

How former Nazi official Reinhard Gehlen erected a state within a state in post-war Germany

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Over 100,000 pages of documents relating to the post-World War II former head of the German Federal Intelligence Service (BND) Reinhard Gehlen (1902-1979) have been leaked to the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (SZ). In its edition of December 1, SZ reporters Uwe Ritzer and Willi Winkler devote four pages to an overview of the documents.

The archive includes reports from spies, political “situation reports,” dossiers on politicians, artists and personalities from the academic world, correspondence and personal records. All of this material was unknown to historians until now.

Much of it appears to be historically worthless snippets such as receipts for daily expenses, condolences and greeting cards, but there is also information of major importance. Over the course of two decades, Gehlen meticulously collected everything and placed it under wraps in a private archive when he retired in 1968, thus ensuring its secrecy even after his death.

The material confirms and embellishes well known facts with many photos, film footage, documents recorded on microfilm, names and detailed information. According to the SZ, it explains how Gehlen prepared for “the period after” just weeks before the capitulation of the German Army (Wehrmacht) at the end of World War II.

During the war, Gehlen was head of the Foreign Army East Division of the General Staff, in charge of collecting information on the social, economic and political life of Nazi Germany’s main target in the war, the Soviet Union. His role in the war was crucial to his career after it.

The SZ documents reveal how Gehlen and his closest associates secretly buried the files in the mountains of Upper Bavaria to be used as a bargaining chip for his personal negotiations with the victorious Allied powers. Shortly after Germany’s surrender, Gehlen was feted by the US Army for his “expert knowledge” and was flown to the United States. There he struck a deal that allotted him the task of heading a secret service in Germany at the behest of the CIA. In this way, the SZ reporters write, Gehlen rose to become “one of the most powerful men in the Federal Republic... without any break in his biography.”

A “transfer company” for former Nazis and right-wing Wehrmacht officers

It is already known that after the war, Gehlen worked with Nazi criminals, generals and Wehrmacht officers as well as former SS and Nazi Secret Service officers. Details of such collaboration were revealed by the historical commission set up some years ago to investigate the history of the BND. What is new is the documentation of the systematic character

and scale of his activities—and the extent to which he was supported and protected by Germany’s first post-war government under the Christian Democratic leader Konrad Adenauer.

The SZ authors write that the “Gehlen Organization,” as the BND was called before 1956, was “the best conceivable job-creation office for ex-officers and old Nazis” following the downfall of the Nazi dictatorship. Equally fitting would be the designation “transfer company.”

However, in contrast to today’s transfer companies, Gehlen’s apparatus did not serve to smooth the path of employed workers to unemployment, but rather facilitated the smooth transfer of the repressive apparatus and leading staff of the Third Reich to the post-war German Federal Republic.

In keeping with its continuity with the Nazi apparatus, the Gehlen Organization moved its operations in December 1947 (70 years ago) to the Reichssiedlung Rudolf Heß—a secluded residential quarter in the community of Pullach in the forests to the south of Munich that had housed high-ranking Nazis.

The driving force behind this apparatus was a profound hatred of communism. For Gehlen, this meant not so much the Stalinist rulers in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. As the documents show, at a later stage Gehlen helped his close confidant Berthold Beitz, representing the Krupp Group, to establish economic contacts with Eastern countries in the face of opposition from the German government. In return, Beitz operated as an informant for the BND, reporting extensively after every one of his visits abroad.

For Gehlen’s apparatus, “communism” was everything relating to the working class—its organizations, political leaders and parties, and the October Revolution and Soviet Union, which continued to exist despite its Stalinist degeneration. Gehlen’s conception corresponded exactly to what Adolf Hitler designated in *Mein Kampf* as Marxism or Bolshevism, and which Hitler declared to be the main enemy of the National Socialists.

Hence, it goes without saying that politicians and personalities from the sphere of cultural and academic life who were opponents of National Socialism during the Third Reich were among the first targets of the Gehlen Organization’s persecution of communists.

The archive material includes a carefully composed dossier on the lawyer and political scientist Wolfgang Abendroth, who was banned from working as a legal trainee in 1933 due to his socialist leanings. A few years later, Abendroth was sent into a punishment battalion of the Wehrmacht active in the war in Greece. He deserted from the Army and joined the Greek resistance movement.

After the war, he commenced teaching as a lecturer at the University of Leipzig. This was sufficient to place him in the first ranks of Gehlen’s list of “enemies of the state.” Abendroth was surrounded by Gehlen’s agents, who diligently sent their observations and notes to Gehlen, all of which are found in the 100,000 files of his private archive.

An open question is how many other cases of BND persecution and harassment of Nazi opponents, socialists and Trotskyists are to be found in the mountain of files.

“Uncontrolled co-ruler of the German Republic”

Probably the most spectacular discovery in this initial review of the archive material is the evidence that the BND planted an informant and probably a provocateur in the leadership of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) at a very early stage. Through the work of his agent, Gehlen was able to observe over many years his most prominent target, SPD leader Willy Brandt, who was foreign minister in the grand coalition (SPD and Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union) from 1966 and in 1969 chancellor of the coalition between the SPD and the Free Democratic Party (FDP). As foreign minister, Brandt was spied upon by his own foreign intelligence service.

The BND collected photos and other material about Brandt’s private life, which it used to blackmail him and subsequently engineer his resignation as chancellor in May 1974. Federal Police (BKA) Chief Horst Herold had an entire dossier compiled on the basis of this material. The unmasking of Chancellor Brandt’s confidante Günter Guillaume and Guillaume’s wife as agents of the East German Stalinist regime was passed on to the FDP and SPD leadership and to Brandt himself to prove the latter’s susceptibility to blackmail and make his resignation appear inevitable.

The BND had known that Guillaume and his wife were East German agents since 1954 but had kept this knowledge to itself, only to use it 20 years later to initiate Brandt’s downfall and a decisive turn in West German politics. Gehlen’s most important agent in the SPD leadership for this operation “behind enemy lines” was SPD Information Director Fried Wesemann. As the archive footage shows, Wesemann passed on to Gehlen information about the internal discussions, decisions and personal details of the SPD leadership and was able to influence them by virtue of his position within the party.

This revelation is not just a colorful anecdote from a story long past. Rather, it is a serious warning of the dangers to the working class and its democratic rights emanating from the BND today. The SZ authors rightly draw the conclusion from the documentary evidence that the Gehlen Organization had risen to become an “uncontrolled co-ruler of the German Republic.” It became and remains a state within the state, founded and built by former Nazi functionaries and fascist criminals who recruited and trained its staff and agents without a trace of democratic control over its reactionary operations, involving mass surveillance, provocations, repression and manipulation of political life.

Today, the BND no longer resides in a secluded Bavarian forest. It recently moved to a huge new complex in the middle of the capital, Berlin, with a staff of over 6,500 “office workers,” which does not even count the agency’s thousands of agents. The complex of buildings is larger than the federal Chancellery and the German parliament (Bundestag) combined.

The BND is still beyond any democratic control. On December 8, the SZ reported on a 39-page secret report by an “independent body” set up last spring to control the BND, after it became known that it, in collaboration with the US National Security Agency (NSA), had illegally tapped, stored and evaluated billions of items of internet data. The lawyers leading the investigating body—two federal judges and one federal prosecutor—complained in their report that they were unable to complete their work because they were denied access to important information.

BND traditions rooted in the Holocaust

Based on the archive documents, it is now possible to confirm a long-standing suspicion of reputable historians, but one that the Christian Democrats and the German Chancellery continue to deny—namely, that the Adenauer government was involved in maintaining links and utilizing a relationship with one of the main criminals of the Nazi period, Alois Brunner.

Brunner was the deputy and right-hand man of Adolf Eichmann in the organization of the Holocaust. He personally oversaw mass deportations and mass executions and exhibited exceptional sadistic cruelty in detecting, hunting down, torturing and murdering Jews, especially Jewish women and children, in Austria, France, Italy and Greece. After the war, he worked under a false name for the US occupation forces, and later in Essen at the Carl Funke mine.

When his true identity threatened to emerge in 1954, Gehlen used his apparatus to help Brunner flee to Syria, where he again lived under a false name, presumably until 2009 or 2010.

In 1961, Brunner believed he had detected an opportunity to make himself useful to the German government and thus end his life in a foreign country under a false name. In the course of the trial of Adolf Eichmann, who had been abducted by the Israeli intelligence service in Argentina in 1960, Hans Globke, head of the Chancellery of Adenauer, was in great danger of losing his reputation and position.

Globke was responsible for both the personnel and day-to-day policy of the federal cabinet. He was the closest confidant of the chancellor. He was also the author of the Nazi race laws of 1936 and a leading commentator on Nazi “jurisprudence.”

These facts were well known and Globke had been the target of public criticism for his role under the Nazis, but Adenauer insisted that he remain in office with the argument that “You can’t throw away dirty water as long as you don’t have any clean water.” But now Globke had been requested to appear as a witness in the Eichmann trial, which would have made his role as the latter’s henchman a matter of public record.

With the support of Adenauer, Gehlen was able to persuade the prosecutor in Israel that Globke should not take the stand. The SZ quotes Gehlen’s note: “Attorney General Hausner already told me on the third day of the trial that Dr. Globke is taboo to him.”

However, a number of daily papers cited the trial testimony of former Wehrmacht officer Max Merten, who had stated that Globke personally ordered the deportation of about 20,000 Jews from Thessaloniki in Greece, thereby confirming that he was directly involved in the Holocaust.

It was at this critical point that Alois Brunner offered his services as a “witness for the defense” of Globke. Gehlen helped establish the contact with the German chancellor’s office and discussed with Globke multiple times all the pros and cons, along with the organizational and legal issues involved in accepting Brunner’s offer.

In the end, they decided to use another weapon from the arsenal of the BND, which promised more success and less risk: a targeted media campaign. Gehlen noted in his files: “Secretary of State (Globke) agreed to the idea cited, to attempt, regardless of the truth, to present Merten as an agent of Eastern propaganda, on the basis of existing findings.”

Influence on the media

The method of denouncing in the media any serious opponent who threatened to reveal the truth about the role of Globke in the Third Reich as an “agent of Pankow” (Pankow in East Berlin was at that time the seat

of government of the Stalinist regime in East Germany) was also used against other opponents.

Beginning in 1958, Reinhard Strecker had organized an exhibition titled “Unatoned Nazi Justice,” which toured throughout West Germany. The exhibition documented the manner in which innumerable Nazi judges had been retained or restored to their exalted positions in the post-war Federal Republic under Adenauer and Gehlen. Based on intensive archival research in Poland and Czechoslovakia, Strecker published a book in 1961 titled *Dr. Hans M. Globke—Statements from the Files. Documents*, in which he exposed Globke as an active organizer of the Holocaust.

The BND set in motion a huge media campaign, using what would today equal hundreds of thousands of euros to defame Strecker and (successfully) prevent the further distribution of his book. The BND continued to persecute Strecker for decades (according to Strecker himself, until 2014), but from this time period we, of course, cannot expect new findings from these files.

However, what can be clearly studied from the files from Gehlen’s term of office is how a network of compliant scribblers and informers was set up in the editorial offices of German and probably also foreign media and deployed time and again to directly influence politicians and policies.

Thus, the SZ reporters describe the campaign set in motion by the BND against Willy Brandt when Brandt stood as the SPD’s choice as chancellor against Adenauer in the early 1960s and first raised the notion of a “policy of détente” relating to the Soviet Union and the German Democratic Republic (East Germany): “The notes in Gehlen’s secret documents repeatedly raise the question of whether Brandt could somehow be discredited.”

Eventually they found a means to defame Brandt in the eyes of Catholic, arch-conservative layers of the population and those who were still shaped by Nazi ideology: Brandt’s origins as an illegitimate child—his original name was Herbert Frahm—were portrayed as “shady,” “sinful” and dishonorable. His involvement in his youth as a socialist against the Franco regime in Spain and against Hitler, as well as his exile in Norway, where he adopted the political name of Willy Brandt, were denounced as evidence of “treason.”

The author of this article can still remember very well the infamous election campaign speeches by Adenauer, who repeatedly referred to “Brandt alias Frahm.” Today we can read in the files: Adenauer was citing from the script provided him by his man in the shadows, Gehlen.

The BND has its spies and mouthpieces in all of the major daily newspapers, referred to by Gehlen as “special connections.” One can read in the files that Marion Gräfin von Dönhoff, the editor of the weekly *Die Zeit*, was overwhelmed by the charm of Hitler’s General Gehlen and his “old-style European manners.” The countess responded with a number of particularly obsequious tributes to Gehlen and his honorable services in the critical year of 1963, when Gehlen’s reputation had suffered badly as a result of the Globke affair.

In this context, the following passage in the SZ report by Winkler and Ritzer is highly relevant: “The documents left behind by Gehlen show the extent of the collaboration with German journalists, who willingly made their contribution to the Pullach brotherhood. The most important connection was soon established with the news magazine *Der Spiegel*, and this is also confirmed by the documents. Time and time again Gehlen’s service takes pride in the number of *Spiegel* stories that had been deliberately leaked to the editorial board, rewritten or stopped before publication.”

One can justifiably claim that *Der Spiegel* was the most important organ of the Federal Intelligence Service. Hans Detlev Becker, the magazine’s editor and later publishing director, showed slavish devotion to the BND. The founder, owner and Editor-in-Chief Rudolf Augstein also requested that important articles be read beforehand by the BND, including his famous report from 1962 about the condition of the Federal Armed Forces

titled “Partially Operative,” which triggered the so-called *Spiegel* affair of the same year. Three other agents on the *Spiegel* editorial board are cited in Gehlen’s notes from the 1950s and early 1960s.

If one assumes that the number of BND field staff and unofficial collaborators on media editorial boards has grown in line with its army of “office workers,” one has an idea of the extent of the BND’s infiltration of the media and influence on policy-making.

In this respect, it is telling that the revelations published in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* have been ignored by Germany’s other major daily newspapers. Only one report appeared five days later in *Die Welt*, authored by Felix Kellerhoff, who in the past has often found appreciative words for Globke. In his comment, Kellerhoff claimed that the latest batch of files produced nothing new.

That Willy Brandt had been spied on as foreign minister and chancellor and treated like a public enemy? That’s not surprising, according to Kellerhoff. At a very early stage, Adenauer had requested information from the BND about the career of the then-mayor of Berlin.

According to Kellerhoff’s line of argumentation, the intelligence services were obliged to intervene. Their procedure could be described only as “logical” and “consistent,” he writes.

The fact that Gehlen protected and defended Globke? Kellerhoff responds: “Even the CIA considered protecting Globke from constant attacks from East Berlin, as everyone has been able to read on the internet since 2006—but these attacks did not lead to anything.” In other words, CIA approval is sufficient to warrant a state within a state and all of its illegal operations.

“However,” Kellerhoff continues, “that the BND or CIA would have protected Eichmann, as is occasionally assumed by authors, is not backed up by the evidence cited.” In fact, the SZ reporters never make this claim or attempt to provide evidence to support it. However, they do reveal the smooth cooperation between the BND and journalists ready and willing to function as informers and mouthpieces for an intelligence service founded and run by Nazis. On this issue Felix Kellerhoff has nothing to say.



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