"One of the Biggest Ears in the World":
East German SIGINT Operations
by Ben Fischer

East Germany is long gone, but the remarkable feats of its foreign intelligence service, the Hauptverwaltung Aufklärung (HVA), will not soon be forgotten. A former Soviet intelligence officer concedes the HVA was the best in the Warsaw Pact—"even better than the KGB."[1] Spymaster Markus Wolf "had so deeply penetrated the West German government, military, and secret services that about all we had to do was lay back and stay out of [his] way," exclaims another ex-KGB officer.[2] *U.S. News & World Report* judged the HVA as the Cold War's best spy agency,[3] and two British authors have described its accomplishments as "legendary."[4] Wolf's former West German opponents also give him his due, claiming that the HVA, by itself, produced 80 percent of all Soviet Bloc intelligence on West Germany and NATO.[5]

The HVA was quintessentially a HUMINT service. The HVA earned its reputation the old-fashioned way: recruiting spies on a scale that boggles the mind. The German interior ministry believes Wolf may have had 6,000 to 7,000 agents in West Germany when the Berlin Wall fell in 1989.[6] The federal attorney's office has investigated at least 5,500 espionage cases since 1990.[7] The HVA's penetration and neutralization of West German national security agencies made it possible for so many agents to spy for so long. At least 19 former intelligence officers are serving time. Bonn's top Soviet analyst, the chief of counterintelligence operations against East Germany, and the deputy head of military counterintelligence were all long-term HVA moles. Spying was so rampant that Bonn's senior intelligence official told the Bundestag that the history of the Cold War in Germany will have to be rewritten.

None of this was known before the early 1990s.[8] But the whole story is not well known outside Germany. The HVA owed much of its success in the 1980s to SIGINT, even though the Ministry for State Security (MfS), not the HVA, ran technical collection operations. The HVA could task, but it did not command, the signals collectors. If Bonn's first shock was discovering the scope of HVA

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[1] Christopher Andrew and Oleg Gordievsky, *MORE Instructions From the Centre: Top Secret Files on KGB Global Operations 1975-1985* (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1992), p. 37.

[2] Oleg Kalugin with Fen Montaigne, *The First Directorate: My 32 Years in Intelligence and Espionage Against the West* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), p. 171.

[3] John Marks, "The Spymaster Unmasked," *U.S. News & World Report*, No. 14, April 12, 1993, p. 42.

[4] David Childs and Richard Popplewell, *The Stasi: The East German Intelligence and Security Service* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), p. 112.

[5] See deu, "Observation of Rightists to be Improved," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, December 14-15, 1991, p. 5. Translated in *Foreign Broadcast Information Service* (hereafter FBIS) *Daily Report*, FBIS-WEU-93-206, October 17, 1991, p. 15. See also "Die Gussen kommen," *Der Spiegel*, No. 12, March 16, 1992, p. 129, which reiterates the same estimate.

[6] *Woche in Bundestag*, November 13, 1991, p. 7. This is the German equivalent of *The Congressional Record*.

[7] The 5,500 figure is cited in a textbox accompanying an interview with federal attorney general Kay Nehm. See ",Er hat zuviel geredet'," *Der Spiegel*, No. 43 October 23, 1995, p. 34.

[8] Bonn received the first details in 1989-90 from MfS officers who technically "defected" before German unification in October 1990. See "MfS hört mit," *Der Spiegel*, No. 5, January 29, 1990, p. 14. Before the collapse of the Berlin Wall there were only two books—both in German—on the East German intelligence and security apparatus. Neither book grasped the extent of East German espionage or even mentioned MfS HUMINT operations.

HUMINT operations, its second was learning the scale of MfS SIGINT activities. Germany's federal attorney said simply that the MfS had "one of the biggest ears in the world."[9]

The MfS SIGINT story is notable for several reasons. First, much valuable intelligence and counterintelligence came from nonsecure or poorly protected West German telecommunications systems, computer networks, and electronic databases. Second, the "father of East German electronic warfare against the Federal Republic,"[10] Generalmajor[11] Horst Männchen, had a powerful rival in Markus Wolf, the grandmaster of agent operations, and had to struggle to keep his own bureaucratic empire from being absorbed by the foreign intelligence directorate. Third, despite this rivalry, SIGINT and HUMINT were highly integrated and coordinated, creating a synergism that extended the range, longevity, and operational security of East German foreign intelligence.

The MfS had several natural advantages over its allies in running SIGINT operations against West Germany. Traditional German technical skill was one. Working against former countrymen in the other half of a divided nation was another. Language, for example, was not a problem.[12] Geography was the biggest boon. Many targets in West Germany within the range of East German intercept sites.

But the East Germans also benefited from their opponent's ignorance—and arrogance. The Federal Intelligence Service (BND) "thought that, technically, we were living in the Stone Age," an ex-HVA officer noted. But "[o]ur Hauptabteilung III (HA III electronic intelligence and counterintelligence) ... had computer diskettes with thousands of BND telephone numbers. We knew [BND officers'] true names, cover names, license plate numbers, and addresses—absolutely everything."[13] And that's just for starters. In 1987, an East German who had worked at an intercept site was allowed to emigrate—an unusual lapse in the MfS's otherwise tight security system. The BND debriefed him but dismissed his claims of a massive SIGINT assault as "exaggerated."[14] When counterespionage investigations sometimes went awry, Bonn suspected moles inside its security services were to blame. But the real culprit was HA III, which detected and then foiled surveillance of HVA agents.[15]

Wolf called his officers "soldiers" fighting on the Cold War's "invisible front." SIGINT officers saw themselves as "soldiers fighting on a special sector" of that front.[16] By the early 1980s, HA III was one of the most prestigious branches of the MfS. It was on a par with the elite HVA and, as a main

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[9]Berlin ADN, May 5, 1991. Translated in *FBIS Daily Report*, FBIS-WEU-91-087, May 6, 1991, p. 6.

[10]This is how a German magazine described Männchen in an interview. See "Wie eine offene Sprache," *Der Spiegel*, No. 43, October 1993, p. 43.

[11]This was the lowest general officer rank, equivalent to brigadier general in the US system. Wolf was a generaloberst (colonel-general), equivalent to a lieutenant general in the US system. These ranks were the same as those in the Prussian army. Wolf assumed command of foreign intelligence in 1952, when he was only 29 years old, and retired in 1986.

[12]The MfS reportedly did have a problem finding qualified linguists to work in languages other than German.

[13]"Wir wußten Bescheid," *Der Spiegel*, No. 51, December 19, 1994, p. 26. The author preferred to remain anonymous.

[14]Friedrich W. Schlomann, *Die Maulwürfe: Noch sind sie unter uns, die Helfer der Stasi im Western* (Munich: Universitas Verlag, 1993), p. 32n38. Schlomann received this background information from a former intelligence official and from an unpublished manuscript written by a Bundeswehr officer.

[15]*Ibid.*

[16]"Wie eine offene Sprache," p. 93.

directorate, even eclipsed the bureaucratic status of its sister service, the KGB's SIGINT (sixteenth) directorate.[17]

The Rise of HA III

MfS SIGINT was a late bloomer. Until the late 1960s, it took a backseat to the armed forces' tactical SIGINT collection along the inter-German border, monitoring NATO military communications and looking for early indications of a NATO attack.[18] Things changed when Männchen, a technically skilled and ambitious major, pleaded for an independent service that could collect strategic intelligence and counterintelligence information. At the time, Männchen was special assistant to Gen. Bruno Beater, first deputy chief of the MfS. Beater was a powerful patron, the *alter ego* of the even more powerful Erich Mielke, GDR minister for state security from 1957 until 1989. With Beater's backing and Mielke's approval, in 1974, Männchen established Abteilung (Abt.) III, the first independent department dedicated to SIGINT collection.[19] In 1984, Abt. III absorbed another independent department, Abt. F (Funkabwehr or radio counterintelligence), which tracked foreign-agent communications on GDR territory.[20] Abt. III became a main directorate (Hauptabteilung) in 1985.

Männchen's rise proved that nothing succeeds like success. His genius was realizing that it was technically possible and operationally profitable to target West German telecommunications, which, even though they did not carry "classified" information, nevertheless contained data of high intelligence and counterintelligence value. "All we had to do was stick a finger in the air and we were able to grab everything because nothing, absolutely nothing, was encrypted or protected."[21] This is how a former officer—perhaps Männchen himself—using the pseudonym "Lutz Erbe"—described HA III's contribution to foreign intelligence.[22] Showing the pride of his former service, "Erbe" noted that much of what is worth knowing in modern societies is not locked in safes but is discussed on the telephone or stored in electronic databases. (He bragged about getting the plans for the US Space Shuttle while "hacking" with his office computer.) Electronic signals can be located and grabbed off where no agent can go. Car telephones used by politicians, senior government officials, industrial managers, and journalists were a rich source. Faxes and computer networks—the microchipped *accouterment* of modern managers were also rich sources.

HA III also worked against "hard targets" such as encoded and enciphered communications on its own and in cooperation with Abt. XII (codes and ciphers) and the KGB.[23] Numerous sites targeted UHF and VHF communications in areas where West German and allied diplomatic missions, military

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[17]Former KGB officer Oleg Gordievsky notes that, despite its many successes, the sixteenth directorate remained in the shadow of the first chief (foreign intelligence) directorate and never gained commensurate status. See Christopher Andrew and Oleg Gordievsky, *KGB: The Inside Story of Its Foreign Operations From Lenin to Gorbachev* (New York: HarperCollins*Publishers*, 1990), pp. 610-611.

18Peter Siebenmorgen, *"Staatssicherheit" der DDR: Der Westen im Fadenkreuz der Stasi* (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 1993), pp. 121-122.

[19]As an independent department, Abt. III was under the direct command of an MfS deputy chief rather than a main directorate.

[20]Manfred Schell and Werner Kalinka, *STASI and kein Ende: Personen und Fakten* (Frankfurt/M und Berlin: Ullstein, 1991), p. 45.

[21]Roland Tichy, ",,Authentisch, aktuell, preiswert"," *CAPITAL*, no. 10, October 1992, p. 133.

[22]The article cited in the previous note described "Erbe" as East Germany's "chief eavesdropper."

[23]For a list of HA III targets see Siebenmorgen, *„Staatssicherheit" der DDR*, pp. 270-271.

installations, and intelligence stations were located. HA III, for example, regularly monitored West German surveillance radios using VHF.[24] It also targeted satellite signals that yielded, among other things, economic and industrial intelligence.[25] Very little is known about such efforts, but HA III operated under the Soviet SIGINT umbrella—the Cold War's largest.[26] West Germany was the USSR's "single most important target country," and the Soviets and East Germans worked according to a division of labor.[27] This allowed the GDR to concentrate on West German government and public telecommunications and electronic data-processing systems, where it achieved signal success (pun intended).

Wolf and Männchen

Wolf first saw the SIGINT handwriting on the wall by the early 1970s. But he rejected the idea of creating his own SIGINT unit because his chief technical expert did not believe he himself was qualified to manage large-scale technical operations. Also he believed he couldn't match the more technically sophisticated and "supremely self-confident" Männchen.[28] Two of Wolf's former officers claim the spymaster himself had reservations in part because he was too wedded to conventional agent operations and in part because he too didn't want to compete with Männchen's rising star—at least not within the confines of the HVA.[29] (They add that Wolf's successor, Gen. Werner Großmann, was more enthusiastic about SIGINT, especially telephone monitoring operations, and relied more than his predecessor had on HA III.)

Männchen got support from Mielke and the KGB—always important in MfS bureaucratic battles.[30] The Soviets argued for a separate SIGINT service for several reasons. First, the KGB had just established its own SIGINT directorate and preferred having the MfS organized along parallel lines.[31] Second, it believed that reorganization would disrupt the highly productive liaison relations it had established with the independent MfS SIGINT unit. Third, it wanted a direct line of command with a single senior officer in charge without having to go through bureaucratic layers. (The KGB residency in East Berlin—the largest in the world—included a senior SIGINT officer assigned to Männchen's office.) Fourth, there were close ties between KGB and MfS SIGINT officers. Many of the latter had trained in

[24]"Stasi hörte von Weizsäckers Autotelefon ab," *Die Welt*, December 10, 1991, p. 4.

[25]Tichy, "„Authentisch, aktuell, preiswert"," p. 134.

[26]The total Soviet HUMINT system—KGB, GRU (military intelligence), and military—was estimated at 350,000 personnel and 500 collection sites in the USSR and worldwide. See Desmond Ball and Robert Windrem, "Soviet Signals Intelligence (SIGINT): Organization and Management," *Intelligence and National Security*, No. 4, October 1989, p. 621.

[27]Desmond Ball, "Soviet Signals Intelligence: Vehicular Systems and Operations," *Intelligence and National Security*, No. 1, January 1989, p. 11.

[28]*Ibid*., pp. 121-122.

[29]Peter Richter and Klaus Rösler, *Wolfs West-Spione: Ein Insider-Report* (Berlin: Elefanten Press Verlag GmbH, 1992), p. 174.

[30]Siebenmorgen, *"Staatssicherheit" der DDR*, p. 122.

[31]SIGINT was removed from the eighth (communications) directorate , in 1972, and placed under the new sixteenth directorate. See Ball and Windrem, "Soviet Signals Intelligence (SIGINT): Organization and Management," p. 626. It is possible that the creation of MfS Abt. III was inspired by the KGB decision and that Männchen may have cited the KGB example when arguing for an independent unit.

the Soviet Union and spoke Russian, and they may have lobbied the Soviets to prevent a merger with the HVA.

The idea of joining Abt. III with the HVA came up again in the early 1980s—this time apparently at Wolf's suggestion.[32] By then, however, Männchen was too powerful. He argued that Abt. III had proven itself and that, administratively and operationally, it made sense to have the now sprawling SIGINT empire—headquartered in East Berlin and with sites throughout the GDR and abroad—under a single command. Mielke agreed, and Wolf was checkmated.

Männchen's Empire

Estimates of the HA III work force range from 4,000 to 6,000; the former figure is probably the more accurate.[33] As of 1989, there were 2,748 officers assigned to its headquarters in Berlin-Wuhlheide and its engineering labs in Gosen bei Berlin.[34] About one-third of the officers were engaged in intelligence collection. The remaining officers were assigned to 42 intercept sites in the GDR, three in Czechoslovakia, two in West Germany, and several more in Middle Eastern countries.[35]

HA III included 20 departments (see inset). Grouped according to major missions (intelligence collection, research, etc.), they were organized along functional and geographical lines. Each of the GDR's 15 regional-administrative divisions (Bezirkverwaltung) hosted an MfS residency, and each residency included a SIGINT component designated as Abt. III. About 400 officers worked in these units, some of which, such as the one in Leipzig, had as many as 25 officers.[36] Abt. III units were nominally under the command of the residency, but they also had direct ties to HA III headquarters, which was tightly compartmented from the rest of the MfS and the HVA.

In addition to fixed sites, HA III used a plane, a helicopter, and a ship as dedicated mobile collection platforms.[37] It also used the GDR merchant-marine and fishing fleets on a target-of-opportunity basis. In West Germany there were collection sites in Bonn—at the GDR's permanent mission[38]—and in Düsseldorf in the GDR trade mission. HA III sometimes used a mobile collection site in Cologne, where the headquarters of West German counterintelligence (Office for the Protection of the Constitution, or BfV) is located, and also may have operated from the Syrian Embassy in Bonn.[39]

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[32]*Ibid*., p. 123.

[33]The higher figure is cited in Schell and Kalinka, *STASI and kein Ende*, p. 181. The lower figure was cited in the *Spiegel* interview with Männchen and, therefore, is probably more accurate. See "Wie eine offene Sprache"," p. 43.

[34]Schlomann, *Die Maulwürfe*, p. 28.

[35]*Ibid*. The author does not cite the Middle Eastern countries, but they probably included at least Iraq, Libya, and South Yemen, where East German foreign intelligence had a substantial presence.

[36]*Ibid.*

[37]*Ibid*. See also "Stasi hörte von Weizsäckers Autotelefon ab;" "Überall schlau," *Der Spiegel*, No. 34, August 17, 1992, p. 51; and Siebenmorgen, *"Staatssicherheit" der DDR*, pp. 270-271.

[38]In December 1972 the two German states signed a treaty establishing official relations. Bonn, however, refused to grant full diplomatic recognition of the GDR as a sovereign state so as not to jeopardize its constitutional commitment to unification. The two governments agreed to exchange official "representatives," but not ambassadors.

[39]Schlomann, *Die Maulwürfe*, p. 28.

HA III Organization[40]
Intelligence
Abt. 2—Satellite signals
Abt. 7—Cable and directional radio between
West Berlin/West Germany (stationary sites)
Abt. 8—West German foreign ministry
Abt. 9—Intercept sites in Czechoslovakia, Middle East
Abt. 6—Directional radio between West Berlin/West Germany (mobile sites)
Abt. 16—West German telecommunications (GDR sites)
Counterintelligence
Abt. F-1—Satellites, sensors
Abt. F -2—Shortwave, amateur radio, and GDR intelligence/military   communications
Abt. F-3—Main intercept station, Hohenluckow
Abt. F-4—Traffic analysis
Abt. 14—Special tasks, internal security
Analysis
Abt. 1—Central analysis unit
Abt. 12—Traffic analysis
Abt. 13—Data exploitation
Abt. 15—Liaison with NVA, postal service
Operations center
Engineering Labs
Abt. N—HA III communications
Abt. T-1—Research and development
Abt. T-2—Probes and sensors
Abt. T-3—Equipment and maintenance
Abt. T-4 —Instrumentation
Security
Abt. 3—Physical security, HA III installations
Abt. 10—Government communications
Abt. 11—Foreign operations (West German agents and sites)
Abt. 4—Training school

The East German armed forces (National People's Army—or NVA) conducted tactical SIGINT. Its "Hans Jahn" regiment had about 900 officers and NCOs stationed along the East-West German border, and GDR marines manned two SIGINT-collection ships that operated in the Bay of Lübeck and near Kiel.

Telephone Monitoring

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[40]Based on *Ibid.*, p. 341, and Siebenmorgen, *"Staatssicherheit" der DDR*, pp. 312-313. I have reconciled some minor differences between these two sources.

HA III earned its keep by monitoring telephones, telefaxes, and teletypes in West Germany and West Berlin. Directional (point-to-point) radio links and cellular car telephones were key targets. The Bundespost (Federal Post Office) transmitted up to two-thirds of all telephone calls over directional radio links.[41] Two transmission paths from northern to southern West Germany—from Hamburg and Hannover to Munich—traversed GDR territory and were intercepted from sites located there.[42] Communication links between West Berlin, which was 120 miles inside East Germany, and West Germany were also intercepted from domestic sites. But other transmission paths inside West Germany were at least partly accessible in good weather by intercepting electromagnetic emanations that "bounced off" in the direction of the GDR.[43] HA III built large intercept sites in the highest elevations of the Brocken and Rhön mountain ranges that could intercept such emanations from the all-important government, military, intelligence, business, and industrial complexes around Cologne-Bonn and Frankfurt/Main. During peak-usage hours, directional radio links carried up to 80 percent of all telephone calls from these areas.[44]

Two intercept sites in Czechoslovakia extended HA III's coverage to much of southern West Germany, and a third covered Austria. Southwestern West Germany was more problematical, whereas in good weather, one of the Czechoslovak sites could intercept some signals there. Southwest West Germany was a high priority area because it was the center of West Germany's hi-tech electronics and aerospace industries. HA III discovered something interesting: French SIGINT sites were targeting this area, looking for industrial and economic intelligence on the electronics, pharmaceutical, and chemical industries; Airbus; and Eureka projects (the West European component of the US Strategic Defense Initiative research program). Intelligence reports were sent to Paris from the French Embassy in Bonn, from the West Berlin mission, and from army headquarters in Baden-Baden. "Lutz Erbe" claims that HA III was able to intercept and read French intelligence communications. "Then we got everything we needed from their intelligence stations."[45]

Estimates vary, but most sources believe that HA III monitored between 25, 000 and 40,000 telephone numbers around the clock. The intercepted conversations were recorded, and some were evaluated as they were being recorded. HA III also did spot monitoring. In 1988, for example, it probed 650,000 conversations.[46] Analysts reportedly issued some 100,000 annual reports, of which about 4,000 were considered very important.[47]

Telephone monitoring was automated and used a simple dial-recognition system.[48] Selected telephone numbers were programmed into a computer. The electrical impulse from the dialed number activated the computer, which directed an antenna toward the directional-radio link carrying the number

[41]Schlomann, *Die Maulwürfe*, p. 29.
[42]*Die Welt* prepared a useful map that shows the location of all MfS intercept sites in the former GDR and Czechoslovakia that targeted directional radio transmission paths and UHF and VHF communications in West Germany. See "Stasi hörte von Weizsäckers Autotelefon ab."
[43]See Tichy, "Authentisch, aktuell, preiswert," p. 34, and "Wie eine offene Sprache"," p. 94.
[44]Schlomann, *Die Maulwürfe*, p. 29.
[45]Tichy, "Authentisch, aktuell, preiswert," p. 136.
[46]Schlomann, *Die Maulwürfe*, p. 30.
[47]"Stasi hörte von Weizsäckers Autotelefon ab."
[48]"Wie eine offene Sprache," p. 95; Schlomann, *Die Maulwürfe*, p. 30.

and started a tape recorder. HA III had 300 tape recorders in East Berlin and another 120 in Leipzig as well as in other places, to record calls.[49]

In an interview with *Der Spiegel*, Männchen claimed that HA III computers also used key words or combinations of key words—the example he cited was Bundeskanzler (federal chancellor)—to select conversations for recording.[50] He added that another technically feasible method was voice-recognition, pointing out that the voices of prominent political figures, for example, could be obtained from radio and television broadcasts, recorded, and entered into a computer. HA III was reportedly working on, but had not perfected, such a system when the end came in 1989.[51]

HA III may have tapped West German communications cables. Männchen hinted at this in *Spiegel* by describing how easy it is to splice into a cable without being detected.[52] The HA III table of organization (see inset) shows that one department targeted cables in West Germany and West Berlin, and another was responsible for the security of agent and technical operations in West Germany. It seems likely, therefore, that HA III used agents to tap cable lines.

There were limits. The West German government used a fiber-optic cable in the greater Bonn area for internal communications.[53] Männchen and other former HA III officers concede that they were not able to compromise the Elcrovox, Elcrortel, Elcrofax, and Elcrodat cipher machines used by West German security agencies. Nevertheless, they targeted their communications and sometimes hit paydirt when security officers forget to use encryption devices.[54]

HA III may have penetrated some cipher systems. Männchen coyly observed in *Spiegel* that what can be enciphered by a machine can be deciphered by a machine and that only a few cipher equipment manufacturers are even "halfway secure."[55] One example he may have had in mind: An HVA agent codenamed "Rubin," a business manager at the Swiss firm Mebo AG, reportedly obtained a cipher machine from the Swiss company Crytpo AG on orders from the KGB.[56]

Some West German government ministries and industrial firms used voice-masking. The East Germans were able to use a "demasking" device, purchased in the West, against some early generation systems but not against the more sophisticated versions.[57]

Human folly played a role. A case in point was the shift in the early 1980s from the use of the "B" car telephone net to the "C-3" net, which West German security experts believed was secure. This belief is not necessarily true. For instance, it took "only a few weeks . . . before we were intercepting the latter [the C-3 net]." Government officials and business managers alike, according to "Erbe," believed that "modernization means security."[58] For example, business executives would often say, "I can't talk any more, I'll send you a fax." HA III then waited for its copy to arrive.

The biggest coup came in 1988 when the Bundespost negotiated an agreement with East Berlin to lay a fiber-optic cable across the GDR to West Berlin. Bonn believed the cable was absolutely

[49]Schlomann, *Die Maulwürfe*, p. 30.
[50]"Wie eine offene Sprache"," p. 94.
[51]Schlomann, *Die Maulwürfe*, p. 33.
[52]"Wie eine offene Sprache," p. 93.
[53]Schlomann, *Die Maulwürfe*, p. 32.
[54]See "Überall schlau," p. 51; Tichy, "Authentisch, aktuell, preiswert," p. 133; and Schlomann, *Die Maulwürfe*, p. 33.
[55]"Wie eine offene Sprache," p. 93.
[56]"Netz mit vielen Spinnen," *Der Spiegel*, no. 16, April 18, 1994, p. 95.
[57]Schlomann, *Die Maulwürfe*, p. 30.
[58]Tichy, "Authentisch, aktuell, preiswert," p. 133.

secure, but it underestimated HA III. The East Germans couldn't splice into the cable—the dropoff in the signal strength at the terminus would be a tipoff. But they convinced Bonn to place a signal-regeneration station near an MfS intercept site where they intercepted the signal from the amplifier. "When the West Germans signed the agreement, champagne began flowing in streams in our office," "Erbe" quipped.[59] At first, the East Germans were suspicious, believing that the information was "chickenfeed" or part of some intelligence ploy. But they soon changed their minds and decided they had hit a rich vein of useful, even though unclassified, information.

The biggest problem was obtaining technology and equipment that was not available in the Soviet Bloc and had to be surreptitiously purchased from Western suppliers. Agent "Rubin" made regular trips to East Berlin, where Männchen gave him HA III shopping lists.[60] "Rubin" received a million West German marks in salary and acquired such things as state-of-the-art antennas, impulse coders, police radios, and data terminals. He also purchased a "Mark" voice-analyzer, which the HVA used in lieu of the polygraph to vet its agents.

Bonn can consider itself fortunate that Männchen registered his big breakthroughs in the 1980s, but its biggest break was the collapse of the GDR. In October 1989, HA III received 300 East German marks earmarked for new technology that would enable it to circumvent some West German communications security safeguards.[61]

Targets

HA III targeted car telephones of the West German president, all state secretaries of federal and state ministries, the federal attorney general, and the president of the BfV. Office phones targeted "around the clock" included those of all federal and state ministries, most politicians and all political parties, all security agencies, hi-tech defense firms such as MMB (Messerschmidt-Bölkow-Blom) and MTU (Motoren-Turbinen-Union), military counterintelligence (MAD), and editorial departments of national newspapers, television, and radio.

A 1993 investigative report in the newsweekly *Focus* revealed the breadth and depth of HA III telephone monitoring.[62] Despite an official order to destroy all files, some renegade officers apparently made copies of so-called target control cards that served as a central index of monitored West German telephone numbers. These officers probably had blackmail in mind when they showed selected cards to the *Focus* reporter in a Prague hotel room.[63] (The reporter claims that a senior German counterintelligence official confirmed the authenticity of the cards he was shown.)

The index cards read like a "who's who" in the West German establishment. Most of the monitoring requests came from the HVA, and they included leading political figures such as Chancellor Helmut Kohl. There were telephone numbers for his official residence near the Rhine River and even his "favorite" tailor. Some telephone numbers were unlisted, and others were classified, such as those for

[59]*Ibid.*

[60]"Netz mit vielen Spinnen," p. 95.

[61]Schlomann, *Die Maulwürfe*, p. 33.

[62]This section is based on Josef Hufelschulte, "Der Stasi-Schatz," *Focus*, No. 43, October 25, 1993, pp. 18-23. For a translation, see *FBIS Daily Report*, FBIS-WEU-93-206, October 27, 1993, pp. 19-21.

[63]The meeting with *Focus* reporter Hufelschulte occurred on the eve of German national elections. During this time, former MfS officers were selectively revealing embarrassing information to the press as a means of pressuring Bonn to halt prosecutions of their colleagues. The Prague meeting with Hufelschulte was probably part of this effort.

BND and BfV safehouses. An operation codenamed "Salamander" compiled order-of-battle type information on all major West German security agencies, including the BND, BfV, the BKA (federal criminal office), and the SSA (state security department). There were telephone numbers for top counterintelligence officials, senior counterintelligence investigators, and even their secretaries.

Phone conversations yielded positive intelligence and counterintelligence information. HA III, for example, monitored calls relayed by satellite from a journalist in Cairo who was working for West German intelligence. It also monitored an Israeli intelligence officer's office phone in Bonn. Other targets included accomplices of the West German terrorist organization Red Army Faction and intelligence agents working inside extremist groups. No detail was too small or too personal for Männchen's troops. The cards included telephone numbers of VIPs' mistresses and girlfriends. In 1990, a German tabloid began publishing some of the more embarrassing cards with the VIPs' name blacked out. This led to the second decision to destroy the "target control" cards—this time by the West German government. But, as the FOCUS report shows, the cards seem to have a life of their own.

Computers

Abt. III began accessing West German electronic databases in the early 1970s. At first it used radio telephones and numbers from private subscribers.[64] This had a drawback—subscribers complained to the Bundespost about bills they received for calls they had not made. Eventually, HA III used "clone phones" reprogrammed with official numbers from West German ministries and agencies. The MfS got the information it wanted, and Bonn paid for the calls.[65]

The East Germans circumvented security procedures in several ways. Passwords and other entry procedures were available from telephone conversations, faxes, telexes, and agents. In order to get passwords via the phone, HA III officers imitated the voices of West German officials and businessmen.[66] One government agency changed its passwords each month but notified its national branches by telex, which, of course, was intercepted.

Männchen and others claim that HA III routinely accessed official databases maintained by resident registration and employment offices, as well as banks, savings and loans, and other financial institutions, looking for information on prospective agents. They also accessed Bundespost electronic records in the major cities. Another target was the Zevis database of the federal motor vehicle registration office. It yielded information on traffic offenders and the license plate numbers of the security agencies' surveillance vehicles.

The East Germans also penetrated Inpol, a national police database, and Pios, a counterterrorism database.[67] But they had no success against the West German intelligence and security agencies, which used high-grade cipher systems. According to *Spiegel* (and presumably Männchen), HA III was able to intercept and read emanations from computers in the US mission in West Berlin.[68]

Disinformation and Dirty Tricks

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[64]Tichy, "Authentisch, aktuell, preiswert," p. 134.
[65]"Überall schlau," p. 51; Schlomann, *Die Maulwürfe*, p. 33.
[66]Tichy, "Authentisch, aktuell, preiswert," p. 134.
[67]"Stasi hörte von Weizsäckers Autotelefon ab;" Schlomann, *Die Maulwürfe*, p. 33.
[68]"Wie eine offene Sprache," p. 93.

HA III was highly compartmented. Elaborate rules and regulations controlled taskings by other MfS and HVA components, as well as access to its files and premises.[69] On occasion, however, sensitive SIGINT information was used in HVA disinformation and dirty tricks operations targeted against West German and US intelligence. Such operations were extraordinary. They also were dangerous, since they had to be surfaced in Western media to be effective and, therefore, ran the risk of compromising sources and methods. Whatever reservations and objections HA III may have had, its hand was never revealed before the Cold War ended.

One operation centered on the collision of two West German military aircraft.[70] The West German defense minister stated publicly that the crash resulted from mechanical failure, but HA III knew from the pilots' radio talk that they had been playing a deadly game of chicken.

HVA Abt. X (disinformation) reprinted the conversation on an official West German military counterintelligence form. For the next step in this ploy, the disinformation specialists needed information from a former BfV officer who had defected to their side. The defector revealed that all mail addressed "care of" the Soviet Embassy in Bonn—but not to a specific addressee—was routinely intercepted and read by his former employer. Just as the East Germans had calculated, the BfV intercepted the "report" and launched a two-year investigation, searching for a "mole" inside MAD.

In 1975, HA III recorded a telephone conversation between Helmut Kohl, then chairman of the Christian Democratic Union, and another party official.[71] Abt. X reprinted a *verbatim* transcript of the conversation in what appeared to be an official US intelligence report, mailed it from the vicinity of a US installation in Frankfurt/M, and then sent it anonymously to the left-of-center weekly *Stern*. Publication of the genuine conversation—Kohl confirmed its authenticity—created an uproar and cast suspicion on the United States. No one ever suspected the real origins of this disinformation operation, which was first revealed in 1991.

Abt. X mounted a riskier operation in 1978.[72] It involved a telephone conversation recorded two years earlier in which Franz Josef Strauß, chairman of the Bavarian Christian Social Union, discussed a Bundestag select committee investigation with a prominent newspaper editor. The committee was looking into the so-called Lockheed affair, trying to find documents concerning the aerospace firm's sale of Starfighter fighter-bombers to the Luftwaffe in the early 1960s. (Touted as an all-weather aircraft, the Starfighter frequently malfunctioned and crashed in poor weather.) Strauß had approved the Starfighter purchase while serving as defense minister, and there were rumors he had taken kickbacks and may have hidden or destroyed compromising documents.

In this case, Abt. X decided to alter the actual conversation, putting self-incriminating remarks into Strauß's mouth. The dirty tricks specialists targeted the BND, using an official form for a Bundestag-approved wiretap. The form was not the correct one, and the East Germans had difficulty reproducing an official stamp needed to "authenticate" it. But the ploy worked. The Munich-based *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, a liberal daily that often criticized Strauß, published the transcript just as the select committee issued its final report. West Germans assumed a disgruntled committee member,

[69]The procedures for tasking HA III and reviewing its files and tape recordings appear in a "secret" MfS document reprinted in Schell and Kalinka, *STASI and kein Ende*, pp. 182-185.
[70]"Gänsebraten im Dschungel," *Der Spiegel*, No. 29, July 15, 1991, p. 36.
[71]*Ibid*., p. 37.
[72]Günther Bohnsack and Herbert Brehmer, *Auftrag: Irreführung: Wie die Stasi Politik im Westen machte* (Hamburg: Carlsen Verlag GmbH, 1992) pp. 145-155.

angry over an illegal wiretap, had leaked the document. Bonn's intelligence coordinator ordered a lengthy investigation that was never resolved but that seriously damaged the BND's public image.

Despite their differences, all three operations had the same goal: to discredit opposing intelligence services and tie up their personnel and resources with time-consuming investigations. The MfS believed the game was worth the candle, since these operations supposedly diverted efforts against HVA agents in West Germany. Creating political scandals was not the main goal—just the icing on the cake.

There may have been still other dirty tricks and blackmail efforts that have not surfaced. Two disinformation specialists familiar with HA III files claim that they were "always astounded" at the "quantity and quality" of information on West German VIPs.[73] HA III had a file on "practically every politician" in West Germany. Just how far East Berlin was willing to go in using such information is one of the Cold War's many secrets.

Conclusions

The MfS was one of the Cold War's premier SIGINT services. This judgment is based more on knowledge of its capabilities than the results of its operations. A comprehensive evaluation would require a study of MfS files that no longer exist. But even anecdotal material reveals a service that was far larger and far more proficient than Western intelligence services realized.

HA III deserves more credit than it has received for East German foreign intelligence successes. The reputation of Markus Wolf's HVA seems secure, and, if anything, it will probably grow as more revelations of its operations appear. But HA III certainly gave the elite HVA an edge it would not have had without close cooperation between HUMINT and SIGINT.

HA III's job was made easier by a gaping blind spot in Bonn's assessment of the intelligence threat from the East. West Germany's underestimation of MfS technical capabilities and overestimation of its own communications security made matters even worse.

The final word on HA III, however, came from the technical wizard who created it. When an interviewer noted that his former enemies considered his service "world-class," Gen. Männchen replied, "And what good did it do?"

Benjamin B. Fischer

Biography

For the past 24 years, Ben Fischer has worked for the CIA in the Directorate of Intelligence, Directorate of Operations, and for the Director Central Intelligence as both an analyst and manager involved in Soviet affairs. Since 1996, he has served on the History Staff of the Center for the Study of Intelligence. He was previously stationed in Bonn, Germany, worked in the Agency's Counterintelligence Center in 1987, and managed the

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[73]*Ibid*., p. 150.

CIA's East German Task Force from 1990-91, reviewing files from the former Ministry for State Security.

Mr. Fischer has published two monographs, A Cold War Conundrum: The 1983 Soviet War Scare in US-Soviet Relations (1997) and Okhrana: The Paris Operations of the Imperial Russian Police (1998) under CIA's Center for the Study of Intelligence/History Staff auspices. The latter is based on declassified files.

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