WASHPOST DEC 26 1975

The W. Germans: Eyes to the East

Last of a Series

By Michael Getler
Washington Post Foreign Service

BONN—West Germany's foreign intelligence service—set up almost 30 years ago with the quiet help and money of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency—is struggling to overcome some of the same kind of public embarrassments that its American counterpart has suffered.

The West Germans are not in the same league as the CIA,

Other Cloaks, Other Daggers—VI

however. By and large, the embarrassments that have surfaced here occasionally over the years have been smaller and less dramatic than those that have recently dealt hammer blows to the image of the American intelligence service.

The West German public and Parliament appear to have a higher tolerance of questionable activities by their own intelligence agencies. It is a reaction explained in part, no doubt, by the generally conservative tilt of the adult population here and by this country's unique geographical position on the front line with Communist East Europe.

Nevertheless, the Atlantic Alliance may now be paying a price for the peculiar problems that both of these huge intelligence services are becoming noted for. Although cooperation is officially good, there is evidence that the extra dimension of cooperation between American and West German intelligence may now be missing.

Since the widespread disclosure of CIA misdeeds by Congress and the press, experienced allied specialists say they are convinced the West Germans are holding back from Washington some of their most sensitive information for fear of public disclosure.

These specialists also acknowledge that the

See SPYING, A11, Col. 1

SPYING, From A1

Americans have never gotten over their suspicions that the West German federal intelligence service—commonly known by its initials BND—is too vulnerable to infiltration by Communist agents, particularly from East Germany.

Thus the CIA is also understood to be holding back to some extent on the West Germans.

The fear of being copromised is also said to extend to the U.S. National Security Agency, which is understood to be reluctant to include the West Germans in a few of its latest super-secret code-breaking and communications projects.

Aside from the CIA, the BND—which officially admits to more than 5,000 persons on its payroll, is the largest Western intelligence service. Yet, it is dwarfed in size and, according to some sources, in aggressiveness, by the huge East German and Soviet spy organizations.

With more than 2 million East Germans having fled to the West since 1949, with language and ethnic assimilation no problem for the would-be spy among them, the Bonn government has had its hands full over the years just trying to protect itself internally.

It has been widely but unofficially estimated that between 10,000 and 15,000 Communist agents, mostly East Germans and Poles but some Russians too, operate in West Germany's relatively open and democratic society at any one time.

Efforts to uncover the hordes of foreign spies operating in West Germany cause occasional infringements of the civil rights of the innocent. How much is hard to measure.

There are occasionally reports of persons being arrested, held for quite some time in espionage investigations and then released. The West German press, with the exception of an occasional burst of attention, normally by the weekly newsmagazine Der Spiegel, does not focus much attention on West German intelligence for some of the same reasons that the population generally tends not to question it.

As in the United States, wiretaps here must be by court order. But, also as in the United States, there are examples of wiretaps that the government claimed it never ordered. The most glaring example took place last year when an embarrassing telephone conversation between two top politicians showed up verbatim in the magazine Stern.

The transcript was on U.S. Army stationery. Both the U.S. Army and the Bonn government claimed that the use of the stationery was a fraud, although the conversation was authentic. The wiretappers have never been identified.

Catching spies inside West Germany is the responsibility of the West German equivalent of the FBI, rather than the BND. German interior security officials, in a report last year, said they uncovered twice as many spies in 1974 as they did in 1973, despite detente with the East.

Unofficially, it is claimed that about 700 foreign agents a year are being caught or uncovered by the German Office for the Protection of the Constitution, But the general view of Western officials here remains that the West Germans are still losing the battle against the East Europeans, who are reportedly throwing in still larger numbers of agents.

Many of the scandals that have surfaced here are linked to this special problem.

The most jolting examples were the disclosure in 1961 that the BND's chief of Soviet counterintelligence, Heinz Felfe, was a Russian spy, and the 1974 resignation of federal chancellor Willy Brandt after it was discovered that one of his top aides—Gunther Guillaume—was an East German agent. There have been numerous lesser episodes.

Most of the blame for letting Guillaume get as far as he did was not aimed at the BND—which is responsible for gathering foreign intelligence—but rather at West German internal security. Information on Guillaume was available for many years but was in the wrong files and never properly pieced together.

The aftermath of the Guillaume affair produced most of what is on the public record here about other BND activities.

Horst Ehmke, the former chief of Brandt's chancellory, told the West German Parliament last year that an investigation had turned up at least 54 dossiers of well-known West German politicians and public figures secretly put together by the BND during the 1950s and 1960s in apparent violation of its charter to collect information outside West Germany's borders only.

Although it has never been

United Press International

Willy Brandt, left, resigned after it was revealed that his close aide, Guenther Guillaume, right, was an East German spy, one of the more spectacular incidents where East Germans have infiltrated in Bonn.

proven, it was also estimated that there vere many more dossiers and that those discovered were not destroyed, despite Ehmke's order to do so.

Next spring, the BND will be 20 years old. But its history really goes back to World War II, when Gen. Richard Gehlen ran Hitler's eastern intelligence service. When Nazi Germany collapsed, Gehlen, some of his staff, his reputation, and his files on the Russians survived and were eagerly scooped up by the U.S. Army.

In the Cold War atmosphere, Gehlen became the head of all German foreign intelligence in 1946 with the blessing of the U.S. Army and the fledgling CIA, officially established the following year.

West German intelligence headquarters then, as now, is in Pullach in the heart of highly conservative Bavaria.

In 1955, Gehlen's organization was reformed as the BND by a Cabinet decree of the Adenauer government rather than by law.

The general remained at the top until 1968, always unseen by the public. He retained a certain mystique and prestige until 1969, when disclosures began to appear that his organization had been outdistanced by the East Germans. The Guillaume affair would later produce tales of domestic surveillance under Gehlen and charges that the general padded his payroll with numerous relatives.

Gehlen was succeeded as head of the BND by Gen. Gerhard Wessel, who served under Gehlen in Hitler's eastern intelligence operation and went on to a career in the West German army.

Because of the heavy American involvement in the BND's birth, it is not surprising that it has much in common with the CIA.

Both are big and well-financed, Both are supposed to deal in foreign intelligence only—but have vague lines in their charters about protecting such intelligence in their own country. Both not only collect but assess what they collect, unlike the British who tend to leave the analysis to another group. Until recently, both did not have very clear or strong lines of political control by their governments.

There are also vast differences primarily growing out of West Germany's position facing Communist spies and armies. Unlike the CIA's global reach, the West German service is heavily concentrated on Eastern Europe. West Germany's increasing economic interest in the Third World may eventually foster BND expansion there, but the focus is now on Eastern Europe.

West Germany's ruling Social Democratic Party has considerable connections with other socialist parties around the world and undoubtedly provides another source of intelligence.

During the earliest years of the Cold War, the West Germans were at least thinking about trying to topple the new Communist regimes. One unofficial account reports that they even suggested to the CIA in 1947 that the U.S. agency liquidate the then past Germany party boss, the late Walter Ulbricht.

By most accounts, however, the West Germans now do not go in heavily for what is called political action and dirty tricks. The probability for success in destabilizing Communist governments 30 years after the war is now viewed as virtually nil, although the BND still has a sizable, eager covert activities section.

What the West Germans produce in the way of intelligence is a matter of debate among allied specialists. Some claim that West German information and assessments are highly professional, on a par with other Western agencies. Others disagree and describe the BND product as no better than good newspaper analysis.

The West Germans are given high marks however for their economic analysis. They

Gen. Reinhard Gehlen, in his Nazi uniform, left, headed Hitler's intelligence operations on the Soviet Union. After the war, right, he became head of West German intelligence.

are apparently more sensitive than others to the impact of economics on politics.

Critics acknowledge that the BND is improving. But they claim the agency is still too vulnerable to clever fabrications, the kind of seemingly plausible new information that is really made up out of existing reference material. Paying for these fabrications has made a number of so-called sources in the massive East-West spy game very wealthy.

It is also acknowledged that the BND has an extraordinarily difficult target to penetrate. No intelligence service is really any better than its ability to infiltrate agents or attract dissidents or defectors. What some view as a lackluster West German intelligence product may simply reflect the enormous difficulty of penetrating the Communist security systems. The West Germans do have the same language and cultural advantage in East Germany as the East Germans in West Germany. But East Germany is a closed society.

The BND's desire to stay in Bavaria, where it stays out of Bonn's political sights and lights, may also make it harder to infiltrate BND men into the East. In Bonn, it is argued, they would be easier to conceal in the vast federal bureaucracy.

Like intelligence services everywhere, the BND for many years was viewed as a band of patriotic tribal warriors not to be tampered with by the politicians.

But in 1969, when Social Democrat Willy Brandt came to power, it occurred to the Bonn government that a group of conservative generals tucked away in Bavaria might do something to upset the Brandt government's Ostpolitik, the policy of reconciliation with the East.

In 1970, for the first time, a Socialist parliamentary deputy—Dieter Blotz—was appointed to the BND as a deputy director, Since then, the BND has come under increasingly tight federal control, currently through the chief of Helmut Schmidt's chancellery, Manfred Schlueter.

There is also a 13-member parliamentary oversight committee made up of leaders from all parties. But that group is considered so prone to leaks that observers say there is very little real passing of information to it.

The Guillaume affair has again provided the stimulus for perhaps another overhaul of West German intelligence—internal, external and military.

But there is still not likely to be a single intelligence czar in West Germany, a position which would entail an enormous concentration of power, an idea that recalls too many unhappy memories for too many Germans.