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On the Frontline of Cold War Espionage

Few institutions have become more striking symbols of Soviet-style totalitarianism than East Germany's Ministry for State Security (MfS, or Stasi). Like its archetype, the Soviet KGB, the notorious Stasi combined foreign espionage and domestic security functions under one administrative roof. But while MfS domestic security operations have generated sustained academic and popular interest–witness the Oscar-winning movie *The Lives of Others* (dir. Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, 2006)–the same cannot be said about the operations of the Stasi's foreign intelligence arm, the HVA (Hauptverwaltung A, or main department A). Knowledgeable publications in English are particularly rare. This collection of articles therefore constitutes a welcome effort to add to our understanding of an important Cold War intelligence agency.

The origins of *East German Foreign Intelligence* lie in a conference on the same subject in Odense, Denmark in November 2007. Intended as a forum for historians and former practitioners, the conference was quickly hijacked by retired MfS officers who droned on about the successful espionage operations of their agency, brushed critical questions aside, and "became louder, less restrained, finally banging on the benches with abandon and dominating the venue."[1] To add insult to injury, the MfS retirees quickly published their own papers in an edited volume, without consulting the dumbfounded Danish conference organizers.[2] *East German Foreign Intelligence* is the academics' response to what many of them considered a rose-tinted view of the HVA.

The volume reproduces papers by several Odense participants but includes a number of contributions from other Cold War and intelligence historians as well. The thirteen articles are grouped thematically in three sections, "Intelligence and Counter-Intelligence," "Political Intelligence," and "Scientific-Technical and Military Intelligence." While the introduction contends that the volume "examine[s] East German foreign intelligence as a historical problem" (p. 6), this statement is somewhat misleading, since only six of the thirteen chapters deal with HVA espionage. The others explore a variety of loosely related subjects, ranging from KGB military intelligence during the Berlin Crisis to CIA operations in East Germany.

The first chapter, "Counter-Intelligence in Post-War Europe, 1945-1965" by renowned espionage writer Nigel West, is a case in point. West provides an eloquent overview of KGB penetration efforts of Western agencies, yet his contribution has little bearing on East German foreign intelligence, which is referenced merely in one paragraph. The author concludes with a curious digression on KGB defector Anatoli Golitsyn. Following his defection in 1961, Golitsyn made a series of fantastic claims, such as British prime minister Harold Wilson being a KGB informer, the Sino-Soviet split being a charade intended to deceive the West, and several other Soviet defectors being KGB plants. Most of Golitsyn's assertions were eventually debunked, and the eminent intelligence historian Christopher Andrew has called him an "unreliable conspiracy theorist."[3] West, however, considers many of Golitsyn's far-fetched theories true. For example, he writes that Golitsyn "made a compelling argument for suggesting that (Soviet military intelligence colonel Oleg Penkovsky), too, had been a dispatched agent, working throughout under KGB control" (p. 17). In fact, Penkovsky had provided CIA and SIS (British intelligence) with critical information on Soviet intentions and military capabilities during the Berlin and Cuban Missile crises. He was eventually captured by KGB counterintelligence, paraded at a Moscow show trial, found guilty of espionage, and executed. Penkovsky's case has been studied in depth, and the evidence comes down firmly on the side of those who argue that he was a genuine agent as well as a courageous man.[4]

The second chapter, by Paul Maddrell, explores "Western Espionage and Stasi Counter-Espionage in East Germany, 1953-1961," i.e., in the years leading up to the erection of the Berlin Wall. Based on the records of MfS counterintelligence, Maddrell concludes that Western (U.S., British, West German, and French) agencies operated thousands of spies in East Germany during that time period. "Save for the Federal Republic of Germany," he writes, "no other state has been so deeply penetrated by spies" (p. 25). Since recruitment and communication between Western intelligence and their agents in the GDR depended on the steady flow of East German refugees into West Germany, and uninhibited transit between East and West Berlin, the erection of the Berlin Wall abruptly ended this espionage bonanza. Although "not built to suppress Western espionage," the wall "still benefited the Stasi's counter-intelligence divisions" (p. 31ff).

Based largely on secondary sources, Erich Schmidt-Eenboom's article, "The Rise and Fall of West German Intelligence Operations against East Germany," explores the same subject–Western intelligence operations against East Germany–but it addresses human intelligence or HUMINT (information gathered by agents or spies) as well as signals intelligence or SIGINT (interception of communication), and covers the entire Cold War period. Like Maddrell, he concludes that the Bundesnachrichtendiest (BND, West German intelligence) by and large succeeded in gathering military and economic information on East Germany, periodic setbacks notwithstanding. Although the eight years immediately following 1945 proved a "golden age" for West German spies, by the late 1980s, 90 percent of BND agents in the GDR were MfS double agents. By that time, however, BND SIGINT, working closely with the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) and National Reconnaissance Office (NRO), made up for this HUMINT failure. Maddrell's and Schmidt-Eenboom's findings are noteworthy since Western intelligence operations against East Germany are traditionally perceived as unsuccessful.

The title of Benjamin Fischer's contribution, "Deaf, Dumb, and Blind: The CIA in East Germany," is an accurate summary of the author's central thesis. According to Fischer, a former CIA chief historian, the MfS inflicted "one of the greatest defeats in intelligence history" on the CIA. (p. 48) By the end of the Cold War, Fischer contends, virtually all East German spies run by the CIA were double-agents whose true loyalty lay with the MfS. According to Fischer, an essential ingredient for the Stasi's success was CIA incompetence. In the words of HVA director Markus Wolf, identifying undercover CIA officers was "ridiculously easy" due to their garrulousness and penchant to share details of their true identities with their agents, and the MfS would routinely send their American counterparts "dangles" (*agents provocateurs*) in an effort to create double agents and penetrate the American agency. Successfully recruiting agents or spies is widely considered an intelligence officer's most important feat, and Fischer suggests that CIA officers occasionally subordinated professional judgment to personal advancement in the pursuit of this goal: "The evidence suggests that some [CIA officers] were fools but most were knaves. They covered up their failure by fraud and deceit, continuing to recruit double agents and disseminating a steady stream of tainted intelligence reports to their 'consumers.' By doing so, they compromised the intelligence process, their agency, and finally themselves" (p. 64).

Robert Livingston's article, "Rosenholz: Mischa's Files, CIA's Booty," examines the source material for most research into HVA operations. As the GDR was nearing its end, East German civil rights leaders, in "unsurpassed naiveté," put the HVA in charge of its own dissolution. In order to protect its agents, the agency set out to meticulously destroy its own records, but overlooked a large set of microfilmed records, including microfilmed copies of nearly 300,000 index cards of people in which the HVA had an interest. Termed "Rosenholz" by West German counterintelligence, these records cover the years 1973-88. In the early 1990s, the CIA obtained the Rosenholz files, and eventually made most of them available to West German authorities. There has been much speculation as to how the CIA managed to get their hands on Rosenholz. Based on interviews with five retired CIA officers, Livingston concludes that the HVA turned over the Rosenholz material to the KGB at the end of the Cold War, and a KGB archivist then walked into the U.S. embassy in Warsaw and offered them to the Americans in 1992. The CIA purchased the material for $75,000. Livingston's reconstruction of events is plausible, though final verification will have to await the opening of the relevant CIA files. While Rosenholz contributed to the arrest and conviction of top spies like Rainer Rupp ("Topas") at NATO headquarters and Gabriele Gast ("Gisela") at the BND, the overall judicial impact was limited: from 1993 to 1995, 2,928 judicial inquiries on espionage or treason charges were launched in Germany against West German citizens, many of them on the basis of information from the Rozenholz files. In the end, the courts handed down merely 252 convictions. Still, for historians, Rozenholz's work constitutes a treasure trove of information. For example, the material reveals that 60 percent of East German agents were ide-

ologically motivated–a fairly high number for the late Cold War era when many spies worked primarily for money–and that as much as 80 percent of Warsaw Pact intelligence on West Germany was collected by the HVA. The Rosenholz files will doubtlessly continue to shed a fascinating light on HVA operations.

Helmut Müller-Enberg's article, "Political Intelligence: Foci and Sources, 1969-1989," is precisely the kind of contribution one would hope to find in a volume titled *East German Foreign Intelligence*. Drawing mostly on secondary sources, the author sets out to methodically examine HVA operations. In West Germany, the HVA successfully penetrated a host of target organizations, including the federal chancellery, the foreign office, the ministries of interior and economic affairs, as well as political parties and political foundations. HVA also carried an impressive "wish list" of U.S. targets, including the White House, the departments of state and defense, and many high-profile private and semi-private organizations, such as the RAND Corporation, Harvard, and Georgetown University. And even though the HVA hardly ever succeeded in penetrating U.S.-based institutions, they successfully planted spies at the headquarters of U.S. forces in Europe (USEUCOM) in Stuttgart and U.S. land forces in Europe (USAREUR) in Heidelberg. In a fascinating case study, Müller-Enbergs reconstructs the story of an East German agent whom HVA initially sent to West Germany as a "sleeper," and then, in 1973, to New York City, where he found work at Schenker Logistics. Interestingly, this agent still "lives in the United States" but "has not yet responded to an interview request" (p. 109). This case study is testimony to the patience and long-term planning efforts HVA invested in their agents. In spite of such tactical accomplishments, the author concludes that "the HVA of the GDR could not procure strategic advantages, namely secure the existence of the state. In this respect, they failed to accomplish their mission" (p. 111).

Michael F. Scholz's contribution, "Active Measures and Disinformation as Part of East Germany's Propaganda War, 1953-1972," examines an integral element of HVA operations: covert efforts to influence individuals and organizations outside the Warsaw Pact. In East Germany, such "active measures" were carried out by the tenth department of foreign intelligence (HVA X) under Col. Ralf Wagenbreth. One of the most effective and enduring active measure campaigns run by HVA X consisted of efforts to taint West German officials as former Nazis, and thus besmirch the Federal Republic in the eyes of its Western partners. An early example of this type of smear campaign was a series of anti-Semitic graffiti at a synagogue in Cologne and other West German cities, at the time viewed as perpetrated by neo-Nazis, but in reality originating with the KGB. In a similar vein, HVA X attempted to expose Swedish links with the Third Reich during World War II, but the effect of this operation was limited. According to the author, Soviet bloc active measures ended abruptly in 1973, because of détente, and "because the Watergate scandal delivered enough real … material for the propaganda war (p. 128). While Scholz's article addresses an important subject, the general outlines of the East German active measures apparatus and operations are already known.[5] His focus on Sweden is novel, although a different case study might have been better suited for the purpose of an article set up as an introduction on active measures, since Sweden was very much a sideshow for HVA X, as Scholz makes clear. One might also add that active measures experienced a renaissance of sorts in the late 1980s, when KGB and HVA launched some of the most vicious disinformation campaigns of the Cold War.[6]

Bernd Lippmann's article, "Foreign Intelligence under the Roof of the Ministry for State Security," examines an important organizational feature of the HVA, which was characteristic of most Soviet bloc intelligence agencies and structurally set it apart from its Western counterparts: the HVA was fully integrated into and widely participated in the GDR's repressive security apparatus. As Lippmann demonstrates, personnel moved freely between the HVA and other MfS components, and HVA and MfS officers worked hand in hand, especially when it came to active measures against human rights and political groups. Lippmann's analysis provides an important counterpoint to the memoirs of many HVA officers, including former HVA directors Markus Wolf and Werner Groβmann, who have long insisted that the HVA was an intelligence gathering agency akin to the CIA or BND, and consequently largely removed from the dirty work carried out by the MfS's domestic security apparatus.

According to Thomas Wegener-Friis's article, "East German Espionage in Denmark," that nation was never high on the HVA's target list. Nonetheless, it carried some significance for the Warsaw Pact due to its NATO membership. The task of espionage in Denmark therefore fell largely to East German military intelligence, rather than the HVA. East Berlin obtained much of the desired military intelligence on Denmark from their spies at NATO headquarters ("Topas") and the West German defense ministry. East German agents in Denmark–there were eight by the end of the 1980s–were able to confirm much of this information on the ground. Denmark also served as a base for East German foreign intelligence to

build up agents for subsequent use elsewhere. Overall, Wegener-Friis judges East German intelligence activities against Denmark "quite successful, since only a few of the agents were caught and the majority of agents exposed after the end of the Cold War were, to a large extent, unknown, not only to the public, but also to the security authorities" (p. 159).

Beatrice de Graaf uses HVA operations in the Netherlands as a case study to examine "How the MfS' Worldview Affected the Intelligence Cycle." The intelligence cycle is a model frequently used to describe the intelligence process. Steps include determination of information requirements, gathering of raw intelligence, assembling a finished product or report, and dissemination of the latter to end-consumers, such as the political leadership. It is widely agreed that the Communist Party's worldview affected Soviet bloc intelligence operations,[7] but with regard to the MfS de Graaf rightly asks "*to what extent* this Manichean worldview dictated intelligence outcomes, supported already fixed opinions, and influenced the political orientation and situation assessment of the political leadership" (emphasis in original, p. 163). Her answer is nuanced. While the HVA often recruited agents in the Netherlands on an ideological basis, the resulting intelligence reports were mostly dispassionate and professional. However, the GDR's communist regime discouraged intelligence reports that could be "damaging to the party." In the few instances when the MfS ventured to produce realistic assessments and recommendations, these were usually ignored by the ruling party, the SED, due to the communist leadership's ideological blinkers. Therefore, the "regime remained blind to the dynamics of the real enmity that threatened the GDR–that of the GDR citizens against the party leadership." [p. 177]

In her contribution, "The Crown Jewels and the Importance of Scientific-Technical Intelligence," Kristie Macrakis examines the HVA's "Sektor Wissenschaft und Technik" (SWT), the department responsible for gathering scientific and technological information in the West. Almost half of the HVA's agents in the West worked for SWT; by 1988, the department ran roughly two hundred spies. Most were male, salaried employees at companies where electronics played a role, including IBM, Siemens, Texas Instruments, and the defense contractor MBB. For many agents, ideology was an important motivation for their espionage work. But while SWT penetrated Western companies with comparative ease, the resulting flow of scientific-technological intelligence to the GDR did not contribute to a modernized, competitive East German economy. "The Stasi," Macrakis concludes, "simply overestimated the power of stolen technological secrets to solve its economic problems, and the enormous spy infrastructure invested produced very small return"(p. 201). Macrakis's article provides a useful overview of East German "tech spies," although interested readers may want to refer directly to her excellent book, *Seduced by Secrets*, which covers this subject in more depth.[8]

Based on extensive research in the archives of the Central Committee of the Communist Party (CPSU) of the Soviet Union, Matthias Uhl examines "The Professionalization of Soviet Military Intelligence [GRU] and Its Influence on the Berlin Crisis under Khrushchev." The author argues that the GRU underestimated Western and Berliners' readiness to stand up to Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev's 1958 ultimatum, which gave the Western powers six months to withdraw from Berlin. This assessment failure resulted in the replacement of the GRU director and consequently a professionalization of the agency. Over the next years, the GRU ran several key spies in the West, including "Murat" at NATO headquarters in the 1960s, whose identity remains unknown to the present day. Even though the GRU suffered painful setbacks, such as the recruitment of GRU colonel Oleg Penkovsky by Western intelligence in 1960, overall the agency injected a degree of pragmatism into Khrushchev's adventure-prone policies: "The 'pragmatic, clear-headed orientation of KGB and GRU' made the 'passionate and slightly foolhardy' Khrushchev shy away from any adventurous decisions at the climax of the crisis and realistically assess the situation. This led to the withdrawal of the tanks at Checkpoint Charlie and later in the Cuban Missile Crisis to the withdrawal from the island" (p. 215).

Based on secondary sources and significant archival research, Armin Wagner examines "BND Military Espionage in East Germany, 1946-1994." Gathering information on Soviet forces in East Germany was one of the main tasks of West German intelligence (since 1956 formally known as BND), which could draw on the extensive archives of the German World War II army's intelligence division. Wagner distinguishes three phases of BND HUMINT operations in East Germany: While in the 1950s and early 1960s, the BND successfully reconnoitered Soviet troops in the GDR, MfS counterintelligence gained the upper hand in the 1960s, mostly due to the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961, which greatly handicapped infiltration from West to East Germany. Only in the 1980s was the BND able to launch new initiatives that posed significant problems to MfS counterintelligence. Comparing East and West German intelligence, the au-

thor concludes: "Intelligence activities are always bound to the intended purpose of their political leaders. Thus, the two German intelligence systems have to be strictly distinguished from each other in their historical evaluation, even though there was some sort of interlacing at the actual operational level. When former MfS and HVA officers argue espionage had been a way of keeping *peace* on both sides of the Iron Curtain, one must reply that only the East and West German spies of the BND could regard themselves as agents in the service of *freedom*" (emphasis in original, p. 232).

Edited volumes are, by their very nature, typically less coherent than monographs by a single author, and *East German Foreign Intelligence* is no exception. The book title suggests a comprehensive analysis of HVA operations and structure, but the volume delivers only partially on this promise. As mentioned earlier, just under half of the thirteen chapters deal with East German foreign intelligence proper. And while the book explores several issues of tangential relevance to East German foreign intelligence (e.g., active measures in Sweden, Soviet military intelligence under Khrushchev), readers will search in vain for subjects that one might expect to find in a volume with this title, such as HVA active measures in West Germany, or HVA operations in the Third World (Cuba, Yemen).

Moreover, some contributors contradict one another when passing judgment on the MfS's overall performance. Fischer, for one, makes a strong case for HVA counterintelligence excellence in thwarting CIA espionage in the GDR, and Wegener-Friis likewise judges HVA operations in Denmark "quite successful." On the other hand, Lippmann contends the HVA was an "absolute failure" because it was unable to save the SED regime, and Müller-Enberg makes the same point. The volume does not develop a formula as to what constitutes intelligence success or failure, and consequently this contradiction is never resolved.

Given the scarcity of English-language studies of the HVA, an in-depth overview in English on this subject is highly desirable. While *East German Foreign Intelligence* does not quite fill this gap, the various contributions address important aspects of Cold War intelligence and reveal much that is noteworthy about an important Soviet bloc intelligence service. Though more "raw intelligence" than "finished product," *East German Foreign Intelligence* will serve as a useful resource for those interested in the HVA and Cold War espionage, and should stimulate further research.

Notes

[1]. "Die Butterfahrt der Stasi-Offiziere," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, April 20, 2007.

[2]. Klaus Eichner, ed., *Hauptabteilung A: Geschichte, Aufgaben, Einsichten* (Berlin: Edition Ost, 2008).

[3]. *The Sunday Times*, June 24, 2007.

[4]. Jerrold L. Schecter and Peter S. Deriabin, *The Spy Who Saved the World: How a Soviet Colonel Changed the Course of the Cold War* (New York: Scribner, 1990).

[5]. See, for example, Günter Bohnsack and Herbert Brehmer, *Auftrag: Irreführung: Wie die Stasi Politik im Westen machte* (Hamburg: Carlsen, 1992).

[6]. Thomas Boghardt, "Operation Infektion: Soviet Bloc Intelligence and Its AIDS Disinformation Campaign," *Studies in Intelligence* 53, no. 4 (December 2009).

[7]. Christopher Andrew and Oleg Gordievsky, *KGB: The Inside Story* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1990).

[8]. Kristie Macrakis, *Seduced by Secrets: Inside the Stasi's Spy-Tech World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

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