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Fraternal Support: The East German 'Stasi' and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam during the Vietnam War

By Martin Grossheim, September 2014



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Fraternal Support: The East German ‘Stasi’ and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam during the Vietnam War

Martin Grossheim

Introduction

In the post-war world, new linkages were established between the so-called “Second World” and the “Global South.” This working paper explores the role which the German Democratic Republic (GDR), or East Germany, played as a second-tier member of the socialist camp in the evolution of state socialism and state modernization in Vietnam. The paper analyzes the links that were forged between the secret service of a minor player in Cold War, the GDR, and the newly constituted intelligence service in the post-colonial Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV). On a more general level, the paper highlights the role of the periphery and demonstrates the importance of middle- and small-powers in the history of the Cold War.¹

Relatedly, this paper makes a contribution to the history of intelligence. In 1984, the British historian Christopher Andrew complained that intelligence was a missing dimension in historiography.² Since then “intelligence studies” have blossomed and “offered new and exciting insights into war, societies, ideologies, institutions, and even cultures and mindsets.”³ Most of these studies, however, have tended to focus on the Western world and the post-colonial nation-states in Africa and Asia have usually been left out.⁴ Yet intelligence services and institutions were just as important to political and social developments within the Global South as they were in the West. In the first study of the role of intelligence in Vietnam during the anti-French resistance war, Christopher Goscha demonstrated how “Vietnamese security and intelligence services were heavily involved in building, protecting, and expanding the Vietnamese state,

¹ Tony Smith, “New Bottles for New Wine: A Pericentric Framework for the Study of the Cold War,” *Diplomatic History* 24, no. 4 (Fall 2000): 567-591.

² Christopher Andrew and David Dilks, eds., *The Missing Dimension: Governments and Intelligence Communities in the Twentieth Century* (London: Macmillan, 1984), 1.

³ Christopher E. Goscha, “Intelligence in a Time of Decolonization: The Case of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam at War (1945-1950),” *Intelligence and National Security* 22, no. 1 (February 2007): 100.

⁴ Goscha, “Intelligence in a Time of Decolonization.” See also Richard J. Aldrich, Introduction, in: same, Gary D. Rawnsley and Ming-Yeh T. Rawnsley, eds., *The Clandestine Cold War in Asia, 1945-1965: Western Intelligence, Propaganda and Special Operations* (Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 2000), 1.

For a new study on the security apparatus in the People’s Republic of China, see Guo Xuezhong, *China’s Security State: Philosophy, Evolution, and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). For the first study of national intelligence “outside of the Anglosphere,” see Philip H. J. Davies and Kristian C. Gustafson, eds., *Intelligence Elsewhere: Spies and Espionage Outside the Anglosphere* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2013).

armed forces, and communist power.”⁵ My aim in this paper is to build upon Goscha’s pioneering research by focusing on the role of the North Vietnamese security apparatus after 1953 and its relationship with the East German Ministry of State Security. Though the starting-point for the formation of the Vietnamese security apparatus was before 1953 and it was modeled after French (Sûreté), British (MI6), Japanese, and Chinese examples, this paper focuses only on the second phase, which began in 1953 with the establishment of a full-fledged ministry.

I make use of files of the former GDR Ministry of State Security, commonly known as “Stasi,” official histories of the Vietnamese Ministry of Public Security (*Bộ Công An*), and newspaper articles written by retired cadres of the Vietnamese security apparatus. In the turbulent months after the fall of the wall in November 1989, most of the files of Department X of the GDR Ministry of State Security, which was in charge with international relations with other socialist countries, were destroyed, but fortunately many of the documents on the relationship between the East German and the Vietnamese security service “survived.” These files have not been used to date, despite that they not only provide information on a forgotten chapter of the history Cold War, the cooperation between the GDR Stasi and the Vietnamese Ministry of Public Security, but also offer insights into the inner workings of the Vietnamese security apparatus.⁶

Until recently, official Vietnamese-language histories of the *Bộ Công An* were classified as “top secret” and “for internal use” only. Fortunately, this has changed, but of course the publications that have become available have to be used carefully as they present a heavily edited and rather teleological version of the history of the Vietnamese security services. However, they contain precious and very detailed information on the ideological foundations of the Vietnamese Ministry of Public Security and institutional changes after the 1950s. Paired together with articles written by retired Vietnamese security cadres who proudly retell their successes in the struggle against so-called internal and external enemies, these official publications allow us to put the information provided in the East German Stasi files in the broader context of the development of the Vietnamese security apparatus.

⁵ Goscha, “Intelligence in a Time of Decolonization,” 104.

⁶ The only exception is the discussion in Kristie Macrakis, *Seduced by Secrets: Inside the Stasi’s Spy-Tech World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

North Vietnam's Security State in the 1950s and the Struggle against the "Enemy"

In 1949, during a meeting of the Liên Việt organization, Lê Đức Thọ, later on the second most powerful politician in North Vietnam next to Lê Duẩn, reacted to criticism of some non-communist members of this front organization by making a statement that was to become a basic tenet of the communist forces in Vietnam and their security services to this day: "To oppose communism means to oppose the resistance war and to betray one's fatherland."⁷ This notion of "Việt Gian," or Vietnamese traitor, would be applied to all those Vietnamese who did not support the monopolistic claim on power by Vietnamese communism or were suspected of being unreliable due to their class background or other affiliations with non-communist forces.

After they had defeated the French at the battle of Điện Biên Phủ in May 1954, the victorious Viet Minh troops returned to Hà Nội and formally took control of the northern part of the country. The victory was not complete, however, as Vietnam had been temporarily divided at the 17th parallel: the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in the north under the control of the Hồ Chí Minh-led government and the Vietnamese Workers' Party, and the Republic of Vietnam in the south with its president Ngô Đình Diệm that was soon built up as a bulwark against communism with the massive support of the United States.

The leadership in the North concentrated first on rebuilding the country and on consolidating its control. The Ministry of Public Security played an important role in this process and became a powerful tool for social control and state consolidation. This is clearly visible in the decree from 1953 that formally established the ministry.⁸ According to this decree, the first task of the ministry was to "fight against spies and reactionaries in the country in order to protect the democratic people's government, the People's Army, [and] the national economy; to protect the borders; [and] to fight against foreign intelligence services and spies."⁹

In the mid-1950s, the leadership in Hà Nội faced two major crises: first, it had to deal with the *Nhãn Văn Giải Phẫu* movement, a political protest movement led by intellectuals; and

⁷ Cited in Christopher E. Goscha, *Vietnam. Un État né de la Guerre, 1945-1954* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2012), 88.

⁸ "Sắc Lệnh của Chủ tịch nước Việt Nam Dân Chủ Cộng Hòa, số 141/SL ngày 16 tháng 2 năm 1953" ("Decree of the President of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, no. 141, 16 Febr. 1953"), <http://moj.gov.vn/vbpq/Lists/Vn%20bn%20php%20lut/View_Detail.aspx?ItemID=1129> (accessed February 12, 2014).

⁹ Ibid. For the beginnings of the North Vietnamese security services and the notion of "enemy," see the article by François Guillemot, "De l'invention et de l'usage de 'l'ennemi intérieur': Vraie et fausse contre-révolution au Nord-Vietnam 1945-1967" ("The Invention and Use of the 'Enemy Within': True and False Counterrevolution in North Vietnam, 1945-1967"), *Communisme* 2013. *Vietnam de l'insurrection à la dictature, 1920-2012*, 259-302.

second, it had to stabilize a countryside which had fallen into utter chaos following a failed land reform campaign. The Vietnamese Workers' Party managed to survive these crises, but both incidents also made clear that it was not yet in full control of the country. The North Vietnamese government therefore took further steps to expand and modernize its police services, and beginning in the mid-1950s, the Soviet Union's Committee for State Security (KGB) offered assistance to the North Vietnamese Ministry of Public Security.¹⁰

In 1960 at the Third Party Congress of the Vietnamese Communist Party, Lê Duẩn was officially elected First Secretary of the Vietnamese Workers Party and, from then on, together with fellow-Politburo members Lê Đức Thọ, Phạm Hùng, and Nguyễn Chí Thanh, he continued to push a militant strategy in South Vietnam and in domestic politics in North Vietnam. This strategy first combined political and military struggle, but more and more focused on military struggle after the establishment of the National Liberation Front (NLF) in 1960.

At the same time, the Lê Duẩn-Lê Đức Thọ faction decided to step up the socialization of the North Vietnamese economy that had already been underway since the end of the 1950s through the collectivization campaign. To consolidate their power and to ensure that this new aggressive approach was carried out, Lê Duẩn relied increasingly on the security apparatus and its minister, Trần Quốc Hoàn.¹¹ Trần Quốc Hoàn, North Vietnam's first Minister of Public Security, was a frontline soldier in charge of asserting party control over the administration of Vietnam and of targeting any internal and external enemies. At the beginning of the 1960s, the party and the state issued several decrees that expanded the role of the Ministry of Public Security, allowing it to become an "instrument of dictatorship absolutely loyal to the party" and to step up the struggle against counterrevolutionaries. In June 1961, for example, the Standing Committee of the DRV National Assembly issued Resolution No. 49 on the re-education of persons considered harmful to society.¹²

¹⁰ Nguyễn Thanh et al., eds., *Những Kỷ Niệm Sâu Sắc Về Bộ Trưởng Trần Quốc Hoàn* (Profound Memories of Minister Tran Quoc Hoan) (Hà Nội: NXB Công An Nhân Dân, 2004), 290-291.

¹¹ For a short biography of Trần Quốc Hoàn, see Liên-Hang T Nguyen. *Hanoi's War: An International History of the War for Peace in Vietnam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 55-56.

¹² "Nghị quyết số 49 NQ/TVQH về việc quy định việc tập trung giáo dục cải tạo có thời hạn đối với các phần tử phân cách mạng ngoan cố và lưu manh chuyên nghiệp" ("Resolution No. 49 on Regulating the Temporary Reeducation of Obstinate Counterrevolutionary Elements and Professional Hooligans"), <http://www.na.gov.vn/Sach_QH/VKQHTap2/Nam%201961/UBTVQH1961_12.htm> (accessed April 24, 2014). See Bộ Công An. Tổng Cục Xây Dựng Lực Lượng. Cục Công Tác Chính Trị (Ministry of Public Security. General Department of Building up the Forces. Political Department), *65 năm Công an nhân dân Việt Nam. Xây dựng, chiến*

An additional decree from January 1962 listed different groups of “elements” which were classified as counterrevolutionaries. These included “South Vietnamese spies, reactionary Catholics, elements who had served the French or had been members of reactionary organizations, die-hard elements belonging to the exploiting class, and all other hostile, counterrevolutionary elements.” The decree further stipulated that until 1963 all leading bodies, important factories, and armed organizations had to be cleared from these “elements.” In concrete terms, suspect elements had to be moved to “unimportant” places (meaning remote places), while those who could not yet be resettled should be monitored closely and not be provided with state secrets. The overall aim of these measures was to basically clean the north from any real or imagined counterrevolutionary forces.¹³

In order to harness the institutional means to carry out this vast clean-up campaign, the leadership in Hà Nội decided to expand the Ministry of Public Security and granted it comprehensive authority to oversee the internal security of the DRV and to proceed against all counterrevolutionary suspects. The Ministry of Public Security was further ordered to establish scientific and technical departments, which were claimed to be necessary for professional operational work and to cope with activities of the enemy in an efficient way.¹⁴ This modernization and professionalization of the Ministry of Public Security was at the top of Trần Quốc Hoàn’s list of priorities.¹⁵ Thus, the decrees from 1961 and 1962 not only aimed at establishing a security state, but also at modernizing and professionalizing the security forces in

đầu và trưởng thành (Sơ thảo) (People’s Public Security of Vietnam: Building, Fighting, Growing Up) (Hà Nội: Công An Nhân Dân, 2010), 148.

¹³ “Nghị quyết của Bộ Chính trị số 39-NQ/TW, ngày 20 tháng 1 năm 1962, về việc tăng cường đấu tranh chống các bọn phản cách mạng để phục vụ tốt công cuộc xây dựng chủ nghĩa xã hội ở miền Bắc và đấu tranh” (“Politburo Resolution No. 39, 20 Jan. 1962, on Intensifying the Struggle against the Anti-Revolutionary Clique to Serve the Building Up of Socialism in the North and the Fight”), <

http://cpv.org.vn/cpv/Modules/Preview/PrintPreview.aspx?co_id=30063&cn_id=160987> (accessed January 10, 2014). See Bộ Công An, *65 năm Công an nhân dân Việt Nam*, 157.

¹⁴ “Nghị quyết của Bộ Chính trị số 40-NQ/TW, ngày 20 tháng 1 năm 1962, về vấn đề củng cố và tăng cường lực lượng công an” (“Politburo Resolution No. 40, 20 Jan. 1962, on Strengthening and Reinforcing the Public Security Forces”), < http://cpv.org.vn/cpv/Modules/News/NewsDetail.aspx?co_id=30063&cn_id=160986> (accessed January 10, 2014); “Nghị định của Hội đồng Chính phủ số 132-CP ngày 9 tháng 9 năm 1961 quy định nhiệm vụ, quyền hạn và tổ chức bộ máy của Bộ Công An” (“Decree 132 of the Council of Ministers, 29 Sept. 1961, Regulating the Tasks, Responsibility, and Organization of the Ministry of Public Security”), <

<http://thuvienphapluat.vn/archive/Nghi-dinh/Nghi-dinh-132-CP-Quy-dinh-nhiem-vu-quyen-han-va-to-chuc-bo-may-cua-Bo-Cong-an-vb43783t11.aspx>> (accessed February 13, 2014). On the establishment of North Vietnam’s national security state, see Nguyen, *Hanoi’s War*, 53-56.

¹⁵ Trịnh Thúc Huỳnh, ed., *Đồng chí Trần Quốc Hoàn – chiến sĩ cách mạng trung kiên của Đảng, nhà lãnh đạo xuất sắc của Công an Việt Nam* (Comrade Trần Quốc Hoàn: Faithful Revolutionary Soldier of the Party, Outstanding Leader of the Public Security of Vietnam) (Hà Nội: Chính trị Quốc gia, 2006), 171.

North Vietnam. Thus, the decree of the Politburo from January 1962 was officially regarded as “the basic decision of the party to establish the People’s Public Security forces.”¹⁶

The decrees were implemented immediately. The first round-up of about 570 “counterrevolutionary elements” actually took place in 1961, but in the following years the campaign was stepped up. In 1962 in Hà Nội, Hai Phong, and other cities, approximately 4,000 people who used to work for the colonial administration and the pro-French Bảo Đại government, as well as others who were considered to be politically unreliable, were sent to re-education camps in remote regions in the north.¹⁷ According to an official Vietnamese-language publication, in the period from 1961 to 1965 the Ministry of Public Security sent 11,365 individuals who were “considered dangerous to our security and social order to collective re-education [i.e., prison].”¹⁸ After the rectification campaign which took place in the early-1950s and the settling of the crisis in 1956 (that is, the land reform campaign and the *Nhân Văn Giải Phẫu* movement), the systematic purges in the urban areas of North Vietnam and the resettling of suspect and unreliable persons to remote regions from 1962 to 1965 was a further step in consolidating the party’s power over the DRV. After the end of the war in 1975, these resettlement programs became a model for handing “elements” in the south deemed unreliable and considered a threat to the new “revolutionary government.” The aim of resettling of suspicious “elements” was to physically exclude them from the social body of Vietnam.

The East German “Stasi” and Vietnam

“Solidarity Shipments”

Since the 1950s the Vietnamese Ministry of Public Security had received assistance from the Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of China, although the concrete contents and scope of the latter case is not clear. According to official Vietnamese sources, at the end of the 1950s Minister Trần Quốc Hoàn asked the security services of the Soviet Union, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, the People’s Republic of China, and even the Democratic People’s Republic of

¹⁶ Bộ Công An, *65 năm Công an nhân dân Việt Nam*, 157.

¹⁷ Phạm Văn Quyền et al., eds., *Bộ Công An. 60 năm Công An Nhân Dân Việt Nam (1945-2005)* (Sixty Years of the People’s Public Security Forces, 1945-2005) (Hà Nội: NXB Công An Nhân Dân, 2006), 201-202; Bộ Công An, *65 năm Công an nhân dân Việt Nam*, 148.

¹⁸ Bộ Nội Vụ. Tổng cục I (Ministry of Interior. General Department I), Major Nguyen Hung Linh and Lieutenant Colonel Hoang Mac, *Lực lượng chống phản động: Lịch sử biên niên (1954-1975)* (Anti-Reactionary Forces: Chronology of Events, 1954-1975) (Hà Nội: NXB Công An, 1997), 134. I would like to thank Merle Pribbenow for providing me with some Vietnamese language sources and his translations.

Korea to help the DRV to build up its security apparatus.¹⁹ While there is evidence that at least in the case of the Soviet Union this assistance was quite substantial, as far as the GDR was concerned only initial contacts were established.²⁰

All this changed when the Vietnam War escalated with the US bombing of north of the 17th parallel and the arrival of the first American soldiers in Đà Nẵng in March 1965. In this new context, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam was not only in desperate need for sophisticated weaponry to use against American B-52 bombers, but also of state-of-the-art intelligence equipment to combat “US-imperialism” and to better handle real and perceived threats to national security. In fact, the war and direct US intervention boosted Lê Duẩn’s efforts to construct a national security state. In this respect, Charles Tilly’s famous adage “war made the state, and the state made war” is not only true for the war against the French (1945-1954), but also against the United States and the Republic of Vietnam (1964-1975).²¹ War forged the Vietnamese state in that the communist party used war to monitor the population in North Vietnam even more tightly and track down opponents of the regime. It was in the context of the war that the North Vietnamese Ministry of Public Security approached the East German Ministry of State Security, an agency that had already established a reputation as one of the most efficient and well-organized intelligence services in the socialist bloc.

The first contacts between the Vietnamese Ministry of Public Security and the GDR Ministry of State Security date back to 1957 when the North Vietnamese side submitted a request for technical equipment, including small tape recorders and small cameras, to the East German embassy in Hà Nội.²² In 1959, the first delegation of the Ministry of Public Security arrived in Berlin, headed by Nguyễn Minh Tiến. The delegation acquainted itself with telecommunications and operational equipment in other fields such as infrared technology.²³ In 1960, Minister Trần Quốc Hoàn visited the GDR for the first time, but no details are known about this trip.²⁴ In the following years both sides kept contact and the North Vietnamese Ministry of Public Security received technical aid from East Germany.

¹⁹ Trịnh Thúc Huỳnh, ed., *Đông chí Trần Quốc Hoàn – chiến sĩ cách mạng trung kiên của Đảng*, 167.

²⁰ For the initial contacts with the GDR, see BStU MfS AP 1839/61.

²¹ For the anti-French resistance war, see Goscha, *Vietnam: Un État né de la Guerre 1945-1954*.

²² BStU MfS AP 1839/61, 737-738.

²³ BStU MfS AP 1839/61, 724, 737.

²⁴ BStU MfS AP 1839/61, 737.

However, after the first visit in 1959 it took another six years before the cooperation between GDR and the Vietnamese security services really gained momentum. In December 1965, a Vietnamese delegation visited East Germany and this time presented a long wish-list including all kinds of devices that would upgrade the technological capabilities of the DRV Ministry of Public Security.²⁵ Erich Mielke, the infamous Minister of State Security, complained at length about this interruption in mutual relations: why it took the North Vietnamese such a long time to resume talks with their East German comrades is unclear. That they did so in 1965 was, as mentioned before, mainly due to the outbreak of the war, but should also be seen in a second context.

In 1963-1964, relations between the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the Soviet Union had reached a low point—especially because Moscow did not endorse Lê Duẩn’s militant course towards reunification and instead favored the concept of peaceful coexistence. In 1964, the leadership in Hà Nội even launched a campaign against “modern revisionism.” The campaign was aimed at cadres who were suspected of being influenced by ideas originating in the Soviet Union. Other socialist countries such as the GDR were also targeted, but it was the Soviet Union that was the main culprit in this internal anti-revisionist campaign.²⁶

After the demise of Khrushchev in October 1964, mutual relations improved fast. On his visit to Hà Nội in February 1965, Soviet Prime Minister Aleksei Kosygin promised military aid, but when it came to intelligence matters it is obvious that North Vietnam wanted to get rid of its unilateral dependence on the Soviet KGB and diversify its links with intelligence services in the communist world. Stasi files and official Vietnamese-language publications provide evidence that, starting in 1965, the Democratic Republic Vietnam received aid from the security services in Poland, Hungary, East Germany, the Soviet Union, and the People’s Republic of China.²⁷

²⁵ BStU MfS Abt. X, 652. Note on a Meeting of Comrade Minister with Vietnamese comrade Nguyen Minh Tien, Head of the Operational-Technical Sector in the Ministry for State Security of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam on Dec. 13, 1965. Dec. 14, 1965: 31-49.

²⁶ See Pierre Asselin, *Hanoi’s Road to the War 1954-1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 162-189; Nguyen, *Hanoi’s War*, 60-70; Martin Grossheim, “The Lao Động Party, Culture, and the Campaign against ‘Modern Revisionism’: The Democratic Republic of Vietnam before the Second Indochina War,” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 9, no. 1 (May 2013): 80-129; Martin Grossheim, “Revisionism in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam: New Evidence from the East German Archives,” *Cold War History* 5, no. 4 (November 2005): 451-477.

²⁷ See Phạm Văn Quyền et al., eds., *Bộ Công An. 60 năm Công An Nhân Dân Việt Nam, 757*. A book on Trần Quốc Hoàn even mentions that the North Korean security services sent advisors to Hà Nội, but this is the only evidence I found of this alleged alliance between the DRV and North Korea. See Trịnh Thúc Huỳnh, ed., *Đồng chí Trần Quốc Hoàn*, 167. For evidence in the Stasi files on aid from Hungary see BStU MfS Abt. X, 652, Andras Benkei, Ministry of Interior of the People’s Republic of Hungary, to Mielke, Translation from Russian, Dec. 11, 1965: 384-385.

From the perspective of the socialist bloc led by the Soviet Union, then, this was also some kind of division of labor.

According to an official publication on Trần Quốc Hoàn, the Minister of Public Security paid special attention to the East German Ministry of State Security because he had heard much about the “industrial, modern, and scientific working-style” in the GDR. He had often exchanged views with Nguyễn Song Tùng, the Vietnamese ambassador in East Germany. The latter had even edited some material on the experiences of the GDR Ministry of State Security.²⁸ In official Vietnamese language histories on the Vietnamese Ministry of Public Security, the assistance provided by the Soviet and East German intelligence services to Vietnam is usually rated as the most important within the socialist bloc.²⁹ The modernization of the security services that Trần Quốc Hoàn had already contemplated for a few years thus started to become a reality in the mid-1960s, mostly thanks to the help of the Soviet Union and the GDR.³⁰

In November 1965, North Vietnam’s Minister of Public Security, Trần Quốc Hoàn, sent a letter to Erich Mielke, GDR Minister of State Security, and reestablished contacts with his East German counterpart.³¹ The delegation headed by Nguyễn Minh Tiến arrived in East Berlin in December 1965. Nguyễn Minh Tiến was head of the Main Technical Department of the North Vietnamese Ministry of Public Security and later became one of its deputy ministers. This was already his second visit to the GDR and many more visits were to follow. In fact, Nguyễn Minh Tiến became the Stasi’s main contact person within the North Vietnamese security apparatus.

During his meeting with Erich Mielke, Trần first expounded on the successes that the Democratic Republic of Vietnam had achieved in the fight against the “American imperialists and their puppets,” but then came to the real reason for his visit to East Berlin:

In our fight, we face many difficulties, because our enemies are very tricky and we are very primitive. We consequently haven’t managed to get hold of many of them yet...Our Comrade Minister knows that our comrades in the GDR have daily contact with the enemy and are constantly fighting it. You have taken many initiatives in the struggle against the enemy and have a long tradition in science

²⁸ Nguyễn Thanh et al., eds., *Những Kỷ Niệm Sâu Sắc Về Bộ Trưởng Trần Quốc Hoàn*, 210; Trịnh Thúc Huỳnh, ed., *Đồng chí Trần Quốc Hoàn*, 189.

²⁹ See, for example, Trịnh Thúc Huỳnh, ed., *Đồng chí Trần Quốc Hoàn*, 63-64, 94.

³⁰ Trần Quốc Hoàn is usually credited with having initiated the modernization of the (North) Vietnamese security forces. See Trịnh Thúc Huỳnh, ed., *Đồng chí Trần Quốc Hoàn*, 63, 94, 253.

³¹ BStU MfS Abt. 652, Tran Quoc Hoan, Hanoi, to Erich Mielke, Nov. 1, 1965: 24-26.

and technology. I therefore ask you to allow us to study your valuable experience so we can carry out our own work more efficiently.³²

Nguyễn Minh Tiến presented a detailed and long wish-list to Mielke: the Vietnamese side asked their East German comrades to help set up a technical operations sector and provide them with the necessary equipment and training. In detail, the Vietnamese wanted to study the Stasi's experience in the following fields and requested the East German side to help build up a department that could analyze and devise the following equipment: bugging techniques, protection against listening devices, concealment devices, lock picking devices, secret visual surveillance, letter inception and surveillance of mail, fabrication of documents, and secret writing.³³

The East German Ministry for State Security was quite willing to share its experience and technical expertise.³⁴ As of 1966, the East German Stasi provided its comrades in Hà Nội with technical aid. Part of the equipment provided to Vietnam actually had to be purchased in West Germany or other Western countries. In March 1966, for example, the Stasi ordered special devices worth 38,000 Deutsch Mark in the West, including a Swiss-made Aciera milling machine for micromechanics.³⁵

The East German assistance to the Vietnamese security apparatus expanded further in September 1966 when Trần Quốc Hoàn, North Vietnam's Minister of Public Security, paid an official visit and met his East German counterpart Erich Mielke for the first time. Phạm Văn Mãn, Deputy Head of the Ministry's Main Technical Department, was also a member of the

³² BStU MfS Abt. X 652, Note on a Meeting of Comrade Minister with the Vietnamese Comrades Nguyen-Minh-Tien, Head OTS in the MfS of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and [name blacked out] interpreter on 13 December 1965 from 4 to 7 pm: 13.

³³ BStU MfS Abt. X, 652, Note on a Meeting of Comrade Minister with Vietnamese comrade Nguyen Minh Tien, Head of the Operational-Technical Sector in the Ministry for State Security of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam on Dec. 13, 1965. Dec. 14, 1965: 31-49.

³⁴ For the Stasi assistance to post-colonial states in the "Global South" in general, see Gerhard Ehlert, Jochen Staadt, and Tobias Voigt, *Die Zusammenarbeit zwischen dem Ministerium für Staatssicherheit der DDR (MfS) und dem Ministerium des Innern Kubas (MININT)* (Berlin: Forschungsverbund SED-Staat, 2002); Jens Gieseke, *Die Stasi 1945-1990* (Munich: Pantheon, 2011), 243-247; Ilko-Sascha Kowalczyk, *Stasi konkret. Überwachung und Repression in der DDR* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2013), 247-262; Bernhard Marquardt, "Die Kooperation des Ministeriums für Staatssicherheit (MfS) mit dem KGB und anderen Geheimdiensten," in *Materialien der Enquete-Kommission: "Überwindung der Folgen der SED-Diktatur im Prozeß der deutschen Einheit"*, vol. 8 (Baden-Baden 1999), 1.966-2.007; and Monika Tantzsch, "Die Stasi und ihre geheimen Brüder. Die internationale geheimdienstliche Kooperation des MfS.," in *Diktaturen in Europa im 20. Jahrhundert – der Fall DDR* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1996), 595-621.

³⁵ BStU MfS Abt. X, 652. Dept. X: 115.

delegation. This reflected the paramount aim of the visit, which was to ask for East German assistance in upgrading and modernizing the Technical Operations Sector.

Trần Quốc Hoan emphasized the principles of “proletarian internationalism.” When calling on the support of the East German comrades in their common struggle against the “American imperialists,” Trần Quốc Hoàn kicked at an open door. Erich Mielke told him that the East German help should be considered as a “solidarity contribution” in the common struggle against “American imperialism.”³⁶ Mielke only asked his North Vietnamese counterpart to send US weapons and other equipment to the GDR: “Thus we can gain new insights.”³⁷ In an earlier meeting with Nguyễn Minh Tiên, the GDR Minister of State Security had already suggested sending two Stasi cadres to the DRV in order to gain knowledge about the operational work of US agents in Vietnam.³⁸

During the meeting, Erich Mielke also announced that the Ministry of State Security would provide the North Vietnamese security services with technical aid worth 2 million (East German) Mark and 200,000 (West German) Deutsche Mark.³⁹ Trần Quốc Hoàn was so delighted about the willingness of the East German comrades to help and even to purchase state-of-the-art equipment in the enemy camp that he thanked Erich Mielke by quoting the well-known Vietnamese saying “to share one’s rice and clothes” (*chia cơm sẻ áo*).⁴⁰

Right after Trần Quốc Hoàn’s visit to the German Democratic Republic in October 1966, the Stasi began the first training courses in the field of electronics for high-level Vietnamese cadres from the Ministry of Public Security such as the head of the Vietnamese radio signals security department.⁴¹ From November 1966 to April 1967, high-ranking North Vietnamese security personnel attended the first training course in East Germany organized by the Stasi’s

³⁶ BStU MfS Abt. X, 652, Note on a Meeting between high-level members of the MfS of the DRV and MfS of the GDR on Sept. 24, 1966, from 9:30 to 12:00 am, Sept. 27, 1966, 141. See also BStU MfS Abt. X, 652, Note on a Meeting of Comrade Minister with the Vietnamese comrades on Febr. 1, 1966, Febr. 10, 1966: 55.

³⁷ BStU MfS Abt. X, 652: 141.

³⁸ BStU MfS Abt. X, 652. Note on a Meeting of Comrade Minister with the Vietnamese comrade on Febr. 1, 1966, Febr. 10, 1966: 58.

³⁹ BStU MfS Abt. X, 652: 135.

⁴⁰ BStU MfS Abt. X, 652: 142.

⁴¹ See BStU MfS, OTS, 1775. Training of Vietnamese Comrades by the MfS in the GDR, Dec. 10, 1971: 2. In a different file the person is identified as the deputy head of the section. See BStU MfS, OTS, 1775. Exchange of specialists/meetings of heads of departments/short consultations, no date. 7. For the East German aid to Vietnam, see also Macrakis, *Seduced by Secret*, 165-166, and Bộ Công An. Tổng Cục Xây Dựng Lực Lượng Công An Nhân Dân Việt Nam (Ministry of Public Security. General Department of Building up the Forces of the People’s Public Security of Vietnam), *Lịch sử xây dựng lực lượng công an nhân dân Việt Nam, Tập II (1954–1975) (Sơ thảo)* (History of Building up the Forces of the People’s Public Security of Vietnam, Volume II, 1954–1975, (Draft)) (Hà Nội: NXB Công An Nhân Dân, 2010), 153-154.

Technical Operations Sector (OTS) and learned skills in such areas as intelligence gathering, postal control, fingerprinting, investigating written correspondence, the production of secret ink, and the analysis and reproduction of documents.⁴² As the designated head of the corresponding department in the North Vietnamese Ministry of Public Security, Nghiêm Sĩ Tạo received training from December 1967 to April 1968 in both the analysis and production of documents and secret ink.⁴³ Similarly, Châu Diệu Ái, later member of the Technical Operations Department, was trained in secret writing and in analyzing and fabricating documents in 1970. In the following years, the Stasi organized additional courses for specialists from Hà Nội with an expanded syllabus. According to an official report of the Stasi's Technical Operations Sector,

in training courses for a period from three to six months, approximately 20 Vietnamese comrades were trained by the OTS in the following fields: [analysis and reproduction of] documents, secret writing, criminalistics, special; electronic devices (room surveillance and telephone tapping), micromechanics/optics, production of containers [concealment devices], [and] security technology.⁴⁴

Thus, the GDR Ministry of State Security trained high-level specialists who later on assumed important positions in the Vietnamese Ministry of Public Security and were instrumental in modernizing its technical department.⁴⁵

As a result of a further request by Minister Trần Quốc Hoàn, East Germany also assisted the Ministry of Public Security in planning and building a forensic institute and training cadres.⁴⁶ According to an official Vietnamese publication, in April 1966 nine cadres were sent to East

⁴² On the Stasi's Technical Operations Sector (OTS), see Roland Wiedmann: Die Dienstseinheiten des MfS 1950–1989. Eine organisatorische Übersicht (MfS-Handbuch). Hg. BStU. Berlin 2012. < <http://www.nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0292-97839421302889> > (accessed March 19, 2014): 160-167.

⁴³ See *ibid.* 2; MfS, OTS, 1775. Important results and activities of the previous cooperation: 6, no date; MfS, OTS, 1775. Exchange of specialists/meetings of heads of departments/short consultations: 7-10, no date.

⁴⁴ BStU MfS, OTS, 1775. Information on the Cooperation of the MfS OTS of the GDR with the Main Department Technology I of the Ministry of Interior of the SR of Vietnam: 14, no date; BStU MfS Abt. X, 652. Hentschke, Head OTS, Training of Vietnamese comrades, Dec. 11, 1967: 303; BStU MfS Abt. X, 562. OTS Der Leiter, Schmidt, Berlin, 7. 11.1969: 333-334. Comment on the training program of the Vietnamese comrade Ai, Letter from 20 Oct. 1969; BStU MfS, OTS, 1775. Training of Vietnamese Comrades by the MfS in the GDR, Dec. 10, 1971: 2.

⁴⁵ Nghiêm Sĩ Tạo who attended one of the first classes organized by the GDR Ministry of State Security in 1967/68 later became Associate Professor and Deputy Director of Schools Department H18; Phạm Tất Lanh and Nguyễn Kim Quý who attended a course in fabricating false documents in 1974 later became Chief of the Security Files Office (*Cục Hồ sơ An ninh*) and Deputy Chief of the Personnel Documents Office (*phòng TLNV*). See “Nhớ mãi những kỷ niệm về Bộ trưởng Trần Quốc Hoàn” (“Unforgettable Memories of Minister Tran Quoc Hoan”), *Công An Nhân Dân* (People's Public Security Newspaper), January 21, 2014, < <http://www.cand.com.vn/vi-VN/phongsu/2014/1/221014.cand> > (accessed 21 January 2014); and BStU MfS Abt. X, 652, Hentschke, Head OTS, Training of Vietnamese comrades, 303, Dec. 11, 1967, 303-304; MfS, OTS, 1775. Exchange of specialists/meetings of heads of departments/short consultations, 7-10, no date.

⁴⁶ BStU MfS Abt. X, 652, Tran Quoc Hoan, Hà Nội, to Erich Mielke, Nov. 1, 1965: 28.

Germany to receive training at the Forensic Science School of the GDR Ministry of Interior.⁴⁷ On a fact-finding mission to Hà Nội in January-February 1967, a delegation of the GDR Ministry of Interior found that forensics in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam were still in an early stage of development and suffered from a lack of specialists and of equipment and expertise. The Vietnamese side asked the GDR Ministry of Interior to provide further assistance. Rychlik, head of the East German delegation, fully approved this request with the somewhat cryptic remark: “The wishes of the Vietnamese side correspond to the necessities in fighting the US aggressor and building socialism in the DRV.”⁴⁸ At the end of 1968, ten additional cadres were sent to the GDR to attend courses in forensic science. Hà Nội then invited experts from the East German Ministry of Interior to train additional experts in Hà Nội. Thus, within one year approximately 100 Vietnamese cadres received training in forensic criminalistics (in fields such as fingerprinting, ballistics, forensic chemistry and biology), though it took another five years until the Politburo of the GDR Socialist Unity Party decided to build a complete Forensic Institute in Hà Nội.⁴⁹

Infiltrating South Vietnam

What is the significance of all these “solidarity shipments” that the former GDR sent to Vietnam? They could serve both the needs of intelligence abroad and domestic counterintelligence and internal security. In the case of North Vietnam, this meant fighting “US imperialism” and the so-called South Vietnamese “puppet government” and tracking down internal enemies. To give one example of the former, in 1967, the United States had provided the Saigon regime with a new type of identity document with very modern and sophisticated technical features. This so-called “Green Dragon” identity card was very difficult for the North Vietnamese and the NLF to duplicate and caused many problems for their cadres who were operating in areas under the enemy’s control. However, in 1972 the Professional Documents Office in Hà Nội, whose staff had been trained in East Germany, managed to fabricate the identity card—mainly due to the help of the Stasi. The Operational-Technical Sector in Berlin

⁴⁷ Bộ Công An, *Lịch sử xây dựng lực lượng công an nhân dân Việt Nam, Tập II (1954–1975)*, 149.

⁴⁸ BStU MfS Abt. X, 652. Ministry of Interior. Account of the Visit of a Delegation of the Ministry of Interior in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam from 12 Jan. 1967 to 15 Febr. 1967. Rychlik: 497.

⁴⁹ Bộ Công An, *Lịch sử xây dựng lực lượng công an nhân dân Việt Nam, Tập II (1954–1975)*, 149-150; BStU MfS Abt. X 348. Mielke an Ministerrat der DDR, Stellv. Vors. Dr. Weiss, 11.10.1973: 270. For further details see the files in the Federal Archives BArch DO 1/11602, Bd. 12, DO 1/11493, and DO 1/40386, Bd. 3.

had analyzed one of the Green Dragon identity cards and pledged to assist their Vietnamese colleagues to duplicate the card by purchasing special material and equipment, even in capitalist countries. The issue of fabricating documents was always on the agenda of meetings between high-ranking members of the North Vietnamese Public Security and their East German colleagues between 1966 and the end of the war.⁵⁰

According to a recent Vietnamese-language account, “in 1973, a tremendous number of Green Dragon identity cards and pieces of supporting equipment were shipped to the Documents Office by our [East German] friends. We continued to provide training classes to cadres and shipped the Green Dragon identity cards and the new pieces of equipment provided by our [East German] friends to cadres being sent to South Vietnam right up through the Victorious General Offensive in 1975.”⁵¹ In order to better understand the significance of this issue, it should be noted that high-level cadres who operated in the south were provided with the fake South Vietnamese identity cards included Nguyễn Văn Linh, later Party General Secretary, and Võ Văn Kiệt, later Vietnam’s Prime Minister.

On a more general level, the monumental official volume entitled *Sixty Years History of the People’s Public Security Forces* mentions that with the help of East Germany and the Soviet Union the North Vietnamese Technical Operations Department managed to produce many devices for the operational work of cadres in South Vietnam, including fabricated seals and documents, optical equipment, lock pick tools, and time fuses.⁵²

While the East German Stasi’s technical assistance was instrumental in protecting high-level communist cadres in the south from being detected by the Saigon security forces and in facilitating their operational work, the modern technical equipment and training provided by the GDR also significantly enhanced the ability of their North Vietnamese colleagues to control and monitor the population—the second aspect of the German-Vietnamese intelligence alliance.

Internal Control in North Vietnam

In June 1967, the DRV Ministry of Public Security sent their East German comrades a detailed plan to establish two departments for the analysis and fabrication of documents and

⁵⁰ MfS, OTS, 1775. Exchange of specialists/meetings of heads of departments/short consultations, 7-10, no date.

⁵¹ Nhớ mãi những kỷ niệm về Bộ trưởng Trần Quốc Hoàn.” See BStU MfS Abt. X 348, Support of the Security Organs of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, Dec. 6, 1971. 261-267.

⁵² Phạm Văn Quyền et al., eds., *Bộ Công An. 60 năm Công An Nhân Dân Việt Nam*, 758.

surveillance technology. According to this document, these departments had to devise and produce special technical equipment “that is necessary for the security forces, the People’s Police and the security organs of the People’s Army in the struggle against the imperialist agents, the reactionaries, and other criminals.”⁵³

Similarly, in May 1969 Trần Quốc Hoàn sent a letter to Friedrich Dickel, GDR Minister of Interior and Head of the German People’s Police, and announced that three Vietnamese security cadres would come to East Germany to receive extensive training in how to suppress and track down counterrevolutionary elements and to make themselves familiar with special equipment that would enable them to fulfill this task.⁵⁴

It is not clear whether in the end this training course suggested by the North Vietnamese side took place. However, the intention of the security apparatus in Hà Nội to enhance its ability to suppress and hunt down “enemies of the revolution” is beyond doubt. There is plenty of evidence that, as mentioned before, high-ranking cadres of the Technical Department of the Vietnamese Ministry of Public had received extensive training in how to use modern surveillance and security technology. Furthermore, it is significant that the first delegation of the GDR Ministry of State Security that went to North Vietnam in mid-1966 consisted of staff members of Department 26 for listening devices and visual observation, Department 31 for photographic technology, visual observation technology, key copying, and security technology, and the Foreign Intelligence Department (HVA). The first Stasi delegation in Hà Nội was assigned to discuss the problem of assistance and the use of “operational equipment,” that is, devices for intelligence and counter-intelligence activities under the specific conditions in Vietnam with their colleagues of the DRV Ministry of Public Security.⁵⁵ East German “solidarity shipments” to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam consisting of state-of-the-art surveillance devices that had started in 1966 kept on arriving at the harbor of Haiphong on a regular basis during the war and were even stepped up after 1975 against the backdrop of the tense security situation in the south after the end of the war.

The available Stasi files contain hundreds of detailed lists of all kinds of equipment and techniques that served the North Vietnamese security services’ needs to carry out secret

⁵³ BStU MfS Abt. X, 652: 262.

⁵⁴ SAPMO BArch DO1/11492. Letter to Friedrich Dickel, Minister of Interior, Hà Nội, 31 May 1969.

⁵⁵ BStU MfS, OTS, 1775. Exchange of specialists/meetings of heads of departments/short consultations since 1966 between the GDR Ministry of State Security and the DRV Ministry of State Security [sic!]: 7, no date.

operations, counterintelligence, and clandestine communication, including devices for wireless and wired room surveillance and listening devices (tape recorders, tapes, headphones, Minox cameras, infrared cameras, periscopes, and directional rifle microphones).⁵⁶ Some of the listening devices and equipment for room surveillance were adjusted to the specific climatic conditions in sub-tropical North Vietnam.⁵⁷

In this context, it is also revealing that in March 1966 during his third visit in East Germany Nguyễn Minh Tiến received six periscopes, ten small Minox cameras, and four surreptitious entry kits as a present,⁵⁸ and that the first “solidarity shipments” in mid-1966 consisted of hundreds of surveillance and listening devices.⁵⁹ Similarly, the North Vietnamese Ministry of Public Security received lock picking kits that enabled its personnel to surreptitiously enter the houses of suspicious “elements” and then to install the above-mentioned listening devices.⁶⁰

Thus, it is no coincidence that official histories of the Vietnamese security apparatus that still had been classified “top secret” or “for internal use only” a few years ago, but are available now, list how the Vietnamese security forces successfully managed to hunt down internal and external enemies of the revolution from the first days of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, partially due to the aid and training provided by the GDR Ministry of State Security.⁶¹ In other words, the supply of state-of-the-art devices and the training of Vietnamese security cadres by the East German Stasi contributed significantly to the intensification of state repression in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. It enabled the North Vietnamese Ministry of Public Security to further tighten its grip on North Vietnam’s society and suppress any opposition.

Any opposition in this respect also refers to dissident voices in the party. The surveillance equipment and all the other devices provided by the East German Stasi, then, also served to monitor the Vietnamese Workers’ Party and People’s Army and stifle any potential opposition. Interestingly, in February 1963 the North Vietnamese Ministry of Public Security had decided to set up an Internal Security Department (*Cục Bảo vệ nội bộ*) that was in charge of tracking down

⁵⁶ BStU MfS Abt. X 345, 320-329, 334-335, 338-341, 373-374, 390-391; BStU MfS Abt. X 652: 109-124.

⁵⁷ BStU MfS, OTS, 1775. Information on the Cooperation of the MfS OTS of the GDR with the Main Department Technology I of the Ministry of Interior of the SR of Vietnam: 15, no date.

⁵⁸ BStU MfS Abt. X 652: 111.

⁵⁹ BStU MfS Abt. X 652: 116-120.

⁶⁰ BStU MfS Abt. X 345: 319, 345; BStU MfS Abt. X 652: 111.

⁶¹ See, for example, Bộ Nội Vụ, Major Nguyen Hung Linh, and Lieutenant Colonel Hoang Mac, *Lực lượng chống phản động*.

and crushing any counterrevolutionary elements who were secretly operating within party and state organizations.⁶² This reorganization of the North Vietnamese state security apparatus provided the necessary institutions for the ruling Lê Duẩn-Lê Đức Thọ faction to sideline and eliminate rising opposition against their militant course in the Vietnamese Workers' Party. This culminated in the so-called "Campaign against Modern Revisionism" (*phong trào chống chủ nghĩa xét lại hiện đại*) in 1964 in which the Ministry of Public Security, with its newly established Internal Security Department, played a major role.⁶³

The most prominent example of the crushing of inner-party dissent in North Vietnam, however, is the so-called "Anti-Party Revisionist Affair" (*vụ án xét lại chống Đảng*) from 1967, which was directly linked to the events of 1963-1964. During this incident, the North Vietnamese security apparatus arrested several hundred party cadres and intellectuals. The precise background of this affair is still unclear, but the available evidence shows that the arrests reflected an ideological hardening of the leadership in Hà Nội on the eve of the Tết Offensive, and criticism was aimed at Defense Minister Võ Nguyên Giáp, Lê Duẩn's main rival for power since the 1950s. Lê Duẩn had supported General Nguyễn Chí Thanh to act as a counterbalance to the popular Võ Nguyên Giáp. However, the sudden death of Nguyễn Chí Thanh in July 1967 left a gap in the power structure in Hà Nội, all the more so since Hồ Chí Minh's health continued to deteriorate.⁶⁴

Until recently, official publications in Vietnam have kept quiet about the waves of arrests in 1967 and their background. However, the *History of the Army Security Department, People's Army of Vietnam (1950-2000)*, which appeared on Vietnamese websites for a short period, presented the official version of the "Anti-Party Revisionist Affair" and provided detailed information on how the Vietnamese security services were involved in tracking down cadres who were considered enemies of the party and even traitors:

⁶² Bộ Công An, *Lịch sử xây dựng lực lượng công an nhân dân Việt Nam, Tập II (1954–1975)*, 113. During a further reorganization of the Ministry the Internal Security Department split up into a "Department against Spies" (Cục Chống gián điệp = Cục Bảo vệ Chính trị I) and a "Department against Reactionaries" (Cục Chống phản động = Cục Bảo vệ Chính trị II). See Bộ Công An, *Lịch sử xây dựng lực lượng công an nhân dân Việt Nam, Tập II (1954–1975)*, 204-208.

⁶³ See Grossheim. "Revisionism in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam," 451-477.

⁶⁴ On this affair, see Nguyen. *Hanoi's War*, 102-109; Sophie Quinn-Judge, "The Ideological Debate in the DRV and the Significance of the Anti-Party Affair, 1967–68," *Cold War History* 5, no. 4 (November 2005): 479-500; and Martin Grossheim, *Die Partei und der Krieg: Debatten und Dissens in Nordvietnam* (Berlin: Regiospectra Verlag, 2009).

From 1965 on, the Army Security Department became more involved in the struggle against a “Reactionary Anti-Party Organization that followed revisionist ideology and served as the puppet of a foreign country.”

This was a major case that our Party had uncovered in late 1963, after the Party Central Committee approved Resolution 9 about our international policy of fighting against modern revisionism and opportunism of all forms. A number of high-ranking cadres and party members working in a number of party, governmental, and military agencies were displaying ideas that were opposed to Marxism-Leninism. They tried to sabotage the foreign policies of our Party and our Party’s policy of fighting the Americans to save our nation, and instead they supported a policy of rightist compromise and conciliation.

Faced with this situation, in mid-1964 the Party Central Committee decided to establish an investigative criminal case...

To accomplish its mission, the Department conducted investigations using various measures, including internal reconnaissance [spies/informants], external reconnaissance [physical surveillance], technical reconnaissance, and combined surveillance measures. Those cadres participating in the investigation and arrests worked night and day, following their target’s every move, collecting, and gathering evidence...

In 1970 the case against the “Reactionary Anti-Party Organization that followed revisionist ideology and served as the lackey of a foreign power” was brought to a conclusion.”⁶⁵

The foreign power mentioned in the “History of the Army Security Department” was the Soviet Union. It is an irony of history that it must have been the very surveillance equipment provided by the East German Stasi as an act of solidarity which the North Vietnamese security apparatus eventually used to monitor party member who were suspected of working for the Soviet Union.

Furthermore, the GDR Ministry of State Security accommodated Trần Quốc Hoàn’s wish in 1966 to modernize his ministry by establishing a central repository for citizens identity cards and a special card index of suspect persons. He asked for training in the basic tenets of secrecy. These requests were met in the following years. It is no coincidence that in this context in February 1968, the North Vietnamese government decided to set up a Documents Department

⁶⁵ “Lịch sử Cục Bảo vệ - An ninh Quân đội nhân dân Việt Nam (1950 – 2000)” (“History of the Army Security Department, People’s Army of Vietnam (1950-2000)”) (Hà Nội: People’s Army Publishing House, 2003), <<http://www.quansuvn.net/index.php?topic=3826.0>> (Accessed November 16, 2008). I rely on Merle Pribbenow’s translation of this document and thank him for his support.

(*Cục Hồ sơ*) within the Ministry of Public Security. The tasks of this new department were manifold. Primarily, it had to keep all documents of the ministry and had to collect and analyze files and material on “the enemy” and provide the other departments with information necessary to eliminate “the enemy.” Documents departments were also set up at lower levels of the Ministry of Public Security. According to an official history of the ministry, the new departments significantly helped to track down and crush internal enemies.⁶⁶ The Stasi helped to set up the Documents Department and introduced new archiving methods that protected and sped up the processing of security information in Vietnam.⁶⁷

Accounts of visits in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam made by delegations of the East German Ministry of State Security and Ministry of Interior shed further light on the inner workings of the North Vietnamese security apparatus and its priorities. During a visit to Hà Nội in 1970, a delegation from the GDR Ministry of Interior gained an understanding of the security situation in the capital and several provinces. Specifically, it obtained a document of the North Vietnamese Ministry of State Security that offers fascinating details into the activities and plans of the security services for the period from 1971 to 1975.⁶⁸ According to the document, the struggle against criminals had to be stepped up by registering the names of all “criminal elements” and expanding the number of unofficial staff members and stabilizing the network of existing informants.⁶⁹

The existence of a network of informants (*đặc tình*) run by the Ministry of Public Security and similar to the infamous Stasi IM in the former GDR is also confirmed in a speech by Minister Trần Quốc Hoàn in 1967 in which he reviews “agent” or “informant” operations. He emphasizes that the security apparatus also had to rely on the masses to suppress counterrevolutionary elements: “With a full and complete understanding of this concept, we see

⁶⁶ Bộ Công An, *Lịch sử xây dựng lực lượng công an nhân dân Việt Nam, Tập II (1954–1975)*, 149-150.

⁶⁷ BStU MfS Abt. X, 652. Note on a Meeting between high-level members of the MfS of the DRV and MfS of the GDR on Sept. 29, 1966, from 15:30 to 17:00 pm, October 5, 1966: 146, 149. BStU MfS Abt. X, 652. Scholz, Working group of the Minister to Head of Dept. X, Consultation with Representatives of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam on Issues of Registering, 25.4.1967: 498-506. See Nguyễn Thanh et al., eds., *Những Kỷ Niệm Sâu Sắc Về Bộ Trưởng Trần Quốc Hoàn*, 69.

⁶⁸ BStU MfS Abt. X 652, Accord of the Activities of a Delegation of the GDR Ministry of Interior in the Ministry of State Security [sic!] of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, 21 Dec. 1970; Kminikowski, Annex 2: Transcript of excerpts from the plan of the Ministry of State Security [sic!] for the period from 1971 to 1975 (in the field of police): 696-702.

⁶⁹ BStU MfS Abt. X 652: 697. The German document uses the abbreviation “GI” which means “Geheimer Informator” [secret informant] and since the end of the 1960s was replaced by the infamous abbreviation “IM” [inoffizieller Mitarbeiter]. See Ralf Blum u.a., *Abkürzungsverzeichnis. Häufig verwendete Abkürzungen und Begriffe des Ministeriums der Staatssicherheit* (Berlin: BStU, 2009), 36.

that our public security service has the necessary structure and the ability to build up a widespread corps of informants that consists of individuals of many different types and from any different social classes in order to uncover and combat all types of counterrevolutionary targets, especially spies conducting secret operations”.⁷⁰

Other paragraphs in the above-mentioned document written by the Hà Nội Ministry of Public Security specify administrative tasks and relate directly to the aforementioned request of Trần Quốc Hoàn for the East German Ministry of State Security to help the North Vietnamese security apparatus establish a central repository for citizen identity cards and a special card index of suspect persons. The document emphasized that 100-percent of all people living in the territory of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam should be registered,⁷¹ as well as all weapons, printing houses, owners of typewriters, producers of seals, and pharmacists. In order to enhance monitoring, a team of unofficial staff members and informants had to be established among these groups.⁷²

The document also laid out a struggle against decadent phenomena in North Vietnam, “especially among those that originate in South Vietnam.”⁷³ In order to restrict the influence of “decadent South Vietnamese culture” on the Democratic Republic of Vietnam the document stated that “this also [makes necessary] the round-up of people from South Vietnam in assembly camps, their education and isolation from others,”⁷⁴ a clear foreboding of the reeducation camps which were established after the end of the war in 1975 in the South.

This wish to protect the North Vietnamese society from outside influences that the leadership in Hanoi considered detrimental also led to serious conflicts with the comrades in the GDR.

⁷⁰ Trần Quốc Hoàn, “*Một số vấn đề về đấu tranh chống phản cách mạng Tối Mật (Chỉ Lưu Hành Nội Bộ Ngành Công An)*” (“A Number of Issues Regarding The Struggle Against Counterrevolutionaries” (Top Secret) (For Internal Distribution within the Public Security Service Only)) (Hà Nội: Viện Nghiên Cứu Khoa Học Công An, December 1975), 319, 323-324.

⁷¹ BStU MfS Abt. X 652: 700.

⁷² BStU MfS Abt. X 652: 701.

⁷³ BStU MfS Abt. X 652: 698.

⁷⁴ BStU MfS Abt. X 652: 698.

Mistrust

In a speech in front of security cadres in 1971, Trần Quốc Hoàn expounded on potential risk-groups that had to be closely monitored. According to the Minister of Public Security, students who had studied abroad (*lưu học sinh*) constituted one of these groups:

Among the students who studied overseas and have returned home there are engineers, doctors and scientists. Some of these have been seduced or bribed into becoming enemy lackeys, but they do not begin to operate immediately but instead lie dormant for a long time, and then after fifteen or twenty years they finally become active.⁷⁵

It was the very case of Vietnamese students who studied in the GDR that put a strain on the otherwise quite cordial relationship between the North Vietnamese and East German security services.⁷⁶

The first students from North Vietnam had arrived in East Germany in the mid-1950s. As mentioned before, in 1964 Hà Nội launched a so-called “campaign against modern revisionism” which mainly targeted the Soviet Union, but other socialist countries in Central and Eastern Europe, including the GDR, were also part of the campaign. In the course of the campaign, all Vietnamese students studying in these “revisionist” countries were ordered to go back home to attend re-education courses. However, about twenty Vietnamese students in East Germany refused to do so because they had previously criticized the new militant line of the Lê Duẩn leadership in Hà Nội and therefore were afraid of reprisals if they returned home. Their case became a constant bone of contention between the Vietnamese embassy in East Berlin and the GDR authorities in general and the Ministry of State Security in particular.

Thus, in 1967, during his first meeting with Erich Mielke, Minister of State Security, the new DRV ambassador in the GDR, Nguyen Viet Dung, first thanked him for the “fraternal aid” that the German comrades had provided to Vietnam. After some more kind words he came to the real reason for his visit: the fate of those Vietnamese students who in 1964 had refused to go home. The Vietnamese ambassador again and again insisted that the GDR Ministry of State

⁷⁵ Trần Quốc Hoàn, “Một Số Ý Kiến của Đồng Chí Bộ Trưởng về Một Số Vấn Đề Cơ Bản Khi Tổng Kết Công Tác Chuyên Án (Nói trong buổi làm việc với Ban tổng kết chuyên án năm 1971)” (“A Few Opinions Expressed by the Minister on Several Basic Issues During the General Review of the Handling of Cases (Spoken during a Discussion with the Committee to Review the Handling of Cases in 1971)”), in Trần Quốc Hoàn, *Một số vấn đề đấu tranh chống phản cách mạng. Tối Mật (Chỉ Lưu Hành Nội Bộ Ngành Công An)* (A Number of Issues Regarding The Struggle Against Counterrevolutionaries. Top Secret [For Internal Distribution within the Public Security Service Only]) (Hà Nội: Viện Nghiên Cứu Khoa Học Công An, December 1975), 370. See Nguyen. *Hanoi's War, 197-198.*

⁷⁶ For this story, see Grossheim, “Revisionism in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.”

Security should help to find the students and send them back to Vietnam.⁷⁷ Mielke claimed that he did not know anything about the whereabouts of the Vietnamese students, though he promised to contact the Ministry of Foreign Affairs about this matter. He further emphasized that as a matter of principle the Ministry of State of Security did not deal with citizens from friendly states.

This was a blatant lie. The Stasi had been monitoring the Vietnamese students on a regular basis and therefore from the beginning had been well aware that some of the Vietnamese students had criticized the militant course of the Lê Duẩn faction in Hà Nội and were therefore afraid of returning to North Vietnam. In 1964, it had even helped some of the dissident Vietnamese to go underground and then recruited some of these students as informants.⁷⁸ While diatribes against “modern revisionism” stopped after the outbreak of the war and state media in the DRV began to praise the international solidarity of the socialist countries such as the GDR, the leadership in Hà Nội upheld a deep distrust of East German society and tried to reduce what it considered to be the side-effects of cultural exchange with those countries that had been classified “revisionist” in 1964. As a matter of fact, in secret the DRV continued to denounce the GDR as “revisionist.”

Thus, the Stasi’s Main Department 20, which was in charge of state, culture, church, and underground affairs and also monitored foreign students, learned that in summer courses in 1966, the Vietnamese embassy had denounced the political line of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED) as “revisionist” and the 6th Party Congress in the GDR as the “climax of revisionism.”⁷⁹ Life in the GDR, the students were warned, was “bourgeois, like in capitalism.”⁸⁰ In contrast, Vietnamese were “real revolutionaries.” If they adopted the way of life of the East

⁷⁷ BStU MfS Abt. X, 652. Note on the Reception of the Ambassador of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in Berlin Nguyen Viet Dung on 31 Jan. 1967 from 2:00 to 3:00 pm in the Ministry of State Security by Comrade Minister Mielke, 7.2.1967: 167-180.

⁷⁸ See, for example, BStU MfS Außenstelle Potsdam, 943/68. Abteilung XX/1, Potsdam, den 1.6.1964, Report, Golombeck (Sublieutenant): 18-20; BStU MfS Abt. X 339: 38-39, Abt. X, Lieutenant-colonel Damm, Head Dpt.. X, 2. Juli 1964, Note; BStU MfS Außenstelle Potsdam, 943/68, Abteilung XX/1, Report on making contact with the Vietnamese student 2.12.1933, Potsdam, 14 Febr. 1966, Leutnant Puls: 21-22; BStU MfS Branch office , 943/68, Abteilung XX/1, Meeting with KP [=contact person]..... on 3 May .66 – 8 am in room Zi. 81 – DEFA [=German Film], Potsdam, den 9.5.1966: 40-42.

⁷⁹ PA MfAA, C 865/72, Information on the behavior of Vietnamese students at the Karl Marx University Dresden and the Technical University Dresden, 17 September 1966, 27–28. See also BStU MfS Abt. X SA 339: 17–19.

⁸⁰ BStU MfS Abt. X, 562, Transcript. Report on a Meeting with the Vietnamese student [name blackened out] (German studies) on 18 January 1967, signed ‘Hermann’, 19 January 1967: 579.

Germans, they would “betray the revolution.”⁸¹ To prevent Vietnamese students from being influenced by this “bourgeois” lifestyle, they were given detailed guidelines on how to behave during their stay in the GDR. According to a list of about fifty detailed instructions received by the Stasi from one of its Vietnamese informants, the Vietnamese students were told to avoid personal contacts with Germans, not to accept private invitations, not to talk about politics, not to watch “indecent” movies from capitalist and socialist countries, to regularly perform self-criticism, not to attend courses on Marxism-Leninism at East German universities, and, last-but-not-least, to avoid any contact with the “group of revisionist students.”⁸² Students who did not follow the instructions risked grave consequences: a negative comment would be added to their personal file and, as the most severe form of punishment, they could be sent home to Vietnam.

These instructions were upheld at least until the end of the 1960s. The local Stasi office of Freital near Dresden, for example, reported in 1969 that a member of the Vietnamese embassy had come to see the Vietnamese trainees who were studying mining. He organized several long meetings and instructed them how to behave: they were not to watch German TV, listen to German radio, read German newspapers, or listen to German music.⁸³ As a first measure of enforcing discipline, the Vietnamese diplomat cut the hair of the Vietnamese trainees because, in his eyes, it was much too long. He threatened the students that he would continue cutting their hair in the future and advised them not to wear “modern clothes” anymore—instead they should dress in a simple way. In the eyes of the Vietnamese cadre, long hair and fashionable clothes, such as wide flare pants, reflected the influence of capitalism and, even worse, the influence of revisionism.

As a matter of fact, analyses of the disruptive forces of decadent Western culture, such as in the Stasi instructions just quoted, can be found not just in the training material of the Vietnamese embassy in East Germany, but also in assessments of the Vietnamese Ministry of Public Security and Culture. Furthermore, both North Vietnamese and East Germans believed in the conspiracy theory and claimed that the West made use of psychological means to undermine the socialist countries. North Vietnamese warned against “peaceful evolution” (*diễn biến hòa*

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² See Ibid., BStU MfS Abt. X, 562, Hauptabteilung XX/3/III, Information on the Situation among the Vietnamese students and postgraduate students in the GDR, 17 December 1966, Leutnant Schwanz, 570, and especially BStU MfS Abt. X, 562, Transcription, Report: Situation among the Vietnamese students, n.d. ‘Adler’: 580–587. This Stasi file contains a detailed summary of the instructions: 584–587.

⁸³ BStU MfS Abt. X, 562, Abschrift Kreisdienststelle Freital, 30 April 1969: 566–67.

binh), while the East Germans against “political-ideological diversion.” Ironically, both were fighting on the same front, but also, as I have suggested, against each other.⁸⁴ In other words, relations between East Germany and the DRV were officially praised as close and friendly, but beneath the layer of internationalist solidarity in the common struggle against “American imperialism” was a layer of distrust.

At the end of the 1960s, the Vietnamese embassy continued to denounce the dissident students as “traitors” and “group of revisionists,” and on several occasions asked the East German authorities to help send them back to the DRV. Vietnamese diplomats argued that, in spite of all efforts made by the DRV embassy for many years, the students stuck to their “incorrect political views” and that therefore there was no other way but to continue their “educational process” in the DRV.⁸⁵ The dissident Vietnamese students worried increasingly about their uncertain legal status, so much so that some wrote letters to GDR ministries and applied for German citizenship, while others managed to flee to West Germany.⁸⁶ In the end, the GDR authorities did not follow the demands brought forward by North Vietnamese diplomats and in 1969 the East German Minister of Foreign Affairs suggested officially extending the residence permits of several “Vietnamese citizens” who had applied for political asylum.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ The term “political-ideological diversion” was first coined by the GDR Ministry of State Security in 1958. The Stasi understood “political-ideological diversion” as a sophisticated and mainly peaceful strategy of the West to destabilize the Communist world. See definition in Roger Engelmann et al., eds., *Das MfS-Lexikon. Begriffe, Personen und Strukturen* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 2012), 72; and Siegfried Suckut, ed., *Das Wörterbuch der Staatssicherheit. Definitionen zur “politisch-operativen Arbeit”* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 1996), 303-304. The theory of a “peaceful evolution” had been originally formulated by Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, who argued that the West should follow a strategy of peaceful conquest and initiate changes inside the Soviet world by supporting forms of opposition within socialist countries, cultural subversion and the spread of information. See Qiang Zhai, “1959: Preventing Peaceful Evolution,” *Cold War International History Project Bulletin* 6/7 (Winter 1995): 227-30.

⁸⁵ PA MfAA/C 865/72: 32–33, Information on a Talk with the Second Secretary of the Embassy of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, Comrade Pham Hao, in the State Secretariat for Universities and Technical Colleges on 24 Oct. 1966, Dr. Joachimi; MfAA/C 865/72: 91–93, Ministry Ministerium f for Universities and Technical Colleges. Main Dept. International Relations. 25 April 1969, Note on incidents concerning the Vietnamese student . . . , Garz; DO1/11491. Minutes of a Talk between Colonel of the People’s Police Schmalfuß and the First Secretary of the Embassy of the DRV, Comrade Tin, on Sept. 24, 1968, 9:00 AM, Berlin, Sept. 25, 1968. In the last source the Vietnamese diplomat mentioned that a group of 40 Vietnamese students and three officers had decided to stay in the Soviet Union.

⁸⁶ BStU MfS Abt.X 339. Regional office for State Security Dresden AIG (Department for Analysis and Information), Head of AIG, Seidel, to Ministry of State Security, Dresden, 21 Nov. 1966: 17-20. Assessment of the Vietnamese students at the Technical University Dresden, Request of Comrade Lt.-Col. Irmeler by phone; BStU MfS Abt. X, 339. Copy, Letter of Vietnamese students to GDR Minister of Interior, Leipzig, 27 Jan. 1969: 9-15.

⁸⁷ PA MfAA/C 865/72, 94–95, Ministry of Foreign Relations to Minister of Interior and Head of the German People’s Police Dickel, 28 April 1969, Winzer.

Stasi Assistance to Post-War Vietnam

The DRV embassy still tried to force the “revisionist” students to go home, but had to give up. Then it seemed to have lost interest in the whole issue. Later events, however, show that the DRV embassy had not forgotten and certainly had not “forgiven” those twenty students who applied for political asylum in East Germany in the 1960s.

In 1983, the Stasi realized that several of those Vietnamese who had been granted a permanent residence permit and GDR citizenship and were now looking after Vietnamese contract workers. The DRV embassy considered this to be a strain on the otherwise good relations with the GDR and therefore asked the East German side to find a “solution.” This time the GDR authorities tried their best to please the Vietnamese embassy. In the meantime, the Ministry of State Security had developed closer relations with the Vietnamese Ministry of Interior and was assigned to gradually “isolate the GDR citizens from Vietnam” from the Vietnamese contract workers. It managed to do so to the satisfaction of their Vietnamese colleagues. The Vietnamese with GDR passports lost their jobs.⁸⁸

The assistance that the East German Stasi gave their Vietnamese colleagues in this case reflected the further improvement of mutual relations after the end of the war in 1975 and the reunification of the country in 1976 when the security apparatus faced new challenges. On April 19, 1975, a few days before the war ended, the Central Party Secretariat issued a decree on the politics towards “the puppet army, the puppet government, and the counterrevolutionary struggle.”⁸⁹ This decree reflects the ongoing concern of the Party leadership in Hà Nội to eliminate any internal enemies and to take preparatory measures before the expected collapse of the government of the Republic of Vietnam. On June 22, 1975, the Central Office of South Vietnam issued a more specific decree on the suppression of counterrevolutionary elements in South Vietnam.⁹⁰

From May 1975 to the end of 1976 the Ministry of Interior, a merger of the old Ministry of Public Security and the Ministry of Interior, sent about 10,000 security cadres to the south to

⁸⁸ For the whole affair see Michael Feige, *Vietnamesische Studenten und Arbeiter in der DDR und ihre Beobachtung durch das MfS* (Magdeburg: Sachbeiträge, Landesbeauftragte für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen DDR Sachsen-Anhalt, 1999), 22-25. See BStU MfS Abt. X SA 339, B1.3, B1.6, and BStU MfS, BVfS Leipzig, Leitung 1037: 47-49, 51-52.

⁸⁹ Bộ Công An, *65 năm Công an nhân dân Việt Nam*, 341.

⁹⁰ Bộ Công An, *65 năm Công an nhân dân Việt Nam*, 341-342.

consolidate the party's power on the territory of the former Republic of Vietnam.⁹¹ One of the most important measures of the communist security apparatus was to register the South Vietnamese population and to send those who had used to work for the “puppet government” or served in the “puppet army” to reeducation camps.⁹² The “fraternal aid” provided by the East German Stasi in the post-war period was instrumental in helping the leadership in Hà Nội to consolidate its power in the south.

The GDR Ministry of State Security provided the Vietnamese security services with an automated 1,500-line telephone switchboard and with sufficient equipment so that each of the city and provincial public security offices in Vietnam could have its own telephone switchboard and an automated telephone network.⁹³ After the end of the war the East German not only stepped up the “training of [Vietnamese] cadres, supply of equipment for operational work, support and cooperation in the fight against “hostile secret services” and subversive activities, the protection of airports and harbors, passport control.”⁹⁴ In November 1977, a high-ranking delegation of the Vietnamese Ministry of Interior visited East Germany. Against the backdrop of an unstable situation in South Vietnam with many unemployed people, lots of civil servants and soldiers of the former Saigon regime still to be re-educated and some of them opposing the new rulers from the North, the leader of the Vietnamese delegation asked the GDR Ministry of State Security to share “experiences in fighting against the hostile influence of imperialist mass media and the specific methods used by the Ministry of State Security...the criminal law used to combat political-ideological diversion among artists, students, doctors and forms of punishment and methods to suppress hostile influences.”⁹⁵

A few years after the end of the Vietnam War, the cooperation between the Vietnamese Ministry of Public Security and the GDR Ministry of State Security and other security services of the Moscow-led socialist bloc was raised to a more formal level. In October 1980, the

⁹¹ Bộ Công An, *65 năm Công an nhân dân Việt Nam*, 343.

⁹² Bộ Công An, *65 năm Công an nhân dân Việt Nam*, 344-345.

⁹³ See Bộ Công An. Bùi Anh Tuấn, ed., *Đồng chí Trần Quốc Hoàn với Công an nhân dân Việt Nam, Chỉ lưu hành nội bộ* (Comrade Tran Quoc Hoan and People's Public Security of Vietnam. Internal Distribution Only) (Hà Nội: NXB Công An Nhân Dân, 2004), 163; MfS Abt. X 345. SRV, Ministry of Interior, Hà Nội, 10.5.1977, Tran Quoc Hoan to Erich Mielke: 27-30.

⁹⁴ MfS Abt. X 345. 19.1.1976, Damm: 285, Proposal to send a delegation of the Ministry of State Security to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (approved by Mielke).

⁹⁵ MfS Abt. X, 340. HA XVIII, Berlin, Nov. 8, 1977. Meeting of a delegation of the Ministry of Interior of the SR of Vietnam and representatives of the departments XVIII [protection of the national economy] and XX [state institutions, culture, church, underground] in the Ministry for State Security from Oct. 18 to November 7, 1977: 162.

Vietnamese and East German sides signed an official treaty of cooperation. They agreed to exchange information on the enemy, to support each other “in the struggle against hostile activities of secret services of imperialist states,” and to send a liaison officer to their respective embassy. In the same month, the Vietnamese Ministry of Interior also signed a treaty of cooperation with the Soviet Union which was complemented by a cooperation agreement with the Soviet KGB in the following month. Furthermore, in December 1980 Vietnam agreed on a formal cooperation treaty with the Ministry of Interior of Czechoslovakia.⁹⁶

In 1984, the Vietnamese security services joined the SOUD data sharing system which contained information on over 188,000 people who were regarded as a “potential threat.”⁹⁷ This joint database that bound the KGB with the intelligence services of Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, the GDR, Cuba, Mongolia, Poland, and Hungary had been set up in 1977 to respond to the perceived threat of an intensified “political-ideological diversion” and stem the negative side-effects of the policy of détente. In 1987, the SOUD database contained information on over 188,000 people who were regarded as a “potential threat.”⁹⁸

The accession to the SOUD data sharing system was a further step towards the integration of the Vietnamese security apparatus into the network of socialist security services that had already been institutionalized by the signing of cooperation treaties in 1980. Thus, in the 1980s, representatives of the Vietnamese Ministry of Interior attended conferences of the socialist bloc on security issues where experiences in counterintelligence and in combating “political-ideological diversion” initiated in “imperialist countries and the international reactionary clique.”⁹⁹

In the treaty of cooperation from 1980, the GDR Ministry of State Security pledged to continue supporting the Vietnamese Ministry of Interior, especially in the field of

⁹⁶ Bộ Công An. Tổng Cục Xây Dựng Lực Lượng Công An Nhân Dân Việt Nam (Ministry of Public Security, General Department of Building up the Forces of the People’s Public Security of Vietnam), *Lịch sử Công An Nhân Dân Việt Nam (1975–1996) (Sơ thảo)* (History of the People’s Public Security of Vietnam, 1975–1996, [Draft]) (Hanoi: Công An Nhân Dân, 2011), 156-157. According to a different official history, the Vietnamese Ministry of Interior also signed treaties of cooperation with the Cuba and Hungary. No exact date is given, but probably it was also in 1980. See Phạm Văn Quyền et al., eds., *Bộ Công An. 60 năm Công An Nhân Dân Việt Nam*, 522-523. For details on the cooperation with the KGB, see Phạm Văn Quyền et al., eds., *Bộ Công An. 60 năm Công An Nhân Dân Việt Nam*, 522-523.

⁹⁷ Bodo Wegmann and Monika Tanzscher, *SOUD – Das geheimdienstliche Datennetz des östlichen Bündnissystems* (Berlin: Der Bundesbeauftragte für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, Abteilung Bildung und Forschung, 1996). On the SOUD database, see John C. Schmeidel, *Stasi: Shield and Sword of the Party* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 115-118.

⁹⁸ See Wegmann and Tanzscher, *SOUD*, 33.

⁹⁹ Phạm Văn Quyền et al., eds., *Bộ Công An. 60 năm Công An Nhân Dân Việt Nam*, 522.

communication equipment and operational equipment.¹⁰⁰ And that is what happened: the Stasi's Communications and Technical Operations Departments provided equipment and trained Vietnamese specialists until the very last days of the German Democratic Republic.¹⁰¹ The East German security services had helped the Vietnamese security apparatus to build up its institutional capacity on a regular basis from the mid-1960s onward.

In January 1989, the Stasi liaison officer in Hà Nội reported back home that his Vietnamese colleagues had mentioned that both sides had already cooperated with each other for 25 years and emphasized the need for future cooperation.¹⁰² This, however, as we know now did not materialize: on 9 November, 1989 the Berlin Wall fell, in 1990 Germany was reunified, and the infamous Stasi dissolved.

Conclusion

The assistance that the East German Ministry of State Security provided from the end of 1965 to the very last days of the GDR was instrumental in modernizing the North Vietnamese security apparatus. Besides supplying modern surveillance devices, the GDR also helped the Vietnamese security apparatus to build up its institutional capacity and contributed to making the Ministry of Public Security into a powerful tool of social control. The Stasi advised Vietnamese security cadres on how to maintain files of suspicious and unreliable persons and how to use unofficial informants to monitor the population. The East German assistance thus allowed their Vietnamese comrades to equip themselves with the techniques for internal suppression. In addition, the Stasi supplied modern radio and telecommunication instruments that linked the Ministry of Public Security in Hanoi with the local security offices in the provinces of North Vietnam before 1975 and after the war in the entirety of reunified Vietnam. By sending state-of-the-art surveillance equipment to Vietnam and training cadres in Hanoi in how to make efficient use of those devices, the East German Stasi enabled the Vietnamese

¹⁰⁰ MfS – BdL 008724. Agreement on Cooperation between the Ministry for State Security of the GDR and the Ministry of Interior of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, Oct. 28, 1980, 1-9. See Bộ Công An, *Lịch sử Công An Nhân Dân Việt Nam (1975–1996)*, 157.

¹⁰¹ See, for example, MfS Abt. X 346. Abteilung X. Report on an official trip to the SRV from 30 May to 8 June 1981, 13.6.1981: 182-189, Albrecht; MfS Abt. X, 346. Mielke an Pham Hung, MdI, 3.1.1985: 347-348; MfS OTS 1775, List of Shipments of the OTS to the Ministry of Interior of the SR of VN from 1976 to 1983, 17f.

¹⁰² MfS Abt. X 348. Liaisons office of the MfS at the MdI of the SRV to MfS, Dpt. 10 X, Comrade Damm, 28. Jan. 1989, H. Knabe: 77-79.

Ministry of Public Security to track down internal and external enemies and to perform operational work that was of major significance for the struggle in South Vietnam.

On a more general level, the cooperation between the GDR Ministry of State Security and the Vietnamese security apparatus is an example of links forged between the secret services of a minor player in the Cold War and the newly constituted security services in post-colonial states. Although nowadays East German assistance, offered in the name of international anti-imperialist solidarity, is praised in articles by retired Vietnamese security cadres, in reality the “side effects” of close relations with the GDR, such as the “clash” of Vietnamese students and cadres with the much more open East German society, were much disputed. The access to documents on the cooperation of the Vietnamese security apparatus with other socialist security services in the Soviet Union, Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia would provide further insights into how the division of labor within the Socialist camp worked.

Abbreviations:

Abt. X Abteilung X (Department X for International Relations in the GDR Ministry of State Security)

MfAA Ministerium für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten (GDR Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

MfS Ministerium für Staatssicherheit (Ministry of State Security, commonly known as ‘Stasi’)

OTS Operativ-Technischer Sektor (Technical Operations Sector in the GDR Ministry of State Security)

Archival Sources:

BStU Der Bundesbeauftragte für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der Ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik (Federal Commissioner for the Records of the State Security Service of the Former German Democratic Republic).

PA MfAA Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes, Ministerium für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten (Political Archives of the Foreign Ministry, GDR Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

SAPMO-BArch Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv (Foundation for Archives of the Parties and Mass Organizations of the GDR in the Federal Archives).

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