

## **THE FOREIGN INTELLIGENCE-GATHERING OF THE MfS' *HAUPTVERWALTUNG AUFKLÄRUNG***

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### Introduction

I am going to present the operations of the section of the East German intelligence agency responsible for gathering intelligence outside East Germany. That intelligence service was called the MfS, the German acronym for the Ministry of State Security, also known as the Stasi. And the section responsible for foreign operations was called the HVA, the Main Department Reconnaissance.

Not much more is known about the HVA after the 1989 Revolution than before. The reason is that the HVA destroyed nearly all its archives before the mob took over its East Berlin headquarters. After the Revolution of November 1989 when the Berlin Wall fell down, the HVA documents that hadn't been destroyed were found by Citizen's Committees in the HVA headquarters as well as elsewhere in the provinces where copies of documents were sometimes sent. However, out of these few documents that could be recovered, very little information has become available.

### The early years of foreign actions

The early development of East German foreign intelligence paralleled that of the domestic security service. And both were no more than auxiliaries of the KGB which directed their work down to the smallest details. The East German Communist Party, the SED, provided an agency for Stasi covert operations abroad. It was officially set up as the shipping department of the Party but, in fact, it served as a front for the creation of a sabotage network led by Ernst Wollweber.

Little is known for certain about the activities of Wollweber's network. But it is known that Swedish and Norwegian authorities took the threat seriously and that in 1950, the Swedish police reported that there were more than 150 eastern agents in the country. Both countries employed their counter-intelligence services against Wollweber's network. The Norwegian authorities never discovered exactly what Stasi's saboteurs had been doing in Norway while the Wollweber's network failed to leave a conclusive trail in Sweden where the security service was very efficient.

It is believed that Wollweber's sabotage network was used to disrupt Allies supplies during the Korean War, a conflict that began in June 1950 and lasted until 1953, opposing South Korea, backed by American, British, Canadian, Australian, and Turkish troops, and North Korea, joined by China. The number of accidents during the Korean War which might have been caused by Wollweber's saboteurs come to 13 and were mainly directed against British ships and French harbors. However, it is interesting to note that not one of these accidents led to diplomatic protests from the Western powers. One could probably argue that the lack of evidence against these efficient saboteurs was the main reason to explain why East Germany has never been accused of being involved in these disruptions. Actually, suspicion was in fact directed toward the Soviet authorities who were believed to be willing to help North Korea.

After the war, all suspicions that the Soviet Bloc powers were active in sabotaging Western shipping disappeared and were never to surface again.

### The *Institut für Wirtschaftswissenschaftliche Forschung* (IWF)

The first official East German foreign intelligence service appeared in 1951 under the name APN, the German acronym for Foreign Political Intelligence Service. It was provided with a front organization, the Institute for Economic Research, known as IWF. It was set up as an East-West trade organization, separate from the MfS as well as from Wollweber's sabotage operations.

The IWF depended on the Soviets ideologically, psychologically and for its training. Each department had a Soviet liaison officer attached to it. In fact the Soviets dominated the IWF, since East Germany was pretty much an occupied land and was isolated diplomatically.

The IWF was divided into four Main Departments. They were the Department of political and military espionage, the Department of economic espionage, the Department of central evaluation of all intelligence, and the General administration. Two operational departments were in charge of counter-intelligence and of espionage in the field of economics and technology. The structure was completed with a Personnel department.

When looking at the name of these departments, we realize that the acquisition of information about Western technology was priority for the East Germans. But there again, very little is known about foreign activities of the Stasi. The only success of the IWF for which evidence exists at the present time was the acquisition in 1952 of the treaty document for the European Defense Community. That treaty was concluded in Paris but by 1954 the necessity for such a community diminished and in its place there arose the Western European Unity Treaty of 1955, setting up the Western European Union.

Operations of the IWF in West Germany soon ran into difficulties, first with the arrest, in August 1952, of one of its officers, Ludwig Weis. Later, in April 1953, following the defection of IWF officer Johann Krauss, the West Germans arrested 38 people on suspicion of espionage during what will be known as the Vulcan Affair. Although only three of them were sentenced to prison, the IWF had been publicly humiliated and its secret intelligence had collapsed. At the end of the year, the IWF ceased to exist and all foreign operations were incorporated in the MfS as Main Department 15.

### The main target: West Germany

In December 1952, IWF officer Markus Wolf became head of East German foreign intelligence. In 1956, the Main Department 15 changed its name to Main Administration Reconnaissance, or HVA. The trust in which the Russians held Wolf was the key reason for his appointment as head of East German foreign intelligence at the age of only 30.

It can easily be stated that one of the greatest successes of the HVA was the work of agent Günter Guillaume who, as a Stasi agent, became the personal assistant of West German chancellor Willy Brandt for 18 years, from 1956 to 1974. He was arranging his contacts with the party and the trade unions, fixing his engagements and going with him on visits to the provinces. He was arrested on April 1974, served 7 years of his 13-year jail sentence and then returned to East Germany as part of an East-West agent exchange in October 1981. He was

awarded the DDR's highest medal and treated as a hero. Although Guillaume's exposure was a considerable blow to the HVA, it was only one of the many embarrassments caused to West Germany by the efficient HVA agents from the 50s to the 90s.

The HVA was used, to begin with, to bring down West German politicians and it was quite successful in doing this. It played on the fear of many in West Germany and many more abroad, that former Nazis were regaining power and influence in West Germany. To do so, books were published exposing Nazi ministers, state secretaries, generals and admirals of the armed forces, high judicial officials, lawyers and judges, diplomats, and police and security officials. This was an exaggeration, but not a great one, according to sources cited by Childs and Popplewell in their book. Also, a British journalist who had been a Reuters correspondent in Germany, defected to East Berlin where he edited the Democratic German Report between 1952 and 1975, devoting much space to attacking Western German politicians, diplomats, industrialists, lawyers, police officials and generals for their pasts. Of all the information available to the HVA, some of course was used to blackmail West Germans into working for the DDR. These tactics are ironically interesting since evidence reveals that many Communist Party members as well as Stasi officers were former Nazis.

The MfS had a serious opponent on the other side of the Wall named Reinhard Gehlen. He was a former colonel who headed German military intelligence on Eastern Front in the Second World War and became the first head of the West Germany's foreign intelligence organization called the BND, from 1956 to 1968. In the early postwar period, it was easy for the BND to infiltrate East Germany just as it was easy for the Soviets and the MfS to infiltrate the West. One of its great successes, in collaboration with the CIA, was a tunnel which started in the US sector of Berlin and ran for six hundred yards into East Berlin, enabling the interception of virtually all the most important Soviet and East German communications going through diplomatic, political and military offices. The MfS could benefit from a British intelligence officer who was working for the Soviets and who told East Berlin about the existence of that tunnel which was closed down in April 1956.

The operations of the HVA against members of the West German Establishment justified the creation, in 1966, of Department 10. Its task was mainly to expose leading figures, or holders of sensitive posts, as former Nazis, war criminals and the like. One example of victim of such campaign was Kurt-Georg Kiesinger, who became Chancellor in 1966 at the head of the great coalition government formed of Christian Democrats and Social Democrats. The HVA fed documents to Western journalists attempting to show that Kiesinger had been an ardent propagandist for the Nazi regime.

Another tactic used by the HVA was the one involving "Romeos" whose targets were mainly female secretaries they would seduce and even marry in order to convince them to spy for the Stasi. At least 50 secretaries were recruited and did work for the HVA from the 60s to the 80s, providing sensitive information and causing harmful damage, amongst the worst cases of espionage in the history of West Germany. It is fair to say that the same kind of tactics, but involving female Stasi agents, have been successfully used against men for HVA recruiting purposes.

Although West Germany was the primary target of the HVA, it was also operating abroad. But in the 50s and 60s the HVA's scope for action abroad was limited by Western foreign policy according to which none of the states of the Western Alliance did recognize the DDR, East Germany. As a result East Berlin was left without diplomatic missions in most countries

and therefore the HVA was unable to work from the cover of Residencies established under the diplomatic immunity of East German Embassies. Despite that major difficulty, the HVA undertook the creation of networks abroad. These networks were constituted of “illegals”, namely intelligence officers operating abroad under the cover of false assumed nationality. The German presence abroad was also seen as a fertile source of agents for the HVA. In the 70s, the development of the Stasi’s activities outside Germany was made possible by the increasing number of states which recognized the DDR after West Germany signed the Treaty of Moscow in 1970, allowing the legal representation of East Germany throughout the world to increase.

### Operations in the United States

It was easier for the MfS to set up operations in the United States after diplomatic relations were established between East Berlin and Washington, and the representation of East Germany at the United Nations Organization in New York represented another strategic advantage. However, operations in the United States were tarnished by the case of the second most important East German defector Eberhard Lüttich. Sent out to New York by the HVA in 1973, he had been given the task of making contacts with American universities, in order to recruit academics as agents. The FBI uncovered him in 1979 and Americans were then able to recruit him. The second case of HVA espionage in the United States involved a professor of physics, Alfred Zehe, who has been a guest lecturer at Puebla University in Mexico in the late 70s. He bought weapon plans from a civilian employee of the US Marine Corps who later decided to work for the FBI and had Zehe arrested in 1983.

### Britain: recruiting journalists, academics, students

As stated in Childs and Popplewell’s book, the Stasi could fall back on a tradition of German communist spying in Britain. It is argued that at the beginning, East Germany could count on the Soviet network of agents in Britain to undertake their own foreign operations in that country. The Stasi was also interested in surveillance of British visitors to East Germany and in recruiting British journalists and academics for their cause.

It is said that recruitment of Western politicians by the Stasi was expressly prohibited as counter-productive. Such politicians could be drawn into friendly conversations, lunches, dinners, fact-finding visits and other hospitality but attempts to recruit them would only frighten them off, perhaps lead to diplomatic protests, and certainly weaken the East German Communist Party’s charm offensive to the West.

Journalists, on the other hand, were fair game. They had the means to provide a good deal of information and could be used to cleverly mould opinion towards a more sympathetic view of East Germany and its policies. Academics were in a similar position to journalists and Stasi quickly learn how to flatter their ego in order to obtain their collaboration. Students were even more vulnerable than their teachers. Their lack of money and experience, their generosity, idealism and lust for adventure could be exploited. Over the years, thousands of British students went on exchanges to East Germany.

In general, the Stasi were always aware that the moves of East German diplomats and journalists were being monitored in Britain by MI5 and other security bodies and that most of their attempts at recruitment would end in failure.

### Fraternal assistance in Asia and Africa

It seems that intelligence operations against the Soviet Bloc's second great rival, China, were the preserve of the KGB and, possibly, of the other satellite intelligence services. HVA doesn't seem to have been significantly involved in China or even elsewhere in South-East Asia. The same is not true, however, of Africa and the Middle East. East Germany provided assistance to developing states by helping them in the development of their police and security services. It also cooperated closely with some national liberation movements, such as the Palestine Liberation Organization, the PLO, and the African National Congress. In these areas of the world, the MfS was mainly acting as an auxiliary to the KGB by training security services of other states who entered the Soviet empire.

The mid-70s was the heyday of Soviet Bloc influence in sub-Saharan Africa. A Marxist-leaning junta came to power in Ethiopia in 1974. Following the break-up of the Portuguese Empire, Marxist regimes also came into existence in Angola and Mozambique. At this time the Stasi made a major contribution to the development of the police and security services of Angola, Ethiopia, Mozambique and, in the Arab world, to the People's Republic of Yemen. They also provided security advisers for two brutal dictators, President Francisco Macias Nguema of Equatorial Guinea, who fell in 1979, and President Idi Amin of Uganda, who was ousted in 1980.

By 1977 it was reported that the MfS was involved in building up the security services of Angola and Mozambique. The local agents were much more brutal than the Stasi was at home in East Germany. Indeed, they sent dissenters to labor camps in Mozambique, joined brutal military detachments in Ethiopia, trained Ethiopian regular and secret police, and ran concentration camps in South Yemen.

### International terrorism

The involvement of the MfS with the Third World is closely linked with its involvement in supporting terrorism. Revelations about East Germany's assistance to international terrorists began after the seizure of Stasi headquarters throughout the country at the end of 1989 and let the Western public realize that its support for international terrorism was far greater than it was suspected. From 1977 on, the Stasi provided the West German terrorists of the Red Army Faction, the RAF, with new identities, papers, apartments, jobs and even with hiding places inside West Germany. But they also facilitated their contacts with the Palestine Liberation Organization, the PLO, mainly for training purposes. In fact, the connection between the RAF and the PLO was so close that on two occasions they collaborated in hijackings.

The Stasi also had very close links with the PLO itself. That support has never been a secret and Yaser Arafat was received in Germany as a state guest. But the extent of East German support for the PLO was far greater than Western observers suspected in the 70s and 80s. In August 1990, the East German Minister for Disarmament and Defense referred to documents which proved that the communist regime had provided military training for the PLO in East Berlin. Some sources even claim the direct involvement of the MfS in the Libyan-backed bombing of the West Berlin "La Belle" discothèque in 1986, which led to the death of two American soldiers and a woman and left 200 people injured. The Stasi knew very well that the terrorist group was preparing to bomb a US military target in West Berlin, they helped

transport the explosives used in the attack, and they allowed the terrorists to return to East Berlin thereafter.

One could ask why East Germany took such a risk in supporting international terrorism, especially since from the end of the 70s, it became increasingly dependent on financial aid from West Germany. The East German Communist Party was grateful to Iraq, which, in April 1969, was the second non-communist state to recognize East Germany. Sudan, Syria, South Yemen, and Egypt followed in a matter of weeks. In the Middle East, the Germans were more popular than the Soviets and therefore, East Germany was hoping to reap economic as well as political favors from its Arab friends. In these circumstances, the MfS would not hesitate from giving assistance of all kinds to the PLO, Iraq, South Yemen and the other friends of the East German Communist Party.

### Conclusion

In November 1989, the wall separating the two Germanies was opened. On 17 November 1989, the new head of government Hans Modrow announced the abolition of the MfS and its replacement by the Office for National Security, the AfNS. The AfNS was abolished on 14 December 1989 and, on 3 October 1990, East Germany joined the Federal Republic.

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## Abbreviations

- AfNS Amt für Nationale Sicherheit: Office of National Security (Nov. to Dec. 1989)
- APN Außenpolitischer Nachrichtendienst: Foreign Political Intelligence Service
- BND Bundesnachrichtendienst: Federal Intelligence Service (West Germany's foreign intelligence service)
- DDR Deutsche Demokratische Republik: German Democratic Republic (East Germany)
- HVA Hauptverwaltung Aufklärung: Main Administration Reconnaissance (Stasi's foreign intelligence organization)
- IWF Institut für Wirtschaftswissenschaftliche Forschung: Institute for Economic Research (Cover for first East German foreign intelligence service)
- KGB Komitet gosudarstvennoi bezopasnosti: Committee for State Security (Soviet security and foreign intelligence agency)
- MfS Ministerium für Staatssicherheit: Ministry for State Security (East German intelligence agency, 1950-1989)
- PLO Palestine Liberation Organization
- RAF Red Faction Army (West German terrorist group)
- SED Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands: Socialist Unity Party of Germany (East German Communist Party)

**Some HVA's Departments**  
(partial list of the 15 to 20 departments)

<u>Department I</u>	Federal Republic of Germany's state apparatus
<u>Department II</u>	Parties and public organizations in the Federal Republic of Germany
<u>Department III</u>	HVA's residencies in the West
<u>Department IV</u>	Federal Republic of Germany military-strategic intelligence
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**The Oath of Stasi**

Sie Schwüren:

Ihrem Vaterland,  
der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik,  
allzeit treu zu dienen,  
sie auf Befehl der Arbeiter-und-Bauern-  
Regierung unter Einsatz Ihres Lebens  
gegen jeden Feind zu Schützen,  
den militärischen Vorgesetzten  
unbedingten Gehorsam zu leisten,  
immer und überall die Ehre  
unsere Republik und des Ministerium für  
Staatssicherheit zu wahren.

We Swear:

to our Fatherland,  
the German Democratic Republic,  
eternal loyalty,  
at the order of their Workers and Farmers  
Government to offer their lives  
in defense against every enemy  
to be to the military authorities  
unquestioningly obedient  
forever and everywhere in the world  
to protect our Republic and our Ministry of  
State Security