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## The “Vietnam Legion”

West German Psychological Warfare against  
East German Propaganda in the 1960s

❖ Peter Busch

On Saturday, 4 September 1965, the editors of *Neues Deutschland*, the official newspaper of East Germany’s Socialist Unity Party (SED), presented “sensational revelations” to their readers. On the first page, under the customary five-pointed star surrounding the portrait of Karl Marx, the main headline featured a story on Southeast Asia. “Bundeswehr takes part in aggression in Vietnam,” it read. The paper went on to reveal “facts” that supposedly confirmed the suspicions voiced by leaders of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) for some time. Officers of the West German air force, *Neues Deutschland* claimed, were flying “terror attacks against Vietnam’s people.” Some 120 soldiers from the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) were fighting side by side with the “American aggressors,” and in the process six had died, thirteen had been wounded, and two had gone missing. These “facts,” the story claimed, had been unearthed by the U.S. weekly news-magazine *Time*, the Associated Press news agency, and a small West German newspaper with close links to Communists, *Bauernruf*, which had allegedly learned about it from a mother whose son had taken part in the mission. *Neues Deutschland* noted that when the West German government was confronted about the matter, a spokesman “denied the involvement of West German soldiers in the dirty war in Vietnam.”<sup>1</sup>

East German radio had broken this purported story in its evening news of the previous day but had not made it the lead. Pride of place had gone to a visit by the SED General Secretary, Walter Ulbricht, to the city of Neubran-

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1. “Bundeswehr ist an Aggression in Vietnam beteiligt,” *Neues Deutschland*, 4 September 1965, p. 1. The small West German newspaper *Bauernruf* was published in Düsseldorf and was closely connected to West German Communist circles.

denburg. Yet when the 9:00 PM news got around to the Vietnam story, it used the phrase that framed GDR media coverage of alleged Bundeswehr participation in Vietnam from then on. The West German government, the news program reported, had established a "Vietnam Legion." The 120 members of the legion had allegedly been given U.S. passports and were flying American aircraft in Vietnam.<sup>2</sup> The following day GDR radio maintained that the West German denial was just another of Bonn's lies. The East Germans added a new accusation to the litany: Bonn was supplying the Saigon regime with poison gas.<sup>3</sup> East German media also claimed that none other than General Heinz Trettner, the Bundeswehr chief of staff, was in charge of the "Vietnam Legion." *Neues Deutschland* stressed that the legion was modeled on the "Condor Legion" that had been sent by Nazi Germany to support the Fascists in the Spanish Civil War. Trettner, who at a young age had served in Adolf Hitler's air force, was supposedly playing a leading role in the "Condor Legion."<sup>4</sup>

The mounting volume of GDR media stories alleging FRG involvement in Vietnam did not go unnoticed in Bonn. The psychological warfare section in the FRG Ministry of Defense had been closely monitoring GDR coverage of purported Bundeswehr activities in Vietnam since June 1965.<sup>5</sup> When *Neues Deutschland*, the main East German wire service, and GDR radio started to use the label "Vietnam Legion" and attacked General Trettner, West Germany's psychological warfare experts swung into action. They embarked on an extensive campaign to expose GDR propaganda methods and prove that East German allegations were completely unfounded.<sup>6</sup>

One purpose of this article is to draw attention to the activities of the Bundeswehr's psychological warfare section, which has so far received scant scholarly attention even in Germany. A recent doctoral dissertation is the most detailed study to date, but it focuses on the section's role in funding edu-

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2. 21.00h news bulletin, GDR Radio I, 3 September 1965, in Imperial War Museum, Duxford, BBC Monitoring Transcript Collection, Box EE/C/53: Eastern Germany, Folder: Voice 29.8.-4.9.1965.

3. "Radio Magazine on West German Bundeswehr," GDR Radio I, 4 September 1965, 17.10h, Imperial War Museum, Duxford, BBC Monitoring Transcript Collection, Box EE/C/53: Eastern Germany, Folder: Voice 29.8.-4.9.1965.

4. "Erhard stellt Legion Vietnam auf," *Neues Deutschland*, 6 September 1965, p. 1.

5. The FRG Ministry of Defense named the section PSK im Frieden (Psychological Warfare in Peace Time).

6. Minute to minister (*Ministervorlage*), 14 January 1966, in Bundesarchiv Militärarchiv, Freiburg (BMA-F), BW/2/5112. At the time, the terms "propaganda" and "psychological warfare" were used interchangeably. A useful, stripped-down definition of "propaganda" has been suggested by Philip Taylor, who calls it a "deliberate attempt to persuade people to think and behave in a desired way." Philip Taylor, *Munitions of the Mind—A History of Propaganda from the Ancient World to the Present Era* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1995), p. 6. For a brief yet excellent discussion of "propaganda history," see Kenneth A. Osgood, *Total Cold War: Eisenhower's Secret Propaganda Battle at Home and Abroad* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006), pp. 15–37.

cational societies in West Germany.<sup>7</sup> Karl Heinz Roth's *Invasionsziel DDR* of 1971 reveals interesting insights into the organization, but the book is marred by Roth's strident anti-Bundeswehr stance.<sup>8</sup> More recently, Dirk Schindelbeck made use of some of the available primary records, and Friedrich-Wilhelm Schlomann drew on his experience as a member of the psychological warfare section in the 1960s to discuss some of its work.<sup>9</sup> Schlomann stresses that FRG Defense Minister Franz-Josef Strauß set up the psychological warfare section in 1958 to "immunize" the West German population against GDR propaganda.<sup>10</sup> Yet like Roth and Schindelbeck, Schlomann then focuses on the psychological warfare activities at the border between East and West Germany; in particular, the use of loudspeakers and the dropping of leaflets to undermine the morale of GDR soldiers. In this they reflect the media reporting on the Bundeswehr's psychological warfare battalions at the time.<sup>11</sup>

The idea of "immunization" meant that Bonn's psychological warfare section was expected to look closer to home as well. The section was responsible for countering Communist subversion "from abroad and from the German underground" that threatened to undermine the will of the West German people to defend their country.<sup>12</sup> By focusing on the campaign to counter the GDR's "Vietnam Legion" allegations, this article reveals that the FRG's psychological warfare experts not only targeted the enemy in the East but also strove—covertly—to influence public opinion in the FRG as well as in France, Britain, and the newly independent states in Africa and Asia. East and West German archival records as well as British primary sources allow for an analysis of the methods used by the psychological warfare section.

In addition to highlighting the activities of the Bundeswehr's psychological warfare section, the article shows how an East German "information" campaign worked and what it tried to achieve. The article then demonstrates how

7. Dirk Drews, "Die Psychologische Kampfführung/psychologische Verteidigung der Bundesrepublik Deutschland—Eine erziehungswissenschaftliche und publizistikwissenschaftliche Untersuchung," Ph.D. diss., University of Mainz, 2006, <http://ubm.opus.hbz-nrw.de/volltexte/2006/981/pdf/diss.pdf>.

8. Karl Heinz Roth et al., *Invasionsziel: DDR, vom Kalten Krieg zur Neuen Ostpolitik* (Hamburg: konkret Buchverlag, 1971). The book was a special edition of the left-wing magazine *konkret*. One of its columnists in the 1960s was Ulrike Meinhoff, later cofounder of the Baader-Meinhoff group.

9. Dirk Schindelbeck, "Propaganda mit Gummiballons und Pappraketen: Deutsch-deutscher Flugblattkrieg nach dem Bau der Mauer," in Gerald Diesener and Rainer Gries, eds., *Propaganda in Deutschland: Zur Geschichte der politischen Meinungsbildung im 20. Jahrhundert* (Darmstadt: Primus Verlag, 1996), pp. 213–234; and Friedrich-Wilhelm Schlomann, "Der psychologische Krieg der DDR und die PsK der Bundeswehr," *Deutschland-Archiv*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (February 2001), pp. 246–258.

10. Schlomann, "Der psychologische Krieg der DDR," p. 252.

11. "Viel Verdruß bei Ballon-Aktion," *Die Welt*, 27 July 1965, p. 4; and "Neckermann schießt auf Luftballons," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 27 July 1965, p. 3. See also the earlier coverage in *Der Spiegel*, No. 22/1965 (25 May 1965), pp. 47–50.

12. Minute for Drews for meeting with Minister of Defense, 10 July 1958, in BMA-F, BW2/20206.

West German authorities maintained an unofficial network that enabled them to publish "camouflaged propaganda" and plant articles in West German newspapers authored by the psychological warfare section.<sup>13</sup> By scrutinizing propaganda practices at the grassroots level, the analysis here expands the post-Cold War literature regarding the use of propaganda in Western democracies during the first two decades after World War II—literature that demonstrates the importance Western leaders attached to information policy and discusses broad themes of Western propaganda.<sup>14</sup> Finally, taking the lead from what Ralph Giordano has termed "perverse anti-Communism," the article also explores the extent to which West Germany's counterpropaganda campaign reflected the survival of essentially undemocratic traditions and convictions rooted in Germany's Nazi past.<sup>15</sup>

A point worth stressing at the outset is that documents in the West German archives lend no credence to the "Vietnam Legion" allegations. The East German campaign stood reality on its head. The West German Defense Ministry's counter-campaign has to be seen in relation to the determination of Chancellor Ludwig Erhard's government *not* to send any West German soldiers to Vietnam. Even U.S. President Lyndon B. Johnson's pressure on Erhard to do so in December 1965 did not change West German policy. Erhard was acutely aware that opinion polls showed no support for Bundeswehr engagement in Vietnam. The FRG government was becoming increasingly worried about the growing student movement, and Erhard was so concerned about the toxic Vietnam issue that he did his best to keep secret the U.S. request for Bundeswehr units.<sup>16</sup>

## The GDR-FRG Information War

One of the major tasks and preoccupations of the West German intelligence service, the Bundesnachrichtendienst (BND), was to monitor and assess the

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13. Often referred to as "gray propaganda," the important point is that the messages were not attributed to the government. On this method, see Osgood, *Total Cold War*, pp. 76–88.

14. Like Kenneth Osgood, most scholars have focused on the United States and Britain. See, for example, Laura A. Belmonte, *Selling the American Way: U.S. Propaganda and the Cold War* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2008); Nicholas J. Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency: American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy, 1945–1989* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Arch Puddington, *Broadcasting Freedom: The Cold War Triumph of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2003); and Scott Lucas, *Freedom's War: The American Crusade against the Soviet Union* (New York: New York University Press, 2000).

15. Ralph Giordano, *Die zweite Schuld oder von der Last Deutscher zu sein* (Hamburg: Rasch & Röhning, 1987), p. 208.

16. Alexander Troche, "Berlin wird am Mekong verteidigt." *Die Ostasienpolitik der Bundesrepublik in China, Taiwan und Südvietnam 1954–1966* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 2001), pp. 393–398.

situation in East Germany. In the BND's high-level situation reports, GDR foreign and domestic policies, as well as the intentions of SED leaders, featured prominently. Several months after the Berlin Wall was built in 1961, the BND noted that public attacks against West Germany had risen significantly, particularly from abroad.<sup>17</sup> By the mid-1960s, West German intelligence believed it knew the general theme of GDR "propaganda" only too well. The propagandists insisted that the FRG, driven by imperialist and neo-colonialist desires, was a threat to peace worldwide.<sup>18</sup> By demonstrating that Bonn was essentially continuing the militarism of Nazi Germany, the GDR hoped to drive a wedge between West Germany and its allies in Europe. The East German regime targeted the West German public with similar arguments. The GDR emphasized its own desire for peace and denounced Bonn's dangerous adventures abroad as "national treason."<sup>19</sup>

The "Vietnam Legion" allegations fit perfectly into the West German assessment of GDR information strategy. Bonn's psychological warfare experts surmised that the GDR had launched a new campaign with four main objectives: first, to discredit the FRG in Europe as well as in Asia and Africa; second, to portray the Bundeswehr as a tool of Bonn's militaristic policies; third, to popularize the slogan "Vietnam Legion" and thereby use General Trettner's connection to Hitler's "Condor Legion" to defame not only the general himself but the Bundeswehr as a whole; and fourth, to convince the West German public that the FRG was squandering the lives of Bundeswehr soldiers in the "dirty war" in Vietnam.<sup>20</sup>

Were these West German assessments correct? Did they reflect the intentions behind GDR information campaigns? The records of the SED indicate that West German interpretations of GDR information policy were generally accurate. However, this does not so much demonstrate the sophistication of West German open-source intelligence analysis as it does show that GDR me-

17. Report 118/62 (briefing paper for visit of British prime minister to Germany), 18 January 1962, in Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes, Berlin (PA), B 6/61.

18. Lagebericht SBZ 9–10/1965, Bundesnachrichtendienst (BND) Situation Report on Soviet Occupation Zone, October 1965, in Bundesarchiv Koblenz (BA-K), B 206/909.

19. Lagebericht SBZ 1–2/1966 (BND Situation Report on Soviet Occupation Zone), February 1966, in BA-K, B 206/910.

20. The FRG's policy of ensuring non-recognition of the GDR outside the Communist bloc, dubbed the Hallstein Doctrine, came increasingly under pressure in the 1960s, particularly in newly independent countries. Information policy and East German attacks on West German "war mongering" and support for regimes like the one in South Africa played a crucial role. See William Glenn Gray, *Germany's Cold War: The Global Campaign to Isolate East Germany, 1949–1969* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), pp. 149–154. East German Radio expanded its foreign language broadcasting in the 1960s to target audiences in Africa and Asia. See Klaus Arnold, *Kalter Krieg im Äther: Der Deutschlandsender und die Westpropaganda der DDR* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2002), p. 134. For the description of Vietnam as a "dirty war," see "Material zur kommunistischen Propaganda Nr. IV-13-965," 10 September 1965, in BW/2/5112, BMA-F.

dia successfully communicated the intended—and fairly blunt—messages. An SED memorandum outlining foreign information policy detailed the issues East German media had to convey. The main aim was to “reveal” Bonn’s aggressive policy and its role in disturbing the peace worldwide. To this end, GDR officials were supposed to “expose” West Germany’s plans for war, its supposed eagerness to acquire nuclear weapons, and its direct support of “imperialist” interventions. They sought to create the impression that Bonn and the “West German armament monopolies” were working hand in hand with “U.S. imperialism.” The FRG was to be portrayed as a close ally of colonial powers and racist dictatorships. In the GDR media, Bonn’s foreign economic and military aid was portrayed as a form of “extreme support for neocolonialism” that would “prevent national, independent, and democratic development” in the Third World. GDR propaganda officials argued that the Federal Republic and Nazi Germany were of the same basic nature. One way to prove this was to show that former Nazi leaders and war criminals occupied leading positions in Bonn. In the view of East German strategists, exposing the Nazi past of the FRG’s elite would reaffirm deep-rooted suspicions still prevalent among West Germany’s neighbors and bring policy differences within the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to the fore, driving a wedge between Bonn and its Western allies.<sup>21</sup> The East Germans were well aware of how successful their previous campaigns had been in revealing the Nazi past of high-ranking FRG politicians. These revelations and an apparent rise of anti-Semitism in the FRG in 1959–1960 had sparked a public outcry in Britain and the United States.<sup>22</sup>

Overall, the intentions of the GDR’s foreign information policy matched West German intelligence assessments. However, West German analysts seemed not to understand the ideological nature of the GDR’s claims. The voluminous records of the SED’s higher organs have an aura of sincerity about them. Officials at all levels seem to have believed in the claims made about West Germany.<sup>23</sup> Although GDR leaders knew they had to adhere to the set line, more significant factors were also at work. On the one hand, dero-

21. “The development of GDR foreign information,” attachment to SED Central Committee minutes 43/65, 9 January 1965, in Stiftung der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv Berlin (SAPMO-BArch), DY30/J IV 2/2/1011.

22. Ulrich Brochhagen, *Nach Nürnberg: Vergangenheitsbewältigung und Westintegration in der Ära Adenauer* (Hamburg: Junius Verlag, 1994), pp. 298–306; and Henning Hoff, *Großbritannien und die DDR 1955–1973: Diplomatie auf Umwegen* (Munich: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2003), pp. 313–314. In their discussion of the 1959–1960 anti-Semitism campaign, Brochhagen and Hoff mention in passing that the FRG Auswärtiges Amt made some feeble attempts at countering GDR propaganda abroad.

23. See Peter C. Caldwell, *Dictatorship, State Planning, and Social Theory in the German Democratic Republic* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 5–11; and Mary E. Sarotte, *Dealing with the Devil: East Germany, Détente, and Ostpolitik, 1968–1973* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), p. 173.

gations of the capitalist enemy as “militarist” and “imperialist” had been a key feature of Soviet-bloc discourse for decades. Party officials did not question the truth of such statements, which fit with their deeply held ideological preconceptions. The SED Central Committee explicitly described the claims about West German militarism as “continuing the polemical and aggressive discussion of the imperialist ideology and policy of West German monopoly capitalism.”<sup>24</sup> For the SED, “truth” or “objectivity” in a positivist sense was of secondary importance, something the West German analysts never fully appreciated. Their counter-campaign focused on a fact-based approach and did not engage with ideas or ideologies.

The Bundeswehr’s psychological warfare analysts closely monitored the “Vietnam Legion” campaign. They noted that East German claims about alleged FRG involvement began in June 1965 and peaked in September of that year, coinciding with the Federal Republic’s election campaign. This could not have been an accident, Bonn’s psychological warfare experts concluded.<sup>25</sup> They assumed that the GDR campaign was carefully planned and centrally directed, most likely from Moscow.<sup>26</sup>

## The GDR Campaign

Documents from the SED archives reveal that the campaign *was* centrally directed by the party’s Commission for Agitation (*Agitationskommission*). However, the East German records do not indicate that the Soviet Union was orchestrating the campaign. The SED Commission for Agitation was headed by Albert Norden, the chief architect of GDR information policy. The commission had twenty members overall, including the directors of GDR radio and TV and the editor-in-chief of *Neues Deutschland*. The day-to-day work was coordinated by a smaller group of three members. Their task was to issue guidelines on the most important questions of the day and to stay in close contact with the directors of GDR television and radio and with the editor of *Neues Deutschland*.<sup>27</sup>

24. “The development of GDR foreign information,” 9 January 1965.

25. “Material zur kommunistischen Propaganda Nr. IV-13-965,” 10 September 1965.

26. Lothar Lohrisch, ed., *Neue Kommunistische Verleumdungskampagne “Legion Vietnam”* (Cologne: Markus-Verlag, 1965), p. 18.

27. Attachment 6 to minute 49/65, 11 December 1965, in SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/J IV 2/2/1017. For an overview of the organization of the GDR’s Department of Agitation, see Heike Amos, *Politik und Organisation der SED-Zentrale 1949–1963: Struktur und Arbeitsweise von Politbüro, Sekretariat und Zentralkomitee und ZK-Apparat* (Münster: LIT-Verlag, 2003), pp. 368–369.

The 1960s were the heyday of the Commission for Agitation. Norden, known for giving press conferences that denounced leading West German politicians as former Nazis, found the body to be a useful tool. The commission's "guidelines for argumentation" (*Argumentationshinweise*), despite their innocuous name, were far more than guidelines. They were binding instructions transmitted to the editors of all major newspapers and the official ADN news agency.<sup>28</sup> GDR television and radio received them too. The guidelines usually dealt with no more than three topics a day. They were not meant to be minutely detailed blueprints for newspapers and newscasts to follow. Instead, the guidelines focused on the issues deemed to be of greatest importance. They also left room for some creativity on the journalists' part to communicate the message.<sup>29</sup>

This principle not only helped to guarantee apparent variety in the GDR media but also left no doubt of the importance of the topics selected by the commission. For example, Guideline No. 66, issued 12 June 1965, gave primary emphasis to the theme of alleged West German military involvement in Vietnam. It asked GDR journalists to take recent coups in Saigon as a starting point to criticize West German claims that the United States was fighting for "democracy" in Vietnam. Newspapers, radio, and television should discuss West German preparations for military involvement in the Vietnam War.<sup>30</sup> This was the first time the guidelines mentioned this theme, and GDR media heeded the commission's advice. Those monitoring GDR media in the West German Ministry of Defense noted that East Germany had started a new campaign against the Bundeswehr.<sup>31</sup>

On 4 September 1965 the commission decided to step up the campaign. The opportunity to accelerate the "Vietnam Legion" propaganda had opened the previous day when West German Bundestag Member Oswald Adolf Kohut of the liberal Free Democrats raised allegations of West German military involvement in Vietnam. Kohut's question was based on rumors and misrepresentations first published by the West German Communist newspaper *Bauernruf* and then picked up by Western news agencies. This led to headlines such as "German Foreign Legion as U.S. Pilots in Vietnam War?" in

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28. Gunter Holzweißig, *Die schärfste Waffe der Partei: Eine Mediengeschichte der DDR* (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2002), pp. 17–19.

29. The complete run of guidelines for 1965 can be found in SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/IV A2/9.02/45–57. The commission also held "argumentation meetings" on Tuesdays and Thursdays. See Julia Franziska Engels, *Helden an der Mauer: Die propagandistische Aufbereitung von Republikfluchten in der deutschen Presse* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2004), p. 54; and Holzweißig, *Schärfste Waffe*, p. 9.

30. *Argumentationshinweise* No. 66 by Singer, 12 June 1965, in SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/IV A2/9.02/48.

31. "Material zur kommunistischen Propaganda Nr. IV-13-965," 10 September 1965.

mainstream West German newspapers.<sup>32</sup> To build on this initial propaganda success, a senior SED official, Rudi Singer, cabled all GDR media outlets on 4 September at 1:00 P.M. He asked editors to continue reporting “all facts” about the participation of West Germans in the Vietnam War “*at length and most prominently.*”<sup>33</sup> Journalists should make use of a recent *Time* magazine article and the parliamentary question tabled by Kohut. They should allege that Bonn was preparing to establish a “Vietnam Legion” as Hitler had done in Spain. Reports should stress that Erhard’s government was trying to hide these preparations from the public. GDR journalists were ordered to disclose as much as possible to convince West German citizens not to reelect the Christian Democrats. According to GDR propagandists, the defeat of Chancellor Erhard at the general elections on 19 September was the only way to stop his “dangerous and adventurous policy” before it was too late.<sup>34</sup>

The instructions from the Commission for Agitation demonstrate that the West German assessment of GDR motives was broadly correct. The SED initiated the extended coverage in East German media of alleged Bundeswehr participation in Vietnam in early September 1965 and strove to put the allegations into the context of the West German general elections. Moreover, on 4 September 1965 the SED employed the phrase “Vietnam Legion.” West German analysts accurately construed the East German actions as a carefully calibrated campaign that would peak prior to the elections, but they overlooked one important aspect: the “Vietnam Legion” campaign proved the flexibility of the East German propaganda machine. SED officials could exploit opportunities when low-key GDR propaganda had succeeded in raising doubts among FRG members of parliament.

It is important to note that the Commission for Agitation’s guidelines to step up the campaign were issued after these events. The parliamentary question and Western reports had created an opening for the GDR to seize on an issue that had been simmering since June. The “Vietnam Legion” theme also fit perfectly into a general instruction issued by the Commission for Agitation in August 1965: When discussing the West German election campaign, GDR journalists had to “engage with” Bonn’s “policy” of endangering peace. Articles were to prove, on a daily basis, the costs the West German people would incur if they reelected the CDU, “the party of division and preparation for war.”<sup>35</sup>

32. “Deutsche Fremdenlegionäre als US-Flieger im Vietnam-Krieg?” *Duisburger General Anzeiger*, 4 September 1965, p. 3.

33. Singer to all GDR media, 4 September 1965, in SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/IV A2/9.02/49; underlined in original.

34. *Ibid.*

35. *Argumentationshinweise* No. 91, 27 August 1965, in SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/IV A2/9.02/49.

GDR radio and *Neues Deutschland* immediately jumped on Kohut's parliamentary initiative, even before the Commission for Agitation issued its guidelines. This showed the speed and flexibility of East Berlin as well as the control of information policy by a small inner circle of GDR officials. The editor-in-chief of *Neues Deutschland*, Hermann Axen, played a key role on the Commission for Agitation.

Although West German psychological warfare experts tended to overestimate the long-term planning of GDR propaganda, they lacked a deeper understanding of the motivation. The "Vietnam Legion" campaign, albeit important, was not one of the major GDR campaigns at the time. The Commission for Agitation did not issue any further guidelines on the matter in 1965. A truly high-profile campaign would have generated many more instructions. An example at the time was the GDR campaign against the statute of limitation for prosecuting Nazi war crimes in West Germany. The campaign was meticulously organized, comprising not only media coverage but also agitation in factories and demonstrations in various East German cities.<sup>36</sup>

West German analysts also failed to appreciate that both the statute of limitations campaign and the "Vietnam Legion" campaign targeted East German as much as West German and international audiences. The "Vietnam Legion" campaign in particular reflected the ideological divide and views of the main political enemy that had dominated German Communist discourse for decades. All leading party officials had fought in the Spanish Civil War against Nazi German intervention, and the ideals and sacrifices of that war were engrained in the German Communist mind and frequently invoked in the GDR until well into the 1970s.<sup>37</sup> Norden's use of the Spanish Civil War in his book on the "making of wars" is a case in point. He devoted the largest part of his chapter on the origins of World War II to a discussion of the "murderers of Spain." Later, in the section on the Vietnam War, he returned to the Spanish Civil War theme, comparing U.S. military help for the Saigon regime to Hitler's support for Francisco Franco.<sup>38</sup>

Norden's book shows how the Spanish experience was used as shorthand for the aggressiveness of the enemies of Communism. Employing the term "Vietnam Legion" was designed not only to vilify the Bundeswehr in West Germany and beyond but also to resonate with ideological stalwarts in the

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36. Attachment 3 to SED Central Committee minute No. 63, 25 August 1965, in SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/J IV 2/3/1103.

37. Arnold Kramer, "The Cult of the Spanish Civil War in East Germany," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 39, No. 4 (October 2004), pp. 531–560. See also Michael Uhl, *Mythos Spanien: Das Erbe der International Brigaden in der DDR* (Bonn: Dietz Verlag, 2004).

38. Norden did not repeat the "Vietnam Legion" allegations in his book *So werden Kriege gemacht!* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1968), pp. 78–92, 223.

GDR. The term was a battle cry that forged unity in East Germany and exposed the alleged neoimperialists in West Germany.

## The West German Counter-Campaign

The existing literature on the West German psychological warfare section stresses that it sought mainly to influence East German hearts and minds. At the border the section bombarded GDR soldiers with loudspeaker messages.<sup>39</sup> Its members also used balloons to drop leaflets over the GDR.<sup>40</sup> The messages usually tried to undermine morale in East Germany and were designed to persuade soldiers and civilians to flee to the more affluent West. This part of Bonn's psychological warfare activity was publicly known, and the media duly dubbed Christian Trentzsch, the head of the psychological warfare section, the "balloon warrior."<sup>41</sup>

Yet the "balloon warriors" reacted differently to the "Vietnam Legion" campaign. They considered neither East German soldiers nor civilians on the other side of the Iron Curtain to be possible targets for countermeasures. Instead, they focused squarely on West German and Western European public opinion—a sign that the psychological warfare experts only partly understood which audience GDR agitation targeted. Often, the West Germans found themselves on the defensive when GDR propaganda escalated, and they did little more than try to show that the East Germans were liars.

One of the reasons for this essentially defensive posture was that despite the FRG's close monitoring of the campaign from June 1965 onward, the dramatic turn in early September came as a surprise to the West German Ministry of Defense. An important omission in the ministry's first press statement on the matter necessitated the more extensive counter-campaign over the following months. In response to the *Bauernruf* report that West Germans were fighting in Vietnam and the subsequent tabling of a parliamentary question, the press office issued a brief statement denying the claims and affirming that no Bundeswehr soldiers were militarily involved in Vietnam, nor had the ministry granted "special leave" to Bundeswehr soldiers to go to Vietnam and fight there. Reports to the contrary were simply false, manufactured by *Bauernruf*, a paper with close links to Communists, the statement added.<sup>42</sup>

39. Report by Gerhard Haas on meeting of permanent conference of interior ministers of German states, 28 January 1966, in BMA-F, BW/2/4216.

40. Report on series of balloon tests by PSKKp in Meppen, 25 May 1965, in BMA-F, BW/2/4216.

41. "Propagandakrieg: Greife lieber zur HB," *Der Spiegel*, No. 22 (26 May 1965), pp. 47–50.

42. Press release by Viebig (press office), 3 September 1965, in BMA-F, BW/2/5112.

The statement was issued on 3 September 1965, a Friday, which might explain why the ministry did not look more closely into the *Bauernruf* claims or at the evidence quoted by the GDR propagandists; notably, the article in *Time* magazine. *Time*, as *Bauernruf* and later GDR media pointed out, had reported that 23 West Germans were fighting in Vietnam. The West German ministry's press release did not mention the *Time* report or look into it, nor did the Associated Press (AP) refer to it when transmitting a story to its clients on 3 September 1965. The AP focused on the West German denial but went on to say that the denial was a reaction to a report in a U.S. newsmagazine.<sup>43</sup>

The AP story opened the floodgates. West German newspapers were keen to pursue it. "Is the Condor Legion Revived in Vietnam?" one paper asked when noting Bonn's denial of a report in the "generally very well-informed American magazine *Time*."<sup>44</sup> Another paper's lead sentence put even more emphasis on the alleged source: "The newsmagazine *Time* claims that German pilots are involved in the Vietnam War."<sup>45</sup> In reality, *Time* had never made such a claim. A report published on 23 July 1965 mentions that 23 West German instructors and technicians were working in Vietnam, but in noting this *Time* was merely reiterating a fact the West German magazine *Der Spiegel* had reported two weeks earlier.<sup>46</sup> Although West German media published corrections a few days later, the damage had been done.<sup>47</sup> Not only had the GDR campaign been reinvigorated, the leadership of the Bundeswehr also received more and more reports that its soldiers were beginning to ask probing questions. Many rank-and-file Bundeswehr soldiers were wondering whether the GDR's claims were true.<sup>48</sup>

Even as officials in the psychological warfare section were trying to explain to the Bundeswehr's command what had happened, news came in that GDR media were about to publish additional evidence for their claims.<sup>49</sup> Leo Habicher of United Press International (UPI) called the ministry to alert the Bundeswehr to the latest ADN report, which featured a supposed witness, Private Reinhard Mankus, who had "sought refuge" in the GDR. Mankus claimed that one of his Bundeswehr superiors had tried to lure him into com-

43. *Vietnam Legion? A New Communist Defamation Campaign* (London: Independent Information Centre, n.d.), p. 54. An original copy of the wire report is in BMA-F, BW/2/5114.

44. "Deutsche als Fremdenlegionäre in Vietnam?" *Duisburger General Anzeiger*, 4 September 1965, p. 1.

45. "Deutsche Piloten im Einsatz in Vietnam," *Neue Ruhr Neue Rhein Zeitung*, 4 September 1965, p. 3.

46. "Viet Nam & Korea: A Comparison," *Time*, 23 July 1965, p. 10; and "Vietnam—23 Deutsche," *Der Spiegel*, No. 28 (7 July 1965), p. 59.

47. Associated Press, "No Vietnam Legion," *Neue Ruhr Neue Rhein Zeitung*, 6 September 1965, p. 3.

48. Draft minute to minister (*Ministervorlage*), 14 January 1966, in BMA-F, BW/2/5112.

49. Minute for Chef Stab S, 9 September 1965, in BMA-F, BW/2/5112.

mitting to a tour in Vietnam by offering a handsome payment of 2,000 Deutschmarks a month.<sup>50</sup>

The psychological warfare section immediately went to work, probed into Mankus's career in the Bundeswehr, and found he had a very poor record. Mankus had joined the Bundeswehr in October 1964. He had been fined numerous times for insubordination, was known for poor personal hygiene, and had crashed the car of an officer on a joyride just a month before his desertion in August 1965. Mankus had an aunt in the GDR, and from her correspondence with relatives in West Germany the psychological warfare section learned that Mankus had probably been arrested in Poland.<sup>51</sup>

The Mankus story forced Bonn's psychological warfare experts further onto the defensive. To recapture lost ground, they provided trusted journalists with background information, appealed directly to journalists to "act responsibly," planted material in regional newspapers, and published a booklet in German, English, and French that detailed the errors, lies, and distortions of the GDR's campaign. While the psychological warfare experts did not command the same resources as the vast state-run GDR media machinery, they counted on one important advantage. Citizens in Western countries knew that the mass media were independent of state control. If the independent media were to debunk the claims made in the "Vietnam Legion" campaign, GDR propaganda was bound to fail. The independence of Western media was thus a crucial part of this strategy.<sup>52</sup> Official denials would never be as powerful as an apparently independent report. The common element of the countermeasures taken by the psychological warfare section was the requirement that the public had to be unaware of the Bundeswehr's involvement.

West Germany was not the only Western democracy concealing its information activities during the Cold War.<sup>53</sup> When rebutting the "Vietnam Legion" allegations, West German officials used techniques similar to those adopted by the U.S. Information Agency (USIA) and the British Information Research Department (IRD). The IRD, for example, stressed in its internal

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50. Record of telephone conversation with Leo Habicher (UPI), 7 September 1965, in BMA-F, BW/2/5113.

51. Special Archive record of Reinhard Mankus, 9 September 1965, in BMA-F, BW/2/5113.

52. On the advantages of this "subtle propaganda," see Shawn J. Parry-Giles, "'Camouflaged' Propaganda: The Truman and Eisenhower Administrations' Covert Manipulation of News," *Western Journal of Communication*, Vol. 60, No. 2 (1996), pp. 146–167.

53. Andrew Defty, *Britain, America, and Anti-Communist Propaganda 1945–1953: The Information Research Department* (London: Frank Cass, 2004); Paul Lashmar and Oliver James, *Britain's Secret Propaganda War 1948–1977* (Stroud, UK: Sutton, 1998); W. Scott Lucas and C. J. Morris, "A Very British Crusade: The Information Research Department and the Beginning of the Cold War," in Richard Aldrich, ed., *British Intelligence, Strategy and the Cold War, 1945–51* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 102–130; and Lyn Smith, "Covert British Propaganda: The Information Research Department, 1944–1977," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 9, No.1 (March 1980), pp. 67–83.

papers that interpretative analyses of Communist policy, including propaganda and tactics, were the most important material that the department distributed. Moreover, the background information produced had to be "as factual and as accurate as we can make it."<sup>54</sup>

Bonn's psychological warriors followed the same principles. However, some aspects of the FRG's counter-campaign also reflect the darker days of German history. The psychological warfare section employed methods that had been used by Nazi propagandists in the 1930s; it also chose to fall back on anti-Communist information networks and writers who had played a prominent role in Nazi Germany.

## West German Counterpropaganda Methods

The FRG's counter-campaign sought to debunk East German propaganda techniques. The psychological warfare analysts presented factual information and thoroughly refuted East Germany's allegations. In this they stuck to the "truth" as they saw it but resorted to emotive language. The documents do not suggest any attempts at distorting or inventing events—the content of West German information on the alleged "Vietnam Legion" was factual and accurate—but many of the means of disseminating the information were questionable or outright manipulative, none more so than the psychological warfare section's first initiative. In the wake of the escalation of the GDR's campaign, the section published an article in the Sunday edition of *Kölnische Rundschau*, one of the major papers in Cologne, West Germany's third-largest city.<sup>55</sup> Published under the byline "Rundschau on Sunday's Own Report," the article affirmed that the story of West German soldiers fighting in Vietnam was false.<sup>56</sup> The authors cited the professions of the 23 West Germans *Time* had mentioned as working in Vietnam. Most were teachers, social workers, and doctors. The article seemed like any journalistic, fact-based report, but the tone changed in the final paragraph: "This ['Vietnam Legion'] is a phantom army," the article observed. "Anything else is utter invention and distortion."<sup>57</sup> How the psychological warfare section managed to plant the article or

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54. IRD memo "Use of I.R.D. written material," enclosed in letter by L. C. Glass (IRD), 28 November 1961, in The National Archives of the United Kingdom (TNAUK), FO 1110/1355—PR 1011/1/G.

55. Minute Fü BVII 68/5 to Chief of Staff, 3 September 1965, in BMA-F, BW/2/5112; and Draft minute to minister (*Ministervorlage*), 14 January 1966.

56. In German the byline is "Eigener Bericht der Rundschau am Sonntag."

57. "Deutsche Vietnam Kämpfer am Rhein erfunden," *Kölnische Rundschau am Sonntag*, 19 September 1965.

who its contacts at the newspaper were remains obscure. It probably helped that the paper was known to be government-friendly and that its offices were not far from the Ministry of Defense.<sup>58</sup>

In a second step, the FRG analysts prepared background information for journalists. Titled “Material on Communist Propaganda,” this information series was routinely disseminated to trusted journalists, politicians, and activists at home and abroad, and it was to be used without attribution.<sup>59</sup> Providing “information” on Communist policies and leaving its use to the individual journalist was common practice during the Cold War. The USIA and IRD spread information in the same way. They shared the view that publication without acknowledging the government as a source increased the persuasive value of the information. An internal IRD paper explained the rationale behind this approach:

The basic principle on which we produce this material is that for the most part it is intended to be passed discreetly to local leaders of opinion in all spheres, political, official, military, educational, trade union, press, religious, etc. as ammunition to help them fight the threat of Communist subversion in their countries in their own way. It is intended that there should be no attribution of this material to a Mission, Her Majesty's Government or indeed any official British source.<sup>60</sup>

Like the IRD's material, the psychological warfare section's “Material on Communist Propaganda” series could succeed only if journalists cooperated. In at least one case cooperation was forthcoming. Franz Portnersberg of the conservative weekly newspaper *Rheinischer Merkur* based a full-page article on little more than material supplied by the Ministry of Defense—and without acknowledging the source. Portnersberg limited his journalistic contribution to stylistic improvements to the cumbersome language the psychological warfare section had produced.<sup>61</sup>

Whereas the first two aspects of the counter-campaign relied on the connivance of journalists, the third and main pillar of the psychological warfare section's information campaign dispensed with the need for reporters' and editors' cooperation. Using a technique that had served ultranationalist press baron Alfred Hugenberg well in spreading nationalistic propaganda in the 1920s and 1930s, the psychological warfare section managed to have provincial newspapers publish a one-page special report denouncing the GDR's

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58. The pro-government line did not go unnoticed in Bonn's information ministry. See, for example, Dr Enselig to Diehl (*Bundespresseamt*), 23 January 1968, in BA-K, B145/6217.

59. Minute FÜ BVII 68/5 to Chief of Staff, 30 September 1965, in BMA-F, BW/2/5112.

60. Letter by Glass (IRD), 28 November 1961, in TNAUK, FO 1110/1355—PR 1011/1/G.

61. Franz Portnersberg, “‘Legion Vietnam’ in Südvietnam?” *Rheinischer Merkur*, 5 November 1965, p. 2; and “Material zur Kommunistischen Propaganda Nr. IV-13-965,” 10 September 1965.

"Vietnam Legion" campaign.<sup>62</sup> A private company distributed the special report in the form of paper pulp molds, known as matrices (*Matern*) in the printing business.<sup>63</sup> Matrices of complete newspaper pages were light, easy to ship, and an inexpensive way for small newspapers to acquire content. Recognizing the possibility of manipulation, U.S. and British forces in western Germany after World War II had promoted newspaper licensing that would establish only papers of sufficient size that could survive without relying on matrices. Licensing had come to an end in 1949, however. Subsequently, more than 700 small provincial newspapers were established in West Germany, and many subscribed to services that provided matrices.<sup>64</sup>

Christina von Hodenberg has convincingly argued that the West German public sphere turned more critical in the 1960s as the political situation in the FRG became more stable. Her work, however, is based on an analysis of national media.<sup>65</sup> In focusing on small regional and local newspapers, the psychological warfare section was targeting the soft underbelly of West German journalism. The section believed that the matrices of its special report reached more than 5 million readers.<sup>66</sup> Titled "'Vietnam Legion' or SED Lies Have Short Legs," the report stuck to the established line of exposing the flimsiness of GDR claims. Photographs were included that aimed to demonstrate the exclusively humanitarian work of West German teachers and doctors in Vietnam. Excerpts of the article in the West German Communist newspaper *Bauernruf*, which had started the GDR campaign, were prominently displayed, as were reproductions of the misquoted *Time* magazine report and the Associated Press wire that had repeated the *Bauernruf* claims without checking the paper's sources.<sup>67</sup>

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62. By 1933 more than 1,000 newspapers relied on Hugenberg matrices. See Arnulf Kutsch, "Ein Professor von unbequemer Sorte," *Message—Internationale Zeitung für Journalismus*, No. 2 (2002), p. 160.

63. Matrices, usually referred to as "boilerplates," were widely used in the United States from the nineteenth century onward to distribute syndicated material. They were often blamed for the poor standards of local newspapers. See "Rural Press Lord," *Time*, 24 June 1946, p. 23.

64. Joachim-Felix Leonhard et al., eds., *Medienwissenschaft: Ein Handbuch Zur Entwicklung Der Medien Und Kommunikationsformen* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1999), p. 452; and Simone Szydlak, "Die Maternpresse im Zeitungsgewerbe," *Journalistik Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (2005), p. 31. For a detailed study of the use of matrices to promote the Bundeswehr, see Peter Busch, "Media-Military Relations in the Shadow of Germany's Nazi Past: The Bundeswehr 1955–1965," in Peter Dennis and Jeffrey Grey, eds., *The Military, The Media, and Information Warfare* (Canberra: Australian Military History Publishing, 2009), pp. 111–134.

65. Christina von Hodenberg, "West Germany's Long Sixties and the Formation of a Critical Public Sphere," *Contemporary European History*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (August 2006), pp. 367–395. See also Christina von Hodenberg, *Konsens und Krise: Eine Geschichte der westdeutschen Medienöffentlichkeit 1945–1973* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2006), pp. 441–460.

66. Minute FÜ BVII 68/5 to Chief of Staff, 30 September 1965.

67. Final draft of newspaper matrix "Vietnam Legion," 14 September 1965, in BMA-F, BW/2/5112.

The editors who received the matrices of the special report had no way of knowing the piece originated with the Ministry of Defense. This became apparent when the *Bauernruf* called for the newspapers that had printed the page to publish a counterstatement—a right provided by West German press law. Faced with this legal demand, the editors sent urgent letters to West-Pressedienst, the press service that had distributed the matrices. The letters show that newspaper editors did not know that West-Pressedienst was working for the Ministry of Defense. The editors asked the press service for the name of the journalist who had written the report. They also asked to be given more information.<sup>68</sup> Replies on behalf of West-Pressedienst were sent by Helmut Hermann Führung, a freelance author who lived close to Bonn.<sup>69</sup> Because he had authored matrices promoting the cause of the Bundeswehr before, he likely also wrote the “special report” countering the “Vietnam Legion” allegations.<sup>70</sup> In 1939, Führung had published a book on the achievements of the “Condor Legion” in the Spanish Civil War.<sup>71</sup> If so, the ministry was relying on someone with a potentially controversial past. Führung wrote two more books on military subjects after World War II, both published by a company owned by Paul Junker, who had been a prominent publisher in Nazi Germany.<sup>72</sup> Prior to founding the publishing house Junker und Dünnhaupt Verlag in 1927, Junker had received a doctorate in philosophy at Greifswald University. His thesis supervisor at Greifswald was Hermann Schwarz, who played a major role in the ultranationalist German Philosophic Society (*Deutsche Philosophische Gesellschaft*) and who joined the National Socialist German Workers’ Party (NSDAP) before 1933.<sup>73</sup> Among the books Junker und Dünnhaupt Verlag published in the 1930s was the official history of the SS.<sup>74</sup>

The psychological warfare section counted on a network of people with

For an example of the published newspaper page, see “‘Legion Vietnam’ oder SED haben kurze Beine,” *Westdeutsche Rundschau*, 8 October 1965, p. 1.

68. Ebeling (*Rotenburger Kreiszeitung*) to West-Pressedienst, 4 October 1965, in BMA-F, BW/2/5112; and Freitag (*Westdeutsche Rundschau*) to West-Pressedienst, 11 October 1965, in BMA-F, BW/2/5112.

69. Ebeling (*Rotenburger Kreiszeitung*) to H. H. Führung, 6 October 1965, in BMA-F, BW/2/5112.

70. Examples of these matrices are “Sie leben wie Olympia Kandidaten,” 23 April 1960, in BA-K, B145/3647; and “Kein Mangel an Freiwilligen trotz 80 Stunden Woche,” 6 August 1964, in BA-K, B145/3647.

71. H. H. Führung, *Wir funken für Franco—Einer von der Legion Condor erzählt* (Gütersloh, Germany: Verlag C. Bertelsmann, 1939).

72. H. H. Führung and W. Joost, *Wie stark ist die Sowjetunion? Volk, Wirtschaft, Wehrmacht* (Bonn: Athenäum Verlag, 1958); and H. H. Führung and R. Hauschild, *Raketen, die erregende Geschichte einer Erfindung* (Bonn: Athenäum Verlag, 1958).

73. Norbert Kapferer, *Die Nazifizierung der Philosophie an der Universität Breslau, 1933–1945* (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2001), p. 39; and Christian Tilitzki, *Die deutsche Universitätsphilosophie in der Weimarer Republik und im dritten Reich* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2002), p. 523.

74. Günther d’Alquen, *Die SS: Geschichte, Aufgabe und Organisation der Schutzstaffel der NSDAP* (Berlin: Junker und Dünnhaupt Verlag, 1939).

backgrounds similar to Führung's in the most costly aspect of its counter-campaign against the "Vietnam Legion" allegations: the publication and distribution of an 86-page booklet in German, English, and French. Titled *Vietnam Legion? A New Communist Defamation Campaign* in English and *Legion Viet Nam? Nouvelle campagne de propagande communiste* in French, the booklet was an extended high-gloss version of the "Material on Communist Propaganda" that had been produced for trusted journalists in late September 1965. The German edition was published as part of a series of the defense press service Wehrpolitische Informationen. Ostensibly "neutral," the West German Bundespresseamt covertly funded this press service on behalf of the psychological warfare section.<sup>75</sup> Run by Lothar Lohrisch, the service regularly supplied West German newspapers with information on defense matters and occasionally with booklets like *Vietnam Legion?* Lohrisch was known for his far-right views. His political convictions, coupled with allegations that he had diverted Bonn's covert funding to produce stridently anti-Communist publications, were more than the West German government could stomach when the Social Democrats took office and embarked on *Ostpolitik*. Consequently, the ministry ended all cooperation with Lohrisch in 1970.<sup>76</sup>

For the translation and distribution of the English and French editions, the psychological warfare section employed the services of Markus Verlag. The ministry's ties with this publishing house and its director, Helmut Bohn, dated back to the 1950s. In Nazi Germany, Bohn had been senior editor of *Ruhr Arbeiter*, the newspaper of the Nazi Arbeitsfront. Although Bohn claimed in his memoirs that he began to distance himself from the Nazi regime in the early 1940s, he maintained a circle of friends who belonged to the far right of the political spectrum.<sup>77</sup>

Bohn's contact in Britain was the Independent Information Centre (IIC), founded and run by the Czech anti-Communist Josef Josten, who had come to Britain in 1948. Apart from heading the IIC, Josten was the director of the

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75. The psychological warfare section found this press service an "excellent device" in its "special" public relations campaigns. Trentzsch to Küffner, 1 October 1961, in BA-K, B146/1714.

76. Ahlers to Weyer (drafted by von Schweinitz), 28 August 1970, in BA-K, B145/6906.

77. His memoir, Helmut Bohn, *Verschlungene Spuren: Eine politische Biographie, 1914–1998* (Dresden: Edition Antaios, 2003), reveals certain things about his views. Large parts of the memoir are devoted to "Jewish issues." Moreover, the memoir was published by "Edition Antaios," the publishing branch of the Institut für Staatspolitik, which sees itself as a right-wing think tank. See "Fort-schreitender Realitätsverlust," *Tageszeitung*, 17 December 2002, p. 7. The institute is affiliated with a weekly magazine that West German authorities monitored for its anti-democratic subversive content from 1996 to 2005. Leading German politicians, among them the then-deputy leader of the Social Democrats, expressed concern about the publication. To raise awareness, they provided a detailed analysis of its anti-democratic nature in an edited book: Stephan Braun and Ute Vogt, eds., *Die Wochenzeitung "junge Freiheit": Kritische Analysen zu Programmatik, Inhalt, Autoren und Kunden* (Berlin: Springer, 2007).

Free Czech Information Service (FCIS). Its most important regular publication was *Features and News from Behind the Iron Curtain*, which consisted of a collection of articles on the oppression of the peoples of Eastern Europe. This publication was sent to journalists and politicians.<sup>78</sup> The involvement of the IIC in the West German campaign demonstrates that the Ministry of Defense's use of informal networks extended beyond the FRG's borders. Conversely, Bohn was on the mailing lists of the British Foreign Office's IRD, showing that the British used similar networks of "trusted individuals" in their work in West Germany.<sup>79</sup> Nevertheless, although the regular biannual UK-FRG meetings on information policy—established in 1959 and usually attended by diplomats and officials representing the IRD and the West German Bundespresseamt—suggest some coordination of Western information campaigns, such cooperation proved difficult in practice.<sup>80</sup>

In the murky world of anti-Communist information activity, Western officials at times had difficulty finding out who was behind a campaign or how trustworthy a privately run organization was. This became evident when the IIC first appeared on the radar of the West German Foreign Office in 1961. Josten had started a campaign highlighting the inhumanity of the erection of the Berlin Wall. The Czech émigré sent small parcels to diplomats worldwide containing a paperweight in which a piece of barbed wire was embedded. This barbed wire, Josten claimed, had been used in the division of East and West Berlin in August 1961.<sup>81</sup> In the letter accompanying the "memento," Josten offered to provide more paperweights for a small fee. West German embassies in numerous countries received these parcels, and diplomats there sought guidance from their superiors in Bonn on how to deal with Josten's campaign.<sup>82</sup> The Auswärtiges Amt, not knowing what to make of the IIC, asked its embassy in the United Kingdom for an assessment of Josten's organization. The West German embassy in London needed some time—and a reminder from Bonn—to produce a reply. Eventually the Auswärtiges Amt

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78. Minute by Russell (IRD), 6 January 1964, in TNAUK, FO 110/1820—PR10551/3. Sample issues of *Features and News from Behind the Iron Curtain* can also be found in German archives. A copy of the issue of 30 January 1963 is in PA, B 6/57.

79. "Central Distribution List," attachment to British embassy Bonn to all Information Services, 17 October 1961, in TNAUK, FO 1110/1330—PR10115/49/G.

80. Minute by von Plehwe, 23 June 1965, in PA, B 31/285; and Referat L3 to Abteilung 1, 3 August 1965, in PA, B 31/285.

81. Josten designed the paperweight himself. A hand-drawn sketch survives in his papers, in University Archives Special Collections, University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL), MS 87 Josten Papers, F2 (1), B2. The *Daily Mirror* published a photograph of the paperweight to illustrate its story on Josten's initiative. Tony Miles, "Iron Curtain for Sale," *Daily Mirror* (London), 30 October 1962, p. 10.

82. FRG embassy Dublin to Auswärtiges Amt, 7 November 1962, in PA, B 6/57; FRG embassy Damascus to Auswärtiges Amt, 26 November 1962, in PA, B 6/57; and Ungern-Sternberg (FRG embassy Teheran) to Auswärtiges Amt, 30 January 1963, in PA, B 6/57.

received assurance that Josten was a sincere anti-Communist and that the London embassy had worked with him on a number of occasions. The embassy even admitted that it had helped Josten with his paperweight campaign by giving him addresses for the distribution of 600 of the paperweights. These had been ordered by Inter Nationes, an FRG-funded publisher of material on German culture and society that worked closely with West Germany's Goethe Institutes worldwide.<sup>83</sup>

However, neither the West German embassy in London nor the Auswärtiges Amt in Bonn seemed to know about the involvement of yet another West German player in the anti-Communist information game: Josten's "authentic" barbed wire had been supplied by Heinrich Bär Verlag. This publishing house was heavily involved in the "propaganda war" in Berlin and was behind the satirical magazine *Tarantel*, which made fun of the GDR.<sup>84</sup> The West German psychological warfare section supported the distribution of the magazine in the GDR and also had made use of Heinrich Bär Verlag in an earlier campaign countering GDR attacks against Hans Speidel, the FRG's high-profile general who had become the first German Commander of NATO Land Forces Central Europe in 1957. For this earlier campaign, Heinrich Bär Verlag published a book commissioned by the psychological warfare section to counter GDR allegations that Speidel was behind the Nazi plot to kill the Yugoslav king, Alexander I, in 1934.<sup>85</sup>

Bonn's embassy in London also seemed unaware of the British Foreign Office's more cautious assessment of Josten. The IRD decided to share only a limited amount of its own material with the IIC and FCIS. The IRD regarded some of Josten's publications as useful but found that the IIC's and FCIS's reporting was "indiscriminate and wild," following a "rabid anti-communist line." Moreover, the IRD doubted Josten's discretion and therefore tended "to keep him at arms length."<sup>86</sup>

83. Etzert (FRG embassy London) to Auswärtiges Amt, 5 February 1963, in PA, B 6/57. A note in Josten's papers confirms that Inter Nationes became involved, although it might have paid for only 90 paperweights. The note, dated 25 October 1962, appears on a cover slip addressed to Richard Monneg (Inter Nationes), in UNL, MS 87 Josten Papers, F2 (1), B2.

84. Wolfram Wolf (Heinrich Bär Verlag) to Josten, 28 December 1961, in UNL, MS 87 Josten Papers, F2 (1), B2. "Wolfram Wolf" was the pseudonym of the publishing house's deputy editor-in-chief, Walter Schulz-Heidorf. See Walter Schulz-Heidorf, *Preis unbezahlbar—Die "Tarantel": Heiße Lektüre im Kalten Krieg* (Berlin: Anita Tykve Verlag, 1997); and Burkhard Reiß, "Der Stich der Tarantel: Heiße Lektüre im Kalten Krieg," *Hintergrundinformation des Bundesarchivs*, n.d., [http://www.bundesarchiv.de/oefentlichkeitsarbeit/bilder\\_dokumente/01499/index.html.de](http://www.bundesarchiv.de/oefentlichkeitsarbeit/bilder_dokumente/01499/index.html.de). The West German press at the time speculated that the publishing house was partly funded by the United States: "Wer finanziert Enrico Baer," *Die Zeit*, 22 September 1967, p. 18.

85. Trentzsch (psychological warfare section) to Speidel, 5 March 1959, in BMA-F, BW/2/4444. The book in question was Themistokles Papisissis (pseud.), *Der König muß sterben* (Berlin: Heinrich Bär Verlag, n.d.).

86. Minute by Russell (IRD), 6 January 1964, in TNAUK, FO 110/1820—PR10551/3.

For Bohn and the West German psychological warfare section, however, two aspects made Josten's services attractive. First, the IIC published the booklet *Vietnam Legion* in its own name and thus helped disguise the booklet's role in the West German information campaign. Second, the center had been active since the end of World War II and had established a long list of contacts. Bohn told the Bundeswehr's psychological warfare section that Josten had sent the booklet to all major British newspapers, to prominent journalists, and to members of the British Parliament. Josten had also asked Bohn for an English-language article denouncing the "Vietnam Legion" campaign, and Josten had distributed the article through the FCIS in January.<sup>87</sup>

The IIC also found in John B. Hynd a suitably prominent member of the British Parliament to write the preface of the English-language version of *Vietnam Legion*.<sup>88</sup> Hynd had been minister for occupied Germany and Austria from 1945 to 1947 and was now chairman of the Anglo-German Parliamentary Group.<sup>89</sup> In his preface he stressed that the booklet was contributing to "the cause of truth." He pointed to the "sickening" blatancy of the lies told by Communist propaganda and referred to methods used by Nazi Propaganda Minister Josef Goebbels: "as Herr Goebbels knew so well—the most blatant lies, repeated often enough still leave their imprint on simple minds."<sup>90</sup>

The production and distribution of *Vietnam Legion* marked the peak of Bonn's campaign to counter the GDR's allegations. General Trettner resigned in August 1966 because of a dispute with West German Defense Minister Kai-Uwe von Hassel over allowing trade union activity in Bundeswehr barracks.<sup>91</sup> Consequently, the psychological warfare section was spared having to defend the reputation of a general with a questionable past as a Wehrmacht officer in Spain. However, the escalation of the Vietnam War presented the West German government with a serious dilemma. In the context of the Johnson administration's "more flags campaign," Chancellor Erhard found himself confronted with the U.S. president's request for a West German medical company and construction battalion.<sup>92</sup> Although Erhard stressed that existing legislation meant that sending military units would be very difficult, he

87. Bohn to Heuwinkel, 13 January 1966 and 21 January 1966, attaching Josten's cover letters sent with the booklets, in BMA-F, BW/2/5113. The article was published in the FCI's special report, No. 510 (5 January 1966). On Bohn's later cooperation with Josten, see Bohn, *Verschlungene Spuren*, p. 249.

88. Bohn to Heuwinkel, 8 December 1965, in BMA-F, BW/2/5113.

89. Blankenhorn (FRG embassy London) to Auswärtiges Amt, 19 November 1965, in PA, B31/285.

90. *Vietnam Legion?*, p. 3.

91. Detlef Bald, *Die Bundeswehr: Eine kritische Geschichte 1955–2005* (Munich: Verlag C. H. Beck, 2005), p. 68.

92. On Western European policy toward the Vietnam War, see Joachim Arendt, *Johnson, Vietnam und der Westen: Transatlantische Beziehungen 1963–69* (Munich: Olzog, 1994).

told U.S. officials that dispatching medical personnel should be possible.<sup>93</sup> Accordingly, West Germany sent the hospital ship *Helgoland*, manned by Red Cross staff, to Vietnam in 1966. The conundrum for West German information policy was that FRG officials felt they had to generate sufficient publicity about West German medical aid to placate the U.S. administration. At the same time the humanitarian aspect of the *Helgoland's* mission needed to be stressed to limit Bonn's vulnerability to left-wing and Communist-bloc attacks. In informing domestic audiences about the *Helgoland*, the government therefore decided to avoid talking about moral or political support for the U.S. war effort in Vietnam and to refrain from using the phrase "fight against Communism."<sup>94</sup>

This did not stop GDR politicians from calling the *Helgoland* a troop transporter, nor did it stop the East German press from continuing its "Vietnam Legion" allegations.<sup>95</sup> However, in the late 1960s the psychological warfare section only sporadically countered these claims, usually when news of West German citizens dying while fighting in the U.S. Army in Vietnam refueled the GDR's campaign. One prominent case at the time was that of Private Franz Gerhard Prediger. A West German citizen who had emigrated to the United States in 1960, Prediger had been drafted into the U.S. Army two years later. In 1964, when he was still a German national, he became a professional soldier in the U.S. Army. His unit was sent to Vietnam in October 1965, and he was killed while on foot patrol eight months later.<sup>96</sup>

Prediger's wife still lived in West Germany. On her request the military funeral—including a casket draped in the U.S. flag—was held in Mannheim. East Germany's main evening news *Aktuelle Kamera* reported the event prominently.<sup>97</sup> All the psychological warfare section could do about this was to research Prediger's biography in order to provide West German media with proof that his joining the U.S. forces in Vietnam had nothing to do with the Bundeswehr or the West German government.<sup>98</sup>

The GDR was always keen to point to cases like Prediger's. The problem for the FRG was that West Germans who decided to move to the United

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93. "Memorandum of Conversation between President Johnson and Chancellor Erhard," 20 December 1965, in U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968*, Vol. XV, Doc. 141.

94. Minute by Niebel (Bundespresseamt), 26 July 1966, in BA-K, B145/2858.

95. Speech by Hermann Axen to Volkskammer [East German Parliament], 1 September 1966, in SAPMO-BArch, DY30/IV 2/2.035/161.

96. Aktenvermerk [minute] following phone conversation with Oberstleutnant Keller, 18 July 1966, in BMA-F, BW/2/5113.

97. Transcript of *Aktuelle Kamera* report on Prediger's funeral, 16 July 1966, in BMA-F, BW/2/5113.

98. "Prediger: Militärische Daten," S VII 6 Spezialarchiv, 20 July 1966, in BMA-F, BW/2/5113.

States were allowed to join the U.S. military. Moreover, under U.S. law immigrants could be drafted into the U.S. Army and sent to Vietnam, even if they were still foreign nationals. Immigrants could avoid the draft only by changing their visa status, which in turn prevented them from ever gaining U.S. citizenship. Consequently, several West German citizens who had emigrated to the United States did end up fighting and dying in Vietnam. Confronted with probing questions in the Bundestag, the West German government stressed that the decision to move to the United States and join the U.S. Army was taken by individuals.<sup>99</sup> The West German Foreign Office did its best to improve the information leaflets handed to West Germans who wanted to emigrate to the United States, pointing out that young men ages eighteen-and-a-half to 26 who held an immigrant visa could be drafted.<sup>100</sup>

## Conclusion

The psychological warfare section of West Germany's Ministry of Defense did not limit its activities to the enemy in the East. The "Vietnam Legion" counter-campaign demonstrates that the section attempted to influence West German as well as West European public opinion. The counter-campaign also shows that the psychological warfare unit focused on immediate military concerns, particularly the reputation of the Bundeswehr and its generals. Officials in the section seemed to enjoy a great deal of latitude and independence.<sup>101</sup> Coordination between this unit and other West German government branches dealing with "information," mainly the Bundespresseamt and the foreign ministry, was at times difficult, not least because of the methods employed.

These methods mirrored those preferred by the British IRD and by USIA, which relied on "camouflaged propaganda." The West German psychological warfare unit provided background information to journalists of independent news media and also used private publishers to counter the GDR's "Vietnam Legion" campaign—but with one important difference. In 1962 the *Spiegel* affair had shown the emergence of an increasingly critical West German journalistic sphere that fiercely resisted government restrictions of media freedom.<sup>102</sup> Targeting high-profile national media was not an option

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99. Memorandum by Truckenbrodt (Auswärtiges Amt) on parliamentary question by Kurt Spitzmüller, 1 September 1966, in PA, B 82/623.

100. Müller-Delbrand (FRG embassy Washington) to Auswärtiges Amt, 3 February 1966, in PA, B 82/623.

101. Memorandum from General Heinz Trettner to Peter Busch, 4 September 2005.

102. This affair sparked the resignation of FRG Defense Minister Franz-Josef Strauß because of his in-

for the psychological warfare section. Instead, the section struck at the soft underbelly of the West German press and focused on regional newspapers. Resorting to methods used by Nazi and ultranationalist propagandists in Germany in the 1920s and 1930s, the section produced matrices that were distributed by seemingly independent press services to local newspapers. In using this and similar covert methods, the section relied on a network of people who had played a questionable role in Nazi Germany. Some, like Bohn, had occupied important positions in Nazi newspapers. Bohn claimed to have distanced himself from Nazism well before the end of World War II. Yet he, like many others, including Bundeswehr generals who had fought in the Wehrmacht, remained steadfast anti-Communists who were keen to continue the struggle against the Soviet Union. West Germany provided them with a platform to pursue their fight against Communism, and they seized the opportunity.<sup>103</sup> This led to one curious yet vital aspect of the "Vietnam Legion" counter-campaign: the defense of General Trettner against GDR attacks that focused on his past in Nazi Germany.

East Germany's propagandists certainly knew how to embarrass the FRG. The GDR's emphasis on the Nazi past of many prominent West German officials continued to create problems for the West Germans not only abroad but in the student movement closer to home. Young West Germans demanded to know exactly what their parents and grandparents had done in the 1930s and during the war. Similarly, the escalation of the Vietnam War posed serious challenges for U.S. allies. For FRG diplomats, escalation made the defense of the Hallstein Doctrine more difficult. As dozens of countries in Africa and Asia gained independence, the GDR tried to undermine the FRG's position by stressing West Germany's alliance with the United States and its "neo-imperial" wars. The prospect of West German economic aid usually proved the better argument, but Bonn's policy of breaking relations with any state that recognized the GDR became increasingly problematic.

Not only did GDR propagandists know how to embarrass West Germany; they also showed themselves effective in acting. The "Vietnam Legion" campaign demonstrated that, despite the vast and strictly controlled propaganda/media apparatus in East Germany, its information policy could be flexible and swift to exploit opportunities. Weak spots, such as the poorly researched initial West German press release that denied the existence of a "Vietnam Legion," were quickly seized on by East Berlin. West German me-

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volvement in ordering a police raid on the headquarters of the political newsmagazine *Der Spiegel* and the arrest of its editors. See David Schoenbaum, *The Spiegel Affair* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1968).

103. Matthias Weiß, "Journalisten: Worte als Taten," in Norbert Frei, ed., *Karrieren im Zwielicht: Hitlers Eliten nach 1945* (Frankfurt: Campus-Verlag, 2001), pp. 241–299.

dia were also closely monitored, allowing the GDR to make the most of reports about West German citizens fighting and dying in Vietnam.

How effective was West Germany's campaign to counter the "Vietnam Legion" allegations? How was it received in the FRG and abroad? The psychological warfare section in the West German Ministry of Defense did not address this difficult and possibly unanswerable question. The section's focus was on gathering evidence to demonstrate that East German claims were unfounded. Yet the psychological warfare experts could not stop the GDR from repeating the allegations. They could not stop West German newspapers from reporting them either, particularly the allegations that FRG nationals fighting in U.S. uniforms had been killed in Vietnam. These false claims might have contributed to the increasing disaffection with the U.S. war in Vietnam. The growing student protest movement, particularly in West Berlin, regarded Vietnam as a pivotal issue that united disparate student groups.<sup>104</sup> Without necessarily invoking the "Vietnam Legion" slogan, left-leaning activists and students compared U.S. intervention in Southeast Asia with Nazi Germany's war in Spain. In 1968, a group of West German intellectuals and writers signed a declaration in Berlin declaring that "Vietnam is our generation's Spain."<sup>105</sup>

The West German psychological warfare section failed to appreciate one important aspect of the "Vietnam Legion" campaign: its appeal to the East German audience and the Communist party faithful. This audience could not be affected by a counter-campaign that focused on convincing West Germans and the FRG's NATO allies that East Germany's allegations were patently false. Even today, a quarter of a century after the demise of the GDR, the "Vietnam Legion" myth is still perpetuated in publications of the German Communist Party (DKP) and its affiliates. These publications, such as the weekly magazine *Unsere Zeit*, repeat the allegations made in the 1960s and cite GDR sources as evidence. The author of most of the publications is Gerhard Feldbauer, who was Vietnam correspondent for the GDR's ADN wire service from 1967 to 1970.<sup>106</sup> But the phenomenon is not limited to just the hardline holdovers. Young Germans on the far left are also willing to re-

104. Martin Klimke, *The Other Alliance: Student Protest in West Germany and the United States in the Global Sixties* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), p. 5.

105. Wilfried Mausbach, "Auschwitz and Vietnam: West German Protest against America's War during the 1960s," in Andreas W. Daum et al., eds., *America, the Vietnam War, and the World: Comparative and International Perspectives* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 290.

106. Gerhard Feldbauer, "Krieg: Das deutsche Kapital führt ihn wieder weltweit: Die Bundeswehr wurde darauf seit ihrer Geburtsstunde vorbereitet," *Konsequent (Schriftenreihe der DKP, Berlin)*, Vol. 2 (2010), available at [http://anstoss.dkp-berlin.info/publikationen/k2\\_2010.pdf](http://anstoss.dkp-berlin.info/publikationen/k2_2010.pdf); and Gerhard Feldbauer and Irene Feldbauer, *Sieg in Saigon: Erinnerungen an Vietnam* (Bonn: Pahl-Rugenstein Verlag, 2006).

peat the “Vietnam Legion” story in magazines like *Unsere Zeit*.<sup>107</sup> Neither the psychological warfare section’s counter-campaign in the 1960s nor the dismantling of the Berlin Wall has prevented the seeds sown by GDR propagandists in 1965 from occasionally producing saplings, no matter how small and marginal.

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107. David Noack, “Legion Vietnam,” *Unsere Zeit*, 10 August 2007, p. 9. David Noack, born in 1988, was a history student at the University of Potsdam from 2010 to 2013. From 2009 to 2010 he represented Die Linke.SDS in the University of Greifswald’s student parliament. See <http://davidnoack.net/v2/person/>.