

The Fighting Group against Inhumanity: Resistance and Espionage in the Cold War, 1948–1959
(German title: *Die Kampfgruppe gegen Unmenschlichkeit (KgU): Widerstand und Spionage im Kalten Krieg 1948–1959*)

Enrico Heitzer (Böhlau Verlag, 2015).

Reviewed by Thomas Boghardt

During the early years of the Cold War, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) embarked on a global campaign of espionage and covert action to assess the capabilities and intentions of the Soviet Union and to contain the spread of international communism. Well-known examples of this clandestine endeavor include CIA support of non-communist parties in Italy's 1948 parliamentary elections, as well as of pro-Western coups d'état in Iran (1953) and Guatemala (1954). Since divided Germany constituted the epicenter of the early Cold War, it comes as no surprise that the CIA became very active in this theater as well. One of the agency's principal local auxiliaries was a militantly anti-communist organization called the *Kampfgruppe gegen Unmenschlichkeit* (KgU). In his doctoral dissertation, German historian Enrico Heitzer has produced the definitive study of the KgU, including careful documentation of the organization's numerous links to US intelligence agencies.

Heitzer's book is comprehensive, well-organized, and thoroughly researched. The author mines an impressive array of primary sources, including the KgU's own records and those of its chief antagonist, the East German Ministry for State Security (MfS). Heitzer is also the first historian to exploit the large volume of recently-declassified CIA documents on the agency's collaboration with the KgU, a project codenamed DTLINEN. In four parts—"organization," "individual actors," "operations," and "setbacks"—Heitzer chronicles the genesis, rise, and fall of the KgU.

The KgU was established in Berlin during the Soviet blockade of the city's western sectors in 1948. The communist East German regime constituted the KgU's principal target—whence the organization's name, a reference to the "inhumane" conditions in the Soviet Zone. Its leaders were Rainer Hildebrandt, a historian and publicist, and Ernst Tillich, a Protestant pastor. "Hilly and Tilly," as the CIA referred to them, had served time in prison during the Third Reich for their anti-Nazi activities and always

claimed that their militant anti-communism represented a natural continuation of their opposition to Nazism.

The group employed both overt and covert means in pursuit of their goals. During the postwar years, thousands of people vanished in prisons in the Soviet-occupied zone of Germany, and the KgU built up an extensive database to help relatives track their loved ones. In the process, the KgU collected data on nearly 250,000 individuals. Much of this information subsequently came in handy in covert operations. The KgU also identified numerous informers of the East German regime and gave their names to the US Radio in the American Sector (RIAS), which broadcast so-called "snitch reports" in an effort to silence the informers and deter others from engaging in similar activities.

US intelligence was chiefly interested in the KgU's covert operations capabilities. According to CIA documents, in the early 1950s the KgU ran approximately 500 agents in East Germany and provided hundreds of reports on political and military issues to the CIA's Berlin Station. According to Heitzer, this rate of productivity put the KgU on par with the proto-West German intelligence service of Reinhard Gehlen. In collaboration with the CIA, the KgU also ran an aggressive economic disruption campaign aimed at a "breakdown in the whole [East German] administrative system," in the words of the agency. For example, in Operation *Osterhase* (Easter Bunny), the KgU sent 150,000 forged letters to state-owned East German stores, ordering them to cut prices drastically, and causing a run on already-scarce consumer goods. Following the North Korean invasion of South Korea in 1950, the CIA recruited "stay behind" agents in West Germany who were to operate behind enemy lines in the event of a Soviet invasion, and Heitzer documents the involvement of the KgU in this endeavor.

During its heyday in the early 1950s, the KgU had considerable political clout. Tillich met with West Ger-

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man Chancellor Konrad Adenauer and testified before the House Committee on Un-American Activities on the evils of the East German regime. Hildebrandt met with Eleanor Roosevelt during a visit to the United States. By the late 1950s, however, successful penetration by MfS agents and the arrest of many KgU operatives in East Germany had thrown the group on the ropes, and its crusading anti-communism put it squarely outside the political culture of West Germany. In 1959, the once-powerful organization was quietly dissolved, with many of its records going to the CIA.

Heitzer's book shows that the KgU was never controlled by, but throughout its existence closely cooperated with, US intelligence. The US Army's Counter Intelligence Corps provided funding from the late 1940s, and the CIA gradually replaced the Army as the KgU's principal American benefactor in the early 1950s. Berlin-based CIA officers who worked with the KgU included station chief Peter Sichel and his deputy Harry Rositzke, who used the rather conspicuous cover name "John Wayne" in his dealings with the Germans.

The relationship between the KgU and US intelligence is best described as a partnership between two independent parties with identical goals—the weakening of the East German regime through espionage and covert action. In this bargain, the CIA contributed funds and guidance, and occasionally intervened on behalf of the KgU with the West German government and judiciary. In exchange,

the KgU provided information and manpower, and absorbed massive MfS counter-strikes: numerous KgU agents were kidnapped, arrested, and received long prison sentences, and at least 126 were executed. The intensity of the MfS's response to the KgU's operations suggests that the group had at least some impact in East Germany. The CIA certainly considered the KgU valuable, calling it "the most promising and successful" of the various anti-communist organizations used for similar purposes in Germany.

Heitzer delivers a nuanced and detailed study of the KgU, however, his own assessment of the group grew more negative in the course of his research. For one, Heitzer dismisses Hildebrandt's and Tillich's claim that the group was equally opposed to all forms of totalitarianism, points out that the KgU used numerous activists with a Nazi past, and suggests that many hadn't changed their political views. He also faults the KgU for pursuing operations that were too extreme and dangerous, including sabotage, arson, and poison attacks. Heitzer's disapproving stance puts him at odds with many of the KgU's former members as well as some contemporary German historians who see the group first and foremost as an organization dedicated to a just fight against the totalitarian East German regime. Readers may make up their own minds, but whatever one's take on the KgU, no one will be able to discuss this controversial organization and its place in early Cold War Germany without taking into account Heitzer's excellent book.

