicherheit” der DDR: *Der Westen im Fadenkreuz der Stasi* (Bonn, 1993), 114–15; and Wolf, *Man Without a Face*, 43–48.

28 Wolf, *Man Without a Face*, 44. Wolf evidently did not remember that he had already revealed the APN in a previous publication. See *In eigenem Auftrag: Bekenntnisse und Einsichten* (Munich, 1991), 267.

(pseudonym of Artur Illner) and Robert Korb. Stahlmann was a legendary figure in the international communist movement, a brilliant operative who had run Comintern operations in Scandinavia, the Balkans, and China. Korb was a gifted political analyst, who had served as personal secretary to Georgy Dimitrov, the Bulgarian expatriate head of the Comintern.

Also present at the first organizing session were Gustav Szinda, Gerhard Hentschke, and Gerhard Heidenreich. Szinda had served in Stalin's foreign intelligence service, the Comintern, and the Soviet-backed International Brigades during the Spanish Civil War. He and Hentschke fought with Soviet partisans behind enemy lines during World War II. Heidenreich, another KPD veteran and protégé of SED leader Walter Ulbricht and Ulbricht's future successor, Erich Honecker, was head of the East German youth organization, which screened candidates for the new intelligence service. To protect the APN's covert status, even within SED ranks, officials referred to it as the Heidenreich-Apparat, since Heidenreich was openly known as the head of the SED youth organization. Wolf represented the rising generation of young communists, all devoted Stalinists, as did Werner Großmann, who would succeed Wolf in 1986 as only the second head of the HV A during its entire existence.

Soviet intelligence played a dominant role in the APN/IWF. Four Soviet intelligence officers were present at the organizing session. Soviet officers were omnipresent as "advisers," guiding its operations and making sure that the Germans carried out Moscow's orders. As Wolf noted, "Our Soviet advisers played a strong, even domineering role." The APN was "an exact mirror of the Soviet model"; its structure and operational guidelines were based on verbatim translations from Russian documents.²⁹

KGB oversight of the HV A and its parent organization, the Ministry for State Security (MfS), remained in place throughout the Cold War. A Soviet-East German protocol from 1978 revealed that Soviet officers were issued passes that allowed them unrestricted access to MfS and HV A offices, files, and technical equipment. The KGB also reserved the right to recruit East German citizens without informing the Ministry.³⁰

The APN/IWF was created to fill a gap in the SED's information on West Germany and the Western Allies' intentions in the unfolding

29 Wolf, *Man Without a Face*, 46.

30 "Pingpong für Spione," *Der Spiegel*, February 17, 1992, 86.

East-West conflict. It also had critical implications for Soviet policy. In the early stage of the Cold War, Germany, not the United States, was the cynosure of Stalin's foreign policy, as it had been in the prewar period. The Soviet dictator's greatest fear was that the Western powers would rearm and integrate the new West German state, founded in 1949, into an anti-Soviet alliance. This became a self-fulfilling policy after Stalin ordered the 1948-1949 blockade of West Berlin and gave the green light for North Korea to invade South Korea in 1950. NATO was formed in 1949, and Bonn became a full-fledged political and military member in 1955.

The IWF provided non-alerting commercial cover for espionage. Its overt mission was to facilitate interzonal trade between the Soviet, American, British, and French sectors of East and West Germany, which was still flourishing before the erection of the Berlin Wall. Access to West Germany was secured by opening a "research" branch in Frankfurt and an East-West Trade Corporation (Ost-West Handelsgesellschaft) in Hamburg.³¹ In addition to political and military intelligence, East German operatives were tasked with collecting information on nuclear weapons, nuclear energy, chemistry, electrical engineering, electronics, aviation, and conventional weapons. These intelligence requirements were of little interest to East Berlin but of overriding concern to Moscow. With the exception of nuclear issues, they were reminiscent of Soviet tasking of the KPD in prewar Germany.

By 1952, APN/IWF had a staff of 200 officers. Ackermann was the chief, and Stahlmann and Szinda were his deputies.³² The latter two were in charge of day-to-day operations and divided responsibility for managing several main departments and subordinate branches. The main departments included political and military intelligence; economic intelligence; evaluation and requirements, under Korb; and administration. Wolf was initially assigned as Korb's deputy but soon took over a small counterintelligence unit. Heidenreich headed the personnel department.

In December 1952, Wolf was summoned once again to the SED Central Committee building, this time by none other than Ulbricht himself. Ulbricht told him that Ackermann had asked to be relieved of his duties for health reasons.³³ "We have decided that you should take over the service," Ulbricht said — "we" meaning Ulbricht himself and the Politburo. Wolf was thirty years old. He was ordered to report directly to Ulbricht.³⁴

31 Dallin, *Soviet Espionage*, 343-44.

32 See the table of organization, Appendix 8, in Siebenmorgen, "Staatssicherheit" der DDR, 316.

33 In fact, Ulbricht purged Ackermann both because he was a political rival and an advocate of a "separate German road to socialism," a heresy that Stalin did not tolerate as he was preparing to impose the Soviet model of a command economy and collectivized agriculture on the GDR.

34 Wolf, *Man Without a Face*, 55-57.

Wolf wondered why he had been chosen; he was not only young and inexperienced but also lacked high standing in the SED. He acknowledged, however, that “I am sure that my upbringing and connections with Moscow weighed heavily.”³⁵

Richard Stahlmann, the acting APN chief, was already sixty-one years old, but he gracefully accepted the role as Wolf’s deputy. Years later, Wolf paid tribute to Stahlmann as his mentor, role model, and chief adviser, saying the veteran communist apparatchik was “the true organizer of our foreign intelligence” who had stood “side by side with Soviet intelligence.”³⁶

Mischa

Wolf represented the new generation of East German functionaries and the amalgam of German-Soviet intelligence. Born in 1923, he fled Nazi Germany to the Soviet Union with his mother and brother in 1934. His father, a physician, prominent playwright, and communist official, had arrived the year before. During the next eleven formative years of his youth, Markus became Mischa and in his own words “half Russian.” The Soviet Union, he added, was “our second homeland [*Heimat*].”³⁷

Wolf’s life in clandestine operations began in 1943 at the age of twenty, when he was selected for admission to the Comintern school. It was a stroke of luck that allowed him to escape the vicissitudes of war, since the school had been relocated from Moscow to the safety of Kushnarenkovo, about sixty miles from Ufa. The timing was significant. After the defeat of the Germany army at Stalingrad during 1942–1943, Stalin realized that victory over Hitler’s Germany was now a matter of time. He was planning for the postwar occupation and control of Germany, and he needed a cadre of young and reliable Germans to carry out his plans.

Wolf returned to his native country in 1945, a committed revolutionary determined to realize the prewar goal of a Sovietized Germany. He was a prodigy with prodigious ambition. A fellow exile and Comintern student described him as

the type of very clever, calm official who stands in the background [*Hintergrund Funktionär*], who only regards as a game of chess everything that other comrades take seriously, that

35 Ibid., 57.

36 Meier, *Geheimdienst ohne Maske*, 147.

37 Alexander Reichenbach, *Chef der Spione: Die Markus-Wolf-Story* (Stuttgart, 2009), 49.

they fight for, that they are inspired by. “Background officials” seemed to be inspired by nothing and apparently nothing could shake their calmness. They confined themselves to working out the next tactical step cautiously and carefully. . . .³⁸

Wolf stood out among the returnees, despite his youth, due to his fluency in Russian and his “sparkling contacts with the Soviets.” Unusual perks underscored his status. Still in his mid-twenties, he was assigned a sumptuous country house on the Glienecker Lake away from the ruins of Berlin. His compatriots had to make do with lesser quarters and lower rations. Clearly, his Soviet masters were grooming Mischa for more important assignments.³⁹

The APN/IWF suffered several setbacks on Wolf’s watch, one of which could have ended his career. Several agents working in IWF cover offices in West Germany were caught spying.⁴⁰ Much more serious was the case of Gotthold Krauss, a former banker hired by the APN to work on economic intelligence who became a deputy department chief. He defected to the United States in April 1953, bringing with him copious information on APN staff officers, agents, and operations. “I took it as a heavy personal blow, and it made me realize that our young service was still far from secure,” Wolf wrote years later.⁴¹ Yet fortune smiled on him; his Soviet overseers overlooked the security breaches.

38 Wolfgang Leonhard, *Die Revolution entlässt ihre Kinder* (Cologne, 1981), 576.

39 Reichenbach, *Chef der Spione*, 60.

40 Dallin, *Soviet Espionage*, 343-44.

41 Wolf, *Man Without a Face*, 58. Wolf misspelled Krauss’s name and gave a spurious account of the defection, claiming that West German intelligence was in charge. In fact, Krauss had been in contact with the CIA in West Berlin since 1950 and planned his escape over the intervening years. Krauss attended Wolf’s first staff meeting as chief of the APN, during which Wolf complained about the organization’s poor security. See Benjamin B. Fischer, “Markus Wolf and the CIA Mole,” *Center for the Study of Intelligence Bulletin* (Winter 2000): 8-9.

In 1953, the APN/IWF was disbanded; its staff and files were moved to the Ministry for State Security. Internal security and foreign intelligence were joined in a single ministry on the model of the KGB. Wolf’s main department was designated HA XV. Two years later, HA XV was renamed HV A.

Germans Spying on Germany for Russia Redux

From its modest start in 1951, East German foreign intelligence hit its stride in the 1960s; registered spectacular successes in the 1970s; and became the preeminent Soviet bloc service in the 1980s. It almost certainly exceeded Soviet expectations.

Sheer numbers do not tell the whole story, but they indicate the scope and magnitude of the HV A’s success in carrying out its main mission. The number of West Germans and West Berliners who spied for East Germany almost defies belief. The precise figures will never

be known, but a rough estimate for the MfS and HV A from 1949 to 1989 ranges from 17,000 to 23,000.⁴² The HV A accounted for about 6,000 agents during the same period. Some 3,000 agents were still active when the Berlin Wall fell. About half spied for the MfS and the East German army's intelligence service and the other half for the HV A. Five of every 100,000 West German citizens were "working clandestinely for the GDR."⁴³

After reunification, a German counterintelligence official said, "You see the entire society was sort of infiltrated by hostile intelligence agents. We didn't understand that."⁴⁴ Between 1993 and 1995, Germany's federal attorney investigated 2,928 cases of possible espionage or treason by West German citizens. Some 2,300 of those were dropped. There were 388 indictments and 252 convictions. Sixty-six persons were sentenced to two years or more in prison. The longest sentence handed down was twelve years, but only a few served more than six. Eighty-five persons received sentences of one year or less, probation, or a monetary fine.⁴⁵

The Soviet decision to exploit the East Germans' comparative advantage in spying on West Germany was vindicated many times over. Common language, geographical proximity, past history, and family and business ties all played a part. The main factor, however, was the large number of intelligence officers focused on a single target. The HV A employed 4,268 staff officers inside MfS headquarters, and another 800 were assigned to MfS offices in the GDR's fifteen administrative regions. The most important regional offices, such as the one in Leipzig, were located along the inner-German border, where they conducted operations to recruit and infiltrate agents into West Germany.

Soviet intelligence's largest foreign *rezidentura* (field station) before World War II was in Weimar Germany. The Soviet embassy on the famous Unter den Linden boulevard and the Soviet trade mission provided diplomatic status, and therefore legal cover, for intelligence officers. The Comintern's Western European bureau in Berlin was another base of operations that shielded intelligence operations.

After World War II, the KGB established a *rezidentura* in the East Berlin suburb of Karlshorst, the site of Nazi Germany's surrender to the Red Army. It became the largest in the world with a staff of about 1,000 officers.⁴⁶ About one hundred counterintelligence officers were posted to another office in Potsdam-Cecelienhof. By

42 Georg Herbstritt, *Bundesbürger im Dienst der DDR-Spionage. Eine analytische Studie* (Göttingen, 2007), 70.

43 *Ibid.*, 84.

44 John Marks, "The Spymaster Unmasked," *U.S. News & World Report*, April 12, 1993, 42.

45 Robert Gerald Livingston, "Rosenholz: Misha's Files, CIA's Booty," in *East German Foreign Intelligence*, ed. Friis et al., 70-88, 79.

46 Rita Sélitrenny and Thilo Weichert, *Das unheimliche Erbe: Die Spionageabteilung der Stasi* (Leipzig, 1991), 114.

itself, the *rezidentura* annually poured out as many intelligence reports as an entire KGB main directorate, and the *rezident* (chief of station) held a rank equivalent to that of a deputy director of intelligence in Moscow.⁴⁷

What the Moles Knew

With a few exceptions, the HV A spied with impunity. Very few of its agents were caught, and the number of defections could be counted on the fingers of one hand. The main reason: HV A counterintelligence penetrated and neutralized West German intelligence and security agencies with “moles.” There were moles, in some cases several of them, burrowed inside the BND (foreign intelligence); the BfV (domestic counterintelligence) and its state-level components (LfVs); the SS/BKA (state security department of the federal criminal police); the MAD (military counterintelligence); and the BGS (federal border security).⁴⁸ The three most damaging moles were Klaus Kuron, a senior BfV officer in charge of anti-GDR operations; Gabriele Gast, a senior Soviet affairs analyst with the BND; and the deputy chief of MAD, Col. Joachim Krase.

The impetus to recruit moles inside West German national security agencies resulted from one of the HV A’s few setbacks and one the BfV’s few successes. The HV A dispatched agents to West Germany as emigrants with false names and identities — called legends in intelligence jargon — who resettled in West Germany and West Berlin. Using computer analysis of records from the national network of residential registration offices, the BfV developed profiles of the “illegals.” Codenamed “Anmeldung” (Registration), the operation netted several dozen agents. Arrests, however, were only part of the problem. Wolf had to recall many other illegals, and years of careful work and preparation were lost.⁴⁹

After that setback, Wolf later claimed to have “concentrated everything on one objective: We must get inside their [West German] organizations so that the game is open again.”⁵⁰ The HV A, according to a history compiled by former officers, carried out Wolf’s orders with alacrity.⁵¹

Scientific and Technical Intelligence

Political intelligence was a top HV A priority. Beginning in the 1960s, however, acquisition of scientific and technical intelligence in the

47 Kalugin, *First Directorate*, 174.

48 See the List of Abbreviations.

49 K. Eichner and G. Schramm, *Konterspionage: Die DDR-Aufklärung in den Geheimdienstzentren* (Berlin, 2010), 110–13.

50 Berlin ADN 0708 GMT, September 29, 1991.

51 See Eichner and Schramm, *Konterspionage*, 110–13.

West became a paramount objective both for the GDR and even more so for the USSR.

In 1971, Wolf created a separate component, the Sector for Science and Technology (Sektor für wissenschaftliche-technische Aufklärung, SWT). SWT doubled in size within a few years. Its table of organization comprised five departments.⁵² Three collected intelligence on basic research in nuclear, chemical, biological, and agricultural sciences; microelectronics, electro-optical components, lasers, and software; and vehicle manufacture, shipbuilding, aeronautics, and astronautics. The other two departments evaluated and reported the information and technology samples acquired by the operational departments.

SWT officers, most of whom held degrees in science and engineering, were the elite of the elite HV A, and their work was highly valued in East Germany and the Soviet Union. By the mid-1980s, SWT alone was annually acquiring an estimated 3,400 reports and samples of technology and equipment.⁵³ A review of the so-called Rosenholz files, HV A records obtained by the CIA and then shared with German counterintelligence, revealed that almost half of all agents were run by the SWT.⁵⁴

Target NATO

Recruitment of West German citizens working at NATO headquarters near Brussels was another key HV A mission. Former officers claim that NATO was “an open book” for the HV A.⁵⁵ Starting in the mid-1960s, well-placed agents provided comprehensive knowledge of the Western alliance’s military plans, intentions, and capabilities, often by purloining documents that reached East Berlin before or at the same time NATO’s senior officials received them. HV A agents also provided a steady stream of information on Western armaments production and deployments, arms control policy, military-technological developments, and material and human resources, and identified the numbers and locations of all nuclear weapons deployed in Western Europe.⁵⁶ Agents also acquired copies of NATO’s annual defense plans, as well as the defense plans of its member states. “We knew exactly the strengths and weaknesses of NATO. We could count down to the last soldier, tank, and aircraft,” former HV A officers claim.⁵⁷ There were only two gaps on their list of intelligence requirements: NATO’s nuclear-targeting plans, which they were forced to infer

52 See Appendix 17 in Siebenmorgen, “Staats-sicherheit” der DDR, 326-27.

53 Sélitrenny and Weichert, *Das unheimliche Erbe*, 30.

54 Kristie Macrakis, “The Crown Jewels and the Importance of Scientific-Technical Intelligence,” in *East German Foreign Intelligence*, ed. Friis et al., 185.

55 R. Rupp, K. Rehbaum, and K. Eichner, *Militärsplionage: Die DDR-Aufklärung in NATO and Bundeswehr* (Berlin, n.d. [2011?]). See especially chapter 7.1: “Die NATO — ein offenes Buch für die HV A,” 235-48.

56 *Ibid.*, 11-12.

57 *Ibid.*, 193.

from analysis of military exercises and documents, and NATO's General Defense Plan.⁵⁸

The former officers were bragging but not exaggerating. Research based on some ten thousand pages of NATO documents acquired by the HV A and deposited in the German agency that oversees the archives of the former MfS, the BStU, supports their assertions.⁵⁹ The HV A's success was "striking."⁶⁰ From the late 1970s until the demise of the Soviet bloc, East German "human intelligence operations targeting the Western alliance evolved into one of the most successful enterprises by any communist intelligence service."⁶¹ HV A agents had access to classified documents from NATO, the West German Ministry of Defense and Bundeswehr (Federal Armed Forces), US forces stationed in West Germany and West Berlin, and the American embassy in Bonn. The HV A also obtained information on a regular basis from every other member of the Western alliance.⁶²

58 Ibid., 12, 236-37.

59 See the List of Abbreviations. The BStU has also been known as the Gauck-Behörde, after Federal Commissioner Joachim Gauck and as the Birthler-Behörde after Gauck's successor Marianne Birthler. In 2011, Roland Jahn replaced Birthler.

60 Bernd Schaefer, "The Warsaw Pact's Intelligence on NATO: East German Military Espionage against the West," 3; <<http://www.hollings.net/Content/ParallelHistoryProject-STASIntelligenceOn-NATO.pdf>>

61 Ibid., 1.

62 Ibid., 3.

63 Richter and Rösler, *Wolfs West-Spione*, 55.

64 Wolf, *Man Without a Face*, 292-93.

65 Jamie Dettmer, "Stasi Lured Americans to Spy for E. Germany," *Washington Times*, November 14, 1994, A1.

66 Günter Bohnsack, *Die Legende stirbt: Das Ende Wolfs Geheimdienst* (Berlin, 1997), 60.

Target USA/CIA

Until the late 1970s, the Eastern European services worked under an explicit division of labor in which the KGB jealously guarded its primary status in targeting the United States and the CIA. Each allied service had to obtain KGB permission before developing an anti-US operation, and then the operation had to be cleared in advance by the KGB and serve KGB interests. By the turn of the decade, however, the division of labor had been revised. The HV A was allowed to hit off its own bat. As two ex-officers reported, "the HV A became increasingly engaged in targeting the US intelligence services under the solipsistic slogan 'the CIA is the main enemy; the West German intelligence services are our main target.'"⁶³

Wolf explained his new hunting license by saying that "the Soviets believed that my country's forward geographic position in Europe and our immediate proximity to the American sectors of Berlin and Germany gave us certain advantages in penetrating the United States." The large US presence offered the HV A "a veritable smorgasbord of sources."⁶⁴ Only after the Berlin Wall had fallen and the GDR had collapsed did US intelligence discover that the HV A had netted dozens of American servicemen, businessmen, and students in West Germany and West Berlin.⁶⁵ Wolf's reputation soared in Moscow, and his officers began calling him the Eastern bloc's *resident* for Western Europe.⁶⁶

The chief HV A analyst of the CIA, Klaus Eichner, noted that “it was difficult to operate against the CIA without inside sources. But it was not impossible.”⁶⁷ The HV A’s solution was to dispatch double agents to the agency, i.e., agents pretending to work for the CIA while actually under East German control. The HV A term for double-agent operations was *Blickfeldmaßnahmen*, field-of-vision measures. Putting phony agents in the CIA’s field of vision was one of the biggest intelligence coups of the Cold War. As Wolf noted in his memoir:

By the late 1980s, we were in the enviable position of knowing that not a single CIA agent had worked in East Germany without having been turned into a double agent [after being caught by East German counterespionage] or working for us from the start. On our orders they were all delivering carefully selected information and disinformation to the Americans.⁶⁸

Former senior CIA officials have confirmed Wolf’s claim, acknowledging that all of their putative East German agents were doubles.⁶⁹ “We were batting zero” in East Germany, one noted. Another added, “They dangled people in front of us . . . [and] we wound up taking the bait.”⁷⁰

The double-agent deception had serious implications. For one thing, it meant that by controlling the agency’s putative agents, the HV A neutralized an entire sector of Eastern bloc operations. For another, the East Germans ensured that the CIA knew no more and no less than what they allowed it to know. Disinformation was used to shape the agency’s perception of East German realities. Another result was to tie up CIA resources with bogus agents while keeping the Americans away from genuine sources of information.⁷¹

Target Field Station Berlin

Field Station Berlin (FSB) was America’s premier signals intelligence (Sigint) site during the Cold War. Located in the upscale Grunewald district in the British sector of West Berlin, it was perched atop the Teufelsberg (Devil’s Mountain), an earth-covered mound formed from 25 million tons of rubble excavated from bombed-out Berlin. To outsiders, FSB’s geodesic domes and protruding antennas made it look like a radar station. In fact, it was a gigantic listening post that offered a 115-meter, 360-degree vantage point from which to monitor Soviet and Warsaw Pact military forces and installations.

67 Klaus Eichner and Andreas Dobbert, *Headquarters Germany: Die USA-Geheimdienste in Deutschland* (Berlin, 1997), 103.

68 Wolf, *Man Without a Face*, 285.

69 “Testimony of Bob Inman, Hearings of the Commission on the Roles and Capabilities of the United States Intelligence Community”: <www.fas.org/irp/commission/testinma.htm>; see also “Remarks of Former DCI Robert Gates to the CIA Conference ‘US Intelligence and the End of the Cold War,’” Texas A&M University: <www.cia.gov/news-information/speeches-testimony/1999/dci_speech_111999gatesremarkshtml>

70 John Marks, “The Spymaster Unmasked,” 41, 45.

71 See Fischer, “Deaf, Dumb, and Blind,” 51, 54–60.

In the early 1980s, the HV A recruited an American sergeant, James W. Hall III, who was assigned to FSB as a member of the 766th Military Intelligence Battalion of the US Army's Intelligence and Security Command (INSCOM). This single recruitment would be enough to put the HV A in the record book of Cold War espionage. The East Germans were not fooled by FSB's cover story as a radar facility, but they underestimated its range, believing that it extended only as far eastward as Poland. Hall revealed that the Americans could eavesdrop on Soviet troops as far away as the western USSR.

Hall caused inestimable damage. He compromised vital US capabilities for gathering real-time intelligence on Warsaw Pact armed forces and providing early indications and warning of war. Markus Wolf claimed that Hall's treason "helped our service cripple American electronic surveillance of Eastern Europe for six years."⁷² US officials confirmed that the operations Hall compromised went dead in the 1980s.⁷³

Hall gave the HV A and KGB insight into the worldwide organization, locations, and operations of the US Sigint community. On just one occasion, he handed over thirteen documents from NSA, INSCOM, and the Pentagon's Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA). Wolf passed them on to MfS's Sigint directorate, whose evaluation concluded that:

The material consists of some of the most important American signals intelligence directives . . . [and] is timely and extremely valuable for the further development of our work and has great operational and political value. . . . The contents, some of which are global in nature, some very detailed, expose basic plans of the enemy for signals collection into the next decade.⁷⁴

Hall left West Berlin in late 1986 for a stateside post and a year later requested assignment to the 205th Military Intelligence Battalion in Frankfurt am Main, which supported the US Army's V Corps. The new job was a windfall for Hall and for the HV A. As Hall later confessed, he had access to "the same type of information as in Berlin, only more current, more state of the art."⁷⁵ His biggest haul was a complete copy of the NSA's National Sigint Requirements List (NSRL), which former HV A officers described as "a worldwide wish list" of intelligence requirements. The NSRL consisted of 4,000 pages that were kept in ten loose-leaf binders for continual updating.⁷⁶

72 Wolf, *Man Without a Face*, 295-96.

73 Stephen Engelberg and Michael Wines, "U.S. Says Soldier Crippled Spy Post Set Up in Berlin," *New York Times*, May 7, 1989, A1.

74 Kristie Macrakis, *Seduced by Secrets: Inside the Stasi's Spy-Tech World* (New York, 2008), 111.

75 Stephen Engelberg, "Jury Hears Tale of Spy Who Did It out of Greed," *New York Times*, July 19, 1989, A10.

76 Macrakis, *Seduced by Secrets*, 105.

From 1982 to 1988, the HV A disseminated 232 intelligence reports attributed to Hall. Of those, 169 received the highest evaluation of I (very valuable), and 59 received a grade of II (valuable).⁷⁷ Ironically, Hall began spying for the KGB before the HV A recruited him. Eventually, the Soviets and East Germans compared notes and decided that they were running the same agent and paying twice for his information. Hall was given a choice: work for the KGB or the HV A but not both. He chose the East Germans.

Praetorian Guard of the Soviet Empire

During the 1980s, the KGB became increasingly dependent on the HV A for foreign intelligence, counterintelligence, and internal security inside and outside the Eastern bloc. The Soviet service was a spent force plagued by bureaucratization, poor morale, corruption, defections, expulsions from foreign countries, and an inability to recruit well-placed agents.⁷⁸

The HV A set the precedent in Poland. The rise of Solidarity, the labor union that ballooned into a ten-million-strong national protest movement, sent shudders through the East German regime. The MfS and the HV A formed task forces aimed at thwarting the Polish “counterrevolution.”⁷⁹ The HV A began targeting Solidarity as early as 1980.⁸⁰ Covert measures were used to sow distrust and discord within the union’s ranks and discredit Solidarity as an alleged tool of Western subversion. The campaign escalated after December 13, 1981, when a military dictatorship under the command of Gen. Wojciech Jaruzelski seized power, declared martial law, and outlawed Solidarity, driving it underground.

After Jaruzelski’s coup, a task force of MfS and HV A counterintelligence officers arrived in neighboring Poland where it took over an entire floor of the East German embassy in Warsaw and operated from offices in consulates in Szczecin (Stettin), Gdańsk (Danzig), Wrocław (Breslau), and Kraków.⁸¹ Along the East German-Polish border, the main land route used for delivering humanitarian aid from the West, the MfS controlled all traffic entering and exiting Poland, searching for printing equipment, radios, and other contraband being smuggled to Solidarity.⁸² The task force recruited its own agent networks, intercepted mail, and conducted physical, audio, and video surveillance of Solidarity leaders and Catholic Church officials who supported it.

77 Herbstritt, *Bundesbürger im Dienst der DDR-Spionage*, 158.

78 Sélitrenny and Weichert, *Das unheimliche Erbe*, 115.

79 Markus Wolf, *Spionagechef im geheimen Krieg. Erinnerungen* (Munich, 1997), 335.

80 Wolf, *Man Without a Face*, 122–25.

81 Manfred Schell and Werner Kalinka, *STASI and kein Ende: Personen und Fakten* (Frankfurt/M and Berlin, 1991), 270.

82 *Ibid.*, 122–25.

The HV A also pursued Solidarity leaders in the West. Using intercepted correspondence, it forged letters suggesting that exiled activists were enjoying the “good life” while their colleagues were living underground in Poland. Meanwhile, Wolf was tasked to spy on Western governments, political parties, and intelligence services, as well as Polish émigré organizations, all suspected of helping Solidarity.⁸³

The East Germans failed to disrupt or defeat Solidarity, which survived underground and then arose, Phoenix-like, in 1988 and then won the first free elections held in the Eastern bloc in 1989. Yet, Moscow retained its confidence in the MfS and HV A. On its orders, more operations groups were deployed to Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Bulgaria, as well as to the USSR itself in Moscow, Leningrad, and Kiev.⁸⁴

The last Stalinist regime in Eastern Europe and the once young but now aging Stalinists in the MfS and HV A became the Praetorian Guard of the Soviet empire. That empire, however, was crumbling under their feet. In just six months after Solidarity’s electoral victory, all the other Eastern bloc regimes collapsed in “a chain reaction originating in the Polish revolt.”⁸⁵

New winds were blowing from Moscow, where the new Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, was trying, and failing, to reform the communist system at home and in Eastern Europe. During a visit to East Berlin in 1989, Gorbachev warned the SED regime to get on board with the reform movement. The warning was ignored. The East German people, meanwhile, took to the streets in silent protests until the Berlin Wall was opened and the communist regime fell, taking the HV A with it.

Final Thoughts

German reunification spelled the end of German-Soviet intelligence cooperation. For seventy years, Moscow benefited from a Fifth Column of Germans who spied on Germany for Russia. The German contribution to Soviet intelligence was considerable, a fascinating and still little-known subject in the history of intelligence, as well as the history of Germany and German-Soviet relations.

For all the contributions the KPD and the HV A made to Soviet intelligence, however, their blind devotion earned no gratitude from Moscow. Stalin ruthlessly purged the German communist exiles,

83 Wolf, *Man Without a Face*, 175.

84 Schell and Kalinka, *STASI and kein Ende*, 274–75; and Sélitrenny and Weichert, *Das unheimliche Erbe*, 116.

85 Constantine Pleshakov, *There Is No Freedom Without Bread: 1989 and the Civil War that Brought Down Communism* (New York, 2009), 6.

who had helped him build an industrial base and the armed might that defeated Hitler's Wehrmacht and paved the way to the USSR's rise as a world power.

86 Wolf, *Man Without a Face*, 10-15, 4-5.

87 *Ibid.*, 4-5.

88 *Ibid.*, 7.

If the East Germans expected Soviet gratitude, they, too, were disappointed. Facing the prospect of indictment in the new Germany, Wolf had two choices: an offer from the CIA of "a considerable sum of money" and resettlement in the United States, or flight to Moscow, "the city of my childhood . . . where a large part of my heart had always remained."⁸⁶ He chose the second course. Once there, however, he found "no great rush of comradely support." Indeed, the KGB was in no position to help, since "the supposedly eternal brotherhood to which we had raised our glasses down the years was now a ragged band."⁸⁷ Wolf pleaded directly to Gorbachev: "We were said to have made a great contribution to your security. Now, in our hour of need, I assume that you will not deny us your help."⁸⁸ Gorbachev never replied. He was too busy trying to save what was left of a ragged Soviet Union.

Benjamin B. Fischer is a retired chief historian of the CIA. Before he joined the CIA's History Staff, he served for twenty years as an active CIA officer. He is an expert in Cold War and diplomatic history, as well as in intelligence, security, and defense issues. His publications include *At Cold War's End: U.S. Intelligence on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, 1989-1991* (1999) and many articles in the *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence*.

