

A Wolf in wolf's clothing

LONDON — West German security agencies have long suspected that the far-left terrorist groups that committed a series of murders and bombings in the Federal Republic since the 1970s were sheltered and supported by the former East German regime. This suspicion has been confirmed by the West German state prosecutor.

In fact, officials in Bonn are convinced that the former East German minister for state security, Erich Mielke, personally planned and supervised attacks staged against West German businessmen and government officials by the notorious Red Army Faction.

During the last two weeks, the new, non-communist government of East Germany has arrested six men and women on suspicion of having been active members of the terrorist group. West Germany has requested their extradition and plans to put them on trial. Bonn would also like to charge former East German leader Erich Honecker with abetting terrorism, but so far lacks proof.

The former head of the highly efficient East German intelligence service, Markus Wolf, has also been under investigation by Bonn.

Wolf has long been the East Bloc's master spy. His agents managed over the past three decades to infiltrate virtually every nook and cranny of the West German government, armed forces, intelligence services and big business. One of Wolf's operatives even became the personal assistant of former West German chancellor Willy Brandt.

In a most curious episode, the legendary East German spymaster suddenly turned democratic reformer. Last year Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev paid a state visit to East Germany in which he publicly warned Stalinist party boss Honecker to either reform his ways or be swept away by the tide of history. Shortly after, none other than Markus Wolf went public with calls for democratic reforms in East Germany. And soon after that, the Honecker regime was thrown out by a "reformist" group of communists led by Wolf and Egon Krenz.

Then, things went terribly wrong. Instead of forming a new regime, the East German communists collapsed and were quickly replaced by a non-communist government. The Berlin Wall was thrown open and East Germany embarked on the

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path of reunification with West Germany.

It is now clear that Moscow engineered the overthrow of the Honecker regime and its replacement by pro-Gorbachev reformers. Honecker and security minister Mielke firmly controlled the ubiquitous and justly feared internal security agency, the Stasi. So the KGB used Wolf's intelligence service to organize the overthrow of the old regime. Unfortunately for the Soviets, what was to have been a simple change of government provoked a massive popular uprising that swept away communist power.

Western intelligence experts have known for years that Markus Wolf not only ran East German intelligence as his personal fief but also was Moscow's most important agent in Germany. Wolf is reported to hold one of the most senior ranks in the KGB and to report directly to the Kremlin. The East German spy agency was the most effective and efficient foreign branch of the KGB — which also controlled the intelligence organizations of all the other Warsaw Pact members.

So if Wolf was directly involved in supporting West German terrorists — and there is good evidence that he was — then it's clear Moscow knew about such operations and was likely behind them. In fact, mounting evidence strongly suggests that the KGB secretly supported and directed terrorist groups in not only West Germany but in Italy, France, Spain, Greece, Belgium and Turkey.

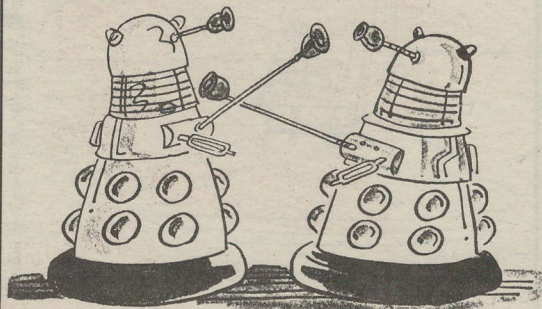
West German agents are now trying to track down evidence in East Germany to support charges against its former leaders. But the ever-efficient KGB has already moved swiftly to cover its tracks. Shortly after the Honecker regime fell, KGB agents and Wolf's men reportedly gathered tons of security files in East Berlin and spirited them off to Moscow. Thousands of other security and intelligence files were destroyed.

But, as World War II showed, the Germans are so thorough there is almost inevitably some sort of paper trail revealing crimes that have been covered up. That's why the Soviets are very nervous that evidence linking them to European terrorism will still emerge.

Meanwhile, we should keep an eye on the mysterious Wolf. He may very well take permanent refuge in Moscow — where he has been spending most of his time lately. Or, like a Teutonic Jack-in-the-box, Wolf might just resurface in a united Germany. He is already putting out hints that he would like to resume his old work, this time, of course, for the united Fatherland.

Germany would be better off without Wolf but, as history shows, old spies never seem to die, they simply go to work for someone else.

Punch



"Glad to see you again after all these years!
Great to hear you haven't lost your accent."