The United States and the European Right, 1945-1955

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ON 8 OCTOBER 1952, Georg August Zinn, the Social Democratic minister president of the West German state of Hesse, made a startling announcement. Zinn informed the Hessian legislature that the United States secretly funded and armed a right-wing German paramilitary group, the Technical Service of the League of German Youth (Bund Deutscher Jugend-Technischer Dienst, BDJ-TD). This organization allegedly trained dozens of ex-Nazi and Waffen SS officers to resist “Case X,” a Soviet invasion of the Federal Republic. Even more alarming, the group apparently targeted “the SPD more than the KPD.” The Technical Service had compiled a so-called “Proscription List” of nearly 100 “politically unreliable” West Germans who might assist Soviet occupiers or “object to German participation in a West European defense system.” Eighty “leading” Social Democrats topped the list, including Hessian Interior Minister Heinrich Zinnkann, Lower Saxony’s minister president Heinrich Kopf, and Hamburg mayor Max Brauer. These figures, along with 15 Communists, were targeted for “liquidation,” which meant that, pending any Soviet attack, they would be “removed, if necessary, by use of arms.”

Subsequent investigation did not sustain Zinn’s most sensational claims. State, federal, and U.S. authorities all considered the facts of the case. Hessian officials alleged an American-backed conspiracy to subvert German socialism. But federal authorities and a mixed U.S.-German commission found no evidence that the Technical Service plotted political murder or that Americans backed any scheme to eliminate socialists.

Numerous German and American sources nonetheless suggest that the U.S. Army Counterintelligence Corps (CIC), with oversight from the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), co-opted ex-Nazis into a planned
stay-behind net aimed at defending the Federal Republic against any Soviet attack. This strategy flowed out of numerous U.S. psychological warfare directives of 1947–51 and dovetailed with German rearmament plans of both the United States and the Adenauer governments. The program imploded in 1952 amidst public exposure. While bilateral relations suffered no permanent damage, the affair heightened West German resentment of the occupation and subverted the Atlanticist consensus essential to the preservation of U.S. hegemony in Europe.

Investigators first learned in September 1952 that the Bund Deutscher Jugend (BDJ), an anticommunist youth alliance in existence since June 1950, operated a secret, U.S.-backed paramilitary branch called the Technical Service (Technischer Dienst, TD). Hans Werner Franz Otto, the TD’s former security chief, divulged the organization to the Frankfurt police, claiming that the agency’s activities troubled his “conscience.” An SS storm trooper with suppressed dreams of becoming a dentist (all those “niggling Latin” medical terms bewildered him, he later confessed), Otto had previously spent several years in U.S. and French prisoner-of-war camps. Following his release in 1948 from a French camp, he worked in a variety of low-paying jobs in the textile, food service, and cardboard packing industries. In an effort to supplement his “paltry income,” Otto in 1949 became a paid informer for the British secret service. He simultaneously joined the “Brotherhood” (“Bruderschaft”), an alliance of war veterans, which secretly planned an “anticommunist defensive army” to defend a “united Europe with Africa as its hinterland.” Here Otto joined many right-wing partisans, including the BDJ’s co-founder, Luftwaffe lieutenant Erhard Peters.2

Peters and the ex-Nazi doctor Paul Lüth together established the Bund Deutscher Jugend as an “independent, nonpartisan, transconfessional, political youth movement for all of Germany.” The organization contained mostly males between the ages of 18 and 35. Many, though not all, had been Hitler Youth or military officers.3 The BDJ boasted 17,000 nationwide adherents by December 1950, though one Hessian analyst estimated a mere “685 members,” with only 32 “full-time.”4

According to the organization’s political action program, the Bund Deutscher Jugend struggled for “a free Germany in a free world.” BDJ members declared themselves ready to pledge their lives to the preservation of German “democratic freedom.” An “uncompromising struggle against Soviet communism” ranked as the group’s most “vital task.” Toward this end, the BDJ rejected neutralism—which would “only serve Soviet communism” by weakening Germans’ ability to withstand Marxist appeals—
and promoted an uncompromising German alliance with the West. While rejecting German unilateral rearmament as politically incendiary, the BDJ advocated a German military contribution to a European army. Only by sharing responsibility for Western defense could Germany prove itself deserving of international trust, and in turn, of full sovereignty. 

Lüth and Peters intended the BDJ as an anticommunist foil to the East German Free German Youth (Freie Deutsche Jugend, FDJ), which used propaganda and mass demonstrations to draw West German young people toward communism. The BDJ held rallies, printed anticommunist literature, and released tear gas at KPD events. In fall 1951, the group disrupted a film festival sponsored by the Society for German-Soviet Friendship (Gesellschaft für Deutsch-Sowjetische Freundschaft), an alleged communist “front organization,” by releasing hundreds of white mice into the Stuttgart auditorium that hosted the gathering. Pandemonium ensued, a participant recalled, as tiny rodents “scampered down shirt collars, scurried up pant legs,” and tumbled like rain from the balcony. “Everyone fled the room,” and the meeting rapidly adjourned.

BDJ functionaries also infiltrated an FDJ “partisan training camp” in the Eastern zone. Here, some 3,000 West German communist “fanatics” mastered “illegal and subversive” tactics for use against their own government. Covert operatives fastidiously detailed the school’s organization (one branch taught Stalinist theory, the other trained participants in the use of handguns and small explosives), finances (the Soviets allegedly fronted some 3.5 million DM to start the school), work schedule (students drilled Monday through Saturday, from 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM), and daily meals (of bread, butter, marmalade, honey, wurst, potatoes, and soup). The BDJ publicized its findings, both in a series of press conferences and in reports to the Federal Interior Ministry (Bundesinnenministerium, BMI) and the Federal Ministry for All-German Affairs (Bundesministerium für Gesamtdeutsche Fragen), all with the purpose of proving that the Soviets plotted to subvert Western unity, and that a ready army of West German sympathizers aided Moscow in its task.

Federal officials read BDJ reports with interest. Ongoing surveillance by the Hessian Interior Ministry revealed that, almost from the outset of the BDJ’s formation, this ostensibly independent political group received logistical and financial aid from Bonn. As early as November 1950, the SPD-dominated Hessian government had identified the BDJ as a “well funded” and “growing militant youth organization” that posed no “acute” or “immediate” danger, but that warranted surveillance.
Verfassungsschutz, LfV) infiltrated the group and reported to Minister President Zinn the BDJ’s ideals, activities, and network of financial and logistical support. Investigators determined that not only numerous large German industrial firms, including Bosch, Salamander, Sarotti, and Coca-Cola GmbH, but also the federal government itself, gave money to the BDJ.11

According to Hessian analysts, BDJ Press Secretary Gerhard Bischof regularly submitted proposed propaganda initiatives to the All-German Ministry and the Office for the Protection of the Constitution (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, BfV, responsible for domestic surveillance). These offices, in turn, provided the BDJ with funds and material for the printing and distribution of anticommunist propaganda.12 The BfV intervened with Hessian officials more than once on the anticommunist youth group’s behalf. In August 1951, at the request of the BDJ’s financial manager, Norbert Hammacher, BfV officials asked the Hessian government to cease investigating the BDJ. And on 24 May 1952, that office requested that the Frankfurt police provide the BDJ with extra protection against potential Communist and FDJ disruption of the BDJ’s forthcoming springtime rally in Frankfurt.13

The Federal Chancellor’s Office (Bundeskanzleramt) backed the BDJ as well. In August 1951, at the recommendation of that agency’s state secretary, Otto Lenz, the government donated 10,000 DM to a “World Youth Festival” in Braunschweig, which brought together 32 anticommunist civic groups, including the BDJ.14 The following May, the All-German Ministry earmarked another 10,000 DM explicitly for the Bund Deutscher Jugend’s Frankfurt rally. Shortly before the event, Adenauer received a visit from, and permitted himself to be photographed with, ten uniformed BDJ members. The chancellor then sent Bundestag representatives Georg Kiesinger (CDU) and August Martin Euler (FDP) to speak at the gathering and to deliver a greeting in Adenauer’s name.15

Whether the United States also aided the BDJ remains speculative. The BDJ’s founding coincided with the onset of the Korean War in late June 1950. North Korea’s invasion of the South, with apparent Soviet backing, intensified U.S. perceptions of Western military vulnerability, already acute since the Soviets exploded an atomic bomb in August 1949 and Mao Zedong’s communist forces prevailed in China the following October.16 American authorities feared that Soviets sought to exploit a divided Germany, as Moscow evidently had taken advantage of a divided and weakened Korea. The immediate creation of a West German anticommunist youth group, prepared to counter internal, as well as external, com-
munist advances, would appear consistent with these fears, as with other U.S. programs aimed at bolstering European youth movements against communist appeals.  

Yet the BDJ’s founding on 23 June 1950 came two days before North Korean troops crossed the 38th parallel. The timing of the former event probably had more to do with panicked right-wing reactions to a massive May 1950 FDJ rally in Berlin than with faraway Asian events. As late as December 1950, Hessian investigators found no evidence of U.S. financial support. Nor did any participant subsequently testify that Americans backed the German youth league’s founding or early activities.  

Hans Otto, however, claimed that the United States founded the Technical Service itself as a secret paramilitary branch of the BDJ. In testimony to local, federal, and U.S. authorities, Otto stated that “an American named Sterling Garwood,” an officer of the CIC (the U.S. Army Counterintelligence Corps), initiated the group in spring 1951. A U.S. middleman named “Dr. Walter” provided the TD with cash and weapons. “Above Dr. Walter” stood another American, whom Lüth and Peters referred to as “Mr. Selby,” or alternatively, the “great friend” or “Siegfried.”  

Otto testified that Americans provided the Technical Service with 40,000–50,000 DM per month. To disguise financing of the enterprise, Peters founded in Lorsch/Hesse a firm with the name “Johann Saxler, Trading Company” (Johann Saxler, Vertriebsgesellschaft). This outfit purportedly marketed plywood for a legitimate and previously extant firm by the same name. But the dummy company actually served to conceal the operations, mail traffic, and cash flow of the Technical Service. American agents funneled money into the TD by placing fake orders through the firm.  

Peters, Garwood, and Lüth together drafted a blueprint for guerilla action. In April 1951 the three approved a plan whereby, in Case X, a Soviet invasion, the Technical Service would divide into two main parts. One wing, “Net A,” would retreat to the Alps shortly before or during a Soviet attack, then join Allied forces in a full-scale invasion to roll back enemy advances. To ensure that the guerilla group’s activity complemented the “strategic operations of the Western military forces,” a “liaison officer” would link this wing of the Technical Service to the NATO commander.  

A second group, “Net B,” would carry out reconnaissance in anticipation of joint Allied-TD maneuvers. Composed mostly of “cripples, disabled veterans, and old people” unlikely to be deported or arrested, Net B would spy on enemy-controlled factories and infiltrate the offices of the new civil and military authorities. A night watchman or a cleaning lady,
Lüth thought, could yield more important and “authentic information” about enemy plans and activities than could mere outside observers.25

Net B would also prepare for the impending arrival of Net A by setting up caches provisioned with weapons, foodstuffs, medicine, and other supplies, and by preparing fake identity papers for all fighters. After Net B had established the intelligence groundwork, Net A, having convened at secure locations in Allied-controlled territory, would unleash “guerrilla warfare” in order to “hinder the fighting capacity of the Soviet occupying forces” and impede civil administration. This unit would attack and destroy roads, railroads, troop barracks, and warehouses conceivably useful to the enemy.26 Fighters would also conduct hit-and-run raids in hostile territory. “The best time for action,” one directive authored by North German TD leader Richard Topp advised, “is during the early morning,” when the still-sleeping enemy would be caught unaware. “Avoid firing warning shots,” which wasted ammunition and betrayed partisans’ whereabouts, and “never shoot without orders.” But wherever possible, “aim for the legs,” a strategy which yielded “great moral effect.” Remember, Topp cautioned: “Early blood prevents much blood. Stealth, quickness, and discipline are essential to your undertaking.”27

As U.S. and German planners projected a fighting force of 7,000 trained men within twelve months, the Technical Service’s first task was to recruit new members. All fighters, according to the TD’s mission statement, must be “nationalistic anticommunists” who “believe that the United States is the only country which can defeat Russia and free Europe.” To ensure quality and security, new members were approved not only by the chief of the Apparat, Erhard Peters, but also by Otto (code-named “Dunston”), who “[checked names] against BDJ files.” The CIC cleared each recruit.28

Ex-army, air force, and Waffen SS officers formed the core of the group.29 Recruitment proceeded through word-of-mouth among close friends and associates known for their “firm anticommunist convictions.”30 According to one leading figure, Rudolf Pintscher, the organization’s cell control structure ensured that each member only knew the identity of the person who gave him orders. Lower-level members knew their Kreis, or regional, leaders, and Kreis leaders knew the Land leaders, though everyone apparently knew the identity of Peters.31

Recruits participated in a two-part program similar to the FDJ training regimen chronicled by BDJ infiltrators. Theoretical instruction occurred at a camp in Grafenwöhr, in Southern Germany. Courses lasted six days each; three took place in summer 1951. Otto himself joined in the first session.
He reported that ten to twenty participants met at the train station in Nuremberg. Garwood greeted them, wearing battle fatigues. The crew piled into an army truck and was driven to a remote site on the outskirts of a military training area in Grafenwöhr. En route to the camp, the truck stopped in a wooded area, where all trainees received American fatigue uniforms and false papers identifying them, with pseudonyms, as members of a U.S. military unit. Once at the camp, Mr. Garwood and two other American officers, whom Otto identified only as “Al” and “Walt,” furnished weapons of U.S., German, and Soviet origin, including handguns, machine guns, and small explosives. Practicing with ammunition from different countries, which occurred in 1951–52 during Stage 2 of the course at Waldmichelbach, anticipated that enemy, as well as Allied, weapons could fall into the paramilitary unit’s hands. Garwood, who directed the enterprise, received monthly and quarterly reports on activities at both camps.32

While primarily directed against external enemies, Otto claimed that the TD targeted “Socialists as much as Communists” within the Federal Republic itself.33 Otto called Peters a “sworn enemy” (“erklärter Feind”) of the SPD. The TD chief feared that the Social Democrats would “one day achieve an absolute majority,” paving the way for a Communist takeover.34 Otto’s task, as head first of “I-f” (Gegneraufklärung) in the BDJ, then of “Security” in the TD, was to identify “open” Communists and disguised (“kommunistenfreundliche”) fellow-travelers.35 Official KPD members, Social Democrats who opposed West German rearmament, individuals whose formative years had been spent resisting Nazism, and members of organizations such as Social Democratic Action (Sozialdemokratische Aktion), which, while affiliated with the SPD, was “obviously” “controlled by the East”—all came under suspicion and surveillance.36

Otto testified that the BDJ hired several outside sources, including one “Dr. Wagner” of Munich, to help compile data on Social Democrats and Communists.37 Otto placed copies of Dr. Wagner’s reports in a file marked “Personnel.” He planned to use these records as the basis for a single, massive index of West German leftists.

That task instead fell to Otto’s successor as TD security chief, Otto Rietdorf, and to Rietdorf’s assistant, Hans Breitkopf. Peters, in late summer 1951, named Otto head of the TD’s “Organization Branch,” which handled liaison between the group’s state and central authorities. After Rietdorf and Breitkopf had taken over, they combined Wagner’s “Personnel” file with local TD reports to create two new sets of documents. The first, a twelve-page typewritten “Proscription List” (“Proskriptionsliste”), identified dozens of little-known, but apparently dangerous, Communists.38 The second, a
collection of red index cards labeled the “Enemy File” (“Gegnerkartei”), catalogued other untrustworthy figures, including those who had tried to join the BDJ and been rejected as security risks. It was the meaning and content of these two sets of files that prompted the scandal that blew up around the Technical Service.

Otto admitted that he himself never saw either the red cards or the typewritten file until 1 October, when the Frankfurt police presented him with copies of each, seized during a 13 September raid on BDJ headquarters in Frankfurt. Indeed, Otto had made no mention of any enemy lists in his three appearances before the Frankfurt police in September. The only comment during this period that implied knowledge of such documents was his statement on 9 September that the TD targeted “Socialists as much as Communists.”

Yet Otto, upon viewing these records, claimed to have had a sense, based on numerous discussions within the TD, that the combined card file and typewritten sheets not only registered prospective enemies but also provided a hit list of individuals who, in Case X, would be “neutralized” (“kaltgestellt”) or “eliminated” (“ausgeschaltet”) to prevent their serving any Soviet occupation. There were no written or oral instructions on this point, and Otto had no personal knowledge of any discussions with Americans or trainees. But he did recall Peters stating something to the effect that “such people in Case X must be removed or made to disappear,” (“Solche Leute im Falle X umgelegt werden müssen oder verschwinden müssen”), which Otto interpreted to mean “they must be killed.”

Otto’s allegations raised as many questions as they answered. The purpose of the lists themselves prompted confusion. Otto suggested that both the “Proscription List” and the “Enemy File” destined prospective collaborators for “neutralization.” Yet the original “Personnel” file acquired from Dr. Wagner contained names and biographies of 95 leading members of the SPD, including Wilhelm Kaisen, Heinrich Zinnkann, and Ludwig Metzger. Were these figures targeted for assassination, too? Otto could not say. It all depended, he mused, on whether individuals were thought to be secretly sympathetic to communism. That Kaisen generally endorsed Western objectives for Germany and was a relatively conservative Social Democrat made it unlikely that all socialists monitored by the BDJ and TD were targeted for elimination. If, however, the TD contemplated assassinating even right-wing SPD leaders, the scope of this apparent conspiracy was very broad, indeed. The TD seemed to plot all-out warfare against the German Left, with profound implications for civil unrest.

Other parts of Otto’s testimony roused additional uncertainty. The ex-
security chief spoke largely in the passive voice about the “Proscription List” (enemies “would be eliminated” and “must be killed”), without specifying exactly how, when and by whom political removal—or proscription—would be accomplished. Otto, in turn, left unclear whether U.S. and West German authorities knew about and approved the TD’s alleged “Proscription List” and sanctioned assassination as a means of containing domestic dissent.

When pressed by interrogators, Otto refined many of his assertions. He told federal officials that he did not know precisely who had been targeted for elimination because the list itself had never been completed. Not all of the Landesführern had sent back reports; the project was constantly “in flux” (“im Fluss”). So long as he headed the security branch, moreover, the TD had gathered data on Social Democrats and Communists, but no explicit enemy file came into being until Rietdorf took over Otto’s post. Otto therefore could not be precise about the record-keeping details.

As for who would order and carry out “neutralization,” and by what means, Otto speculated that the elimination of enemies would “depend on the circumstances” of each case. The “chief of security” (first himself, then Rietdorf), “in conjunction with his superiors” would, “in serious cases, decide the fate of the proscribed.” When asked to specify who these “superiors” might be, Otto identified “the head of the organization” (Peters), but added that he had “no idea” whether Peters was bound to the “order or direction of any Allied office.”

Yet Otto did recall Peters telling him that, in an emergency, Peters could end up directing the organization from North Africa and that this contingency plan “originated with Mr. Garwood,” a statement that implied a continued hands-on American role. And Otto contended that Garwood actively shared Peters’s antisocialist biases. Garwood, said Otto, was “very worried” about the SPD coming to power in an election. Garwood “feared for the organization”—that the SPD would prohibit the TD, or, at very least, impede its preparedness for Case X.

Otto suggested that, even if the Americans did not know the contents of the “Proscription List,” they did have access to some BDJ- and TD-compiled files on domestic leftists. Otto reported that he regularly evaluated the reliability of source reports on Social Democrats and Communists and then gave those records to Peters and Lüth. While he “could not be sure” what either did with this material after receiving it, Otto “assumed” that the reports were “passed along to some American office,” much as Garwood received periodic reports on the training programs at Waldmichelbach and elsewhere.
Otto further implicated Garwood in the group’s questionable activities by claiming that the CIC officer advocated extreme measures to maintain the TD’s internal security. Otto told German and American investigators that TD leaders had contemplated “eliminating” apparent subversives within the Technical Service itself in order to prevent “dangerous people” from betraying the secret group. The activities of one “Sallawa,” who led a branch of the Technical Service in Bavaria, prompted especial concern.50 According to Otto, Garwood had somehow learned that Sallawa had filled out an application to join an unnamed resistance organization with Eastern ties. Anxious lest the TD’s secrecy be compromised, the staff “seriously discussed eliminating Sallawa” (“Im Stab wurde ernsthaft die Beseitigung von Sallawa besprochen”), possibly by “locking him in a car and strangling him.” (“Sallawa ins Auto zu locken und ihn im Kraftwagen zu erwürgen.”) This extreme solution turned out to be unnecessary, for, without specifying details, Otto stated that the affair was peaceably resolved when Edelwald Hüttl, Landesführer in Bavaria, found a replacement for Sallawa.51

But Garwood had, Otto said, in connection with the case, “taught us how to kill a person without leaving any evidence” of the crime. Garwood advocated disguising a murder as a suicide by “chloroforming a victim in a car, then pumping exhaust fumes into the vehicle with a hose.” Garwood also demonstrated how to blindfold a captive, place a piece of meat on a broiling hot burner nearby, and simultaneously lay a hand or some other body part of the victim on a block of ice. “The cold of the ice, in connection with the burning odor of the meat, will give the impression that the individual is being touched by glowing hot metal” and prompt a willingness to talk.52

Otto’s allegation that the Technical Service, with U.S. backing, plotted political murder proved the most sensational part of his testimony. Zinn cited many of Otto’s contentions as fact in his explosive 8 October speech, wherein he publicized the “partisan affair” for the first time. The minister president portrayed the “Personnel” list of leading Social Democrats as identical with the “Proscription List” and the red enemy card file, implying that all three targeted for murder perceived enemies of the Technical Service and the West. The German press broadcasted Zinn’s inflammatory statement, and anti-American political protests proliferated, especially on the German Left.53

Yet the unfolding federal investigation, combined with testimony from other TD participants, cast into doubt many of Otto’s astonishing allegations. The Bonn government’s inquiry began on 18 September 1952 and
overlapped the ongoing examinations of the Hessian government, the Frankfurt police, and the German-American commission. Federal investigators confirmed U.S. backing of the Technical Service. Weeks before any other TD member added details to Otto's initial account, Dr. Carl Wiechmann, chief federal attorney for the Federal Supreme Court (Bundesgerichtshof), met with top German and American officials to determine the extent of U.S. participation. The question of American involvement was crucial, for if, in as-yet semi-sovereign Germany, Otto and his comrades could be shown to be acting on the orders of the Allies—a power higher than that of the Bonn government—they could not be indicted for any crime. If, however, the Technical Service operated independently, its members could be prosecuted under §128, 129 of the German Penal Code for participating in a “criminal” organization, whose “design, purpose, or aim” was purposefully “kept secret from the national government.”

On 1 October, Lieutenant General Lucian K. Truscott, Jr., the CIA's senior representative in Germany, confirmed to Wiechmann that the Technical Service “went back to the initiative and control of a military office of the American occupation power”—that the TD was not a “private” German outfit. In light of this statement, Wiechmann ordered several apprehended suspects, including TD Security Chief Otto Rietdorf and the weapons expert Friedrich Karl Kleff, immediately released on grounds that they had acted on U.S. orders and broken no law. Three days later, on 4 October, Peters, who heretofore could not be found, suddenly appeared at Frankfurt police headquarters with a story that confirmed a prominent American role.

The TD chief verified that the U.S. Army had founded and funded the Technical Service. Peters initially claimed ignorance about which U.S. offices sponsored the paramilitary unit. But he attested that the elusive “Mr. Garwood,” an Army major, approached Peters in February 1951 with a proposal to create a nonpartisan organization aimed at awakening West Germans’ “will to resist” communism. American money would finance the group, which Peters would direct, drawing on the BDJ as a recruitment base. The defense service would train for joint action with Allied forces in contesting any Soviet invasion of West Germany. Garwood subsequently “planned and erected” the training schools in Grafenwöhr and Waldmichelbach and provided false identity cards to Technical Service trainees. Peters sent Garwood, in triplicate, regular reports on the organization’s activities.

Peters also revealed that the Technical Service’s American sponsors were his personal protectors. “I first learned on 13 September 1952, around
7:30 PM, that members of our organization had been arrested,” he informed the Frankfurt police. That same night, Peters drove to Garwood’s residence in Steinbach bei Fürth personally to inform the latter of recent events. Only the maid was home, but the next day, Garwood visited Peters in Frankfurt. “Garwood told me,” Peters recalled, “that I was being ‘put on ice’” for a while, until “some form of order” could be restored in the wake of the Frankfurt investigation. A day or so later, after consulting with his attorney, Peters agreed to be taken into U.S. “protective custody.” Driving an “Opel-Kapitän with German police license plates,” two uniformed Americans “whose names were unknown to me” brought Peters to a safe house, the location of which Peters refused to divulge. Peters claimed that he came under strict orders not to leave the apartment, which prompted some anxiety, given that no one remembered to provision him with extra food. Peters remained by himself for ten to twelve days, at which point another American, this time in civilian clothes, visited and asked whether Peters would be interested in emigrating to the United States. Peters considered the offer but decided that he would rather remain in Germany with his wife and children. At this point, Peters’s civilian contact announced that Peters was free to go, although “it would be better, if Peters did stay.” A day later, Peters emerged from hiding and went to the police.59

Other members of the Technical Service confirmed that the U.S. Army covertly funded and trained the paramilitary group. Co-founder Paul Lüth refused to appear before the Frankfurt police, and that agency evidently lacked either the desire or the power to compel him to testify.60 But the TD’s assistant security chief Hans Breitkopf asserted that Peters sent Otto’s reports to the CIC.61 And Rudolf Pintscher, group leader for Lower Saxony, told federal investigators that “the organization was founded and supported by the United States government” (“amerikanische Dienststellen”) and “led by a U.S. major who had a direct connection with Washington.”62 The money came entirely out of “American sources,” he said. Each county leader received payment of at least 100 DM per month. Pintscher himself earned 250 DM monthly. Participants in training programs procured 10 DM per day, plus an allowance for transportation.63

All interviewees affirmed, as well, that TD members trained to help the Allies defend West Germany against “Case X,” a Soviet invasion. Participants agreed that the Technical Service indexed perceived political adversaries.64 And two members—Security Chief Rietdorf and his assistant, Hans Breitkopf—echoed Otto’s claim that the group endorsed violent methods to eliminate political enemies. According to Breitkopf, the typed “Proscription List” registered Communists and perceived sympathizers
who should be “proscribed,” or “removed from the clutches of the invading Russians,” in order to “prevent their utilization by Soviet forces.” Rietdorf thought that enemies would be “secured” (“sichergestellt”), meaning killed, based on these lists.

Yet Breitkopf admitted that “none of us” was sure how the “liquidation” of enemies would be carried out. There existed “no explicit instructions on this point.” Rietdorf first said that he doubted that Americans would have been “tough enough” to murder internal dissidents. He held as a “given,” he said, that the TD itself would carry out such acts. But Rietdorf admitted that Garwood “did not personally tell” Rietdorf whether the U.S. Army or partisan fighters themselves would remove people itemized on the “Proscription List.” While affirming that Garwood “knew about this project” to “gather information about people likely to cooperate with the Russians,” Rietdorf could not ascertain that the “Proscription List” had been sent to the American major or that Americans had ever ordered that socialists be targeted explicitly.

Other members denied altogether that the Technical Service had violent aims. The TD, by Peters’s account, had no responsibility for internal political warfare and made no plans to murder Social Democrats or Communists. Pintscher agreed. While acknowledging that the Technical Service shared with the Americans intelligence work that included the identification of apparently pro-communist West Germans, Pintscher resolutely maintained that the only purpose of this list was to “prevent any infiltration of our organization” by leftist forces, not to compile a roster of assassination targets. Pintscher claimed never to have heard the expression “Proscription List” until that term appeared in the German press following Zinn’s incendiary speech. He felt certain that the phrase had been grossly misunderstood (“man diesen Listen einen falschen Sinn zu Grunde legte”) and declared that “no leading politicians of the SPD” or of “any other democratic parties” had been placed on his own register of alleged left-wing subversives in Lower Saxony.

Rudolf Radermacher, TD Landesführer in Hesse, similarly stated that although his office transmitted to Peters reports on prospective subversives within his territorial domain, such lists were compiled solely with reference to whether individuals had “connections to” the Communists. Membership in the SPD or any other political party did not automatically lead to inclusion in TD write-ups. Radermacher did say that “either Peters, Otto, or Rietdorf” (he could not remember which) had ordered Landesführern to report people who likely would work with Soviet occupiers and so should be “secured” (“sichergestellt”). But the meaning of that
word itself proved imprecise. Radermacher initially said that he passed along monthly reports without giving any thought to the word “sichergestellt” or what it meant. Upon subsequent questioning by his examiners, Radermacher reversed himself, stating, “I thought that the named persons would be arrested.” Yet when interrogators observed the unfeasibility of the plan—“there would scarcely be time to carry out the apprehension or forced exodus of dangerous people”—Radermacher said he was not of the opinion that TD members themselves would capture or incapacitate foes. Allied forces likely would perform this difficult task.73

Both Radermacher’s and Pintscher’s professed ignorance about the stay-behind net and the “Proscription List” may have been authentic. The two men headed state organizations, Radermacher in Hesse, Pintscher in Lower Saxony, and they were not members of the Technical Service’s leadership circle. Pintscher acknowledged that he had not personally participated in the training program at Grafenwöhr or Waldmichelbach. And Radermacher admitted that Otto, Peters, and Rietdorf sometimes “sent [him] out of the room” in order to prevent his hearing discussions among the organization’s leading figures, a scenario that possibly explained inconsistencies in Radermacher’s own account.74 The exclusion of Radermacher and Pintscher from high-level talks correlated with a guerilla cell structure that purposely kept individual members ignorant of each other’s activities.

The contradictory testimony of participants nonetheless revealed serious disagreement about the Technical Service’s larger goals, including its criminal intent. Differing versions of events exposed internal power struggles that further discredited individual accounts. Otto both observed and exacerbated these divisions. According to the former security chief, disputes among Peters, Garwood, and Lüth over the Technical Service’s relation to the BDJ soon prompted the former two to isolate Lüth from decision making. Otto recalled that the TD and the BDJ initially shared offices on Frankfurt’s Liebigstrasse until Garwood persuaded Peters to sever the TD’s ties with its parent organization lest too much “joint knowledge” compromise either group.75 In summer 1951, Erhard moved the TD’s headquarters to Neu-Isenburg with essential BDJ intelligence data in tow. The left-behind Lüth raged that his guerilla warfare handbook Bürger und Partisan had itself inspired the Technical Service’s founding. Otto ineptly assured his seething former boss that Lüth, the “queen ant,” had indeed laid the TD’s doctrinal eggs, but that he must be “pushed aside” so that the colony could flourish.76

Otto further portrayed Peters, and possibly Garwood, as corrupt. Otto recalled Peters telling him that one day in May 1952 Garwood showed up
acting “very agitated” ("sehr aufgeregt"). The American exclaimed that some 30,000 DM out of the organization’s treasury had been found missing. Garwood and Peters quickly “constructed evidence” to conceal the missing money, and Peters, by his own account, burned some “twenty middle-sized folders” of incriminating reports.77 Garwood was soon thereafter relieved of his duties and forbidden further contact with the Technical Service, though he continued a secret liaison with Peters.78

“Al” took over for Garwood and restructured the organization into a “smaller, tighter” fighting force of “no more than 300 men.” The new leadership staff contained many veterans of the Technical Service, including Rietdorf, Otto, and Kleff, who put the former TD chief under scrutiny. Otto and his comrades thereby determined that Peters’s lifestyle exceeded his means. They discovered that Peters had pilfered “at least” 50,000 DM out of the TD’s secret treasury, then used the money to purchase a fancy house in Waldmichelbach, two big cars (a Mercedes 170V and a sporty BMW Cabriolet), and a profitable pharmaceutical wholesale firm in Coburg. When confronted with this alleged wrongdoing, Peters offered to compensate his former subordinates for their continued silence. “I received my last payment on August 1,” Otto confessed. “How long the others continued receiving money, I do not know.”79

Otto himself, in the words of a colleague, scarcely led “a lifestyle that was salutary for the organization.”80 One night a drunken Otto was “cornered by the police” when he let a woman without a license drive one of the organization’s cars.81 Otto’s proclivity for the “alcohol and whores of Frankfurt’s Altstadt” made him “insufferable,” Breitkopf said.82 Sometime in March 1952, Breitkopf had placed Otto under surveillance on Peters’s orders.83

Conflicting accounts of the Technical Service’s activities, combined with prominent divisions within the command staff itself, diminished Zinn’s portrayal of a U.S.-backed conspiracy to assassinate Social Democrats. Personal discord among TD leaders imputed each member’s statements about the group as a whole. Far from offering a well-conceived program to save West Germany from doomsday, the Technical Service was a shoestring operation, poorly planned, internally riven, and lacking clear vision or purpose.

Chief Federal Attorney Carl Wiechmann, in his secret report of January 1953 to Attorney General Thomas Dehler, pointed to the discrepancies of testimony, along with the evidence of U.S. backing, to recommend that all federal charges against TD leaders be dropped. Wiechmann acknowledged that the Technical Service had “played with dangerous ideas” by planning to eliminate “actual or putative ‘collaborators’” of the East. But, he said, “it
is not in itself criminal” to contemplate illegal acts, absent any crime.84 Wiechmann found no proof that the TD had actualized plans to assassinate political opponents. Despite some agreement among Otto, Rietdorf, and Breitkopf that the organization plotted to “eliminate,” “neutralize,” “liquidate,” and “secure” enemies during a Soviet attack, no one could confirm whether the red enemy cards, the “Personnel” file, or even the “Proscription List” served to bring such plans to fruition. That none of the names appearing in the three lists overlapped diminished further the likelihood that all the people listed in TD files were slated for removal.85

Wiechmann further determined that some record-keeping may have served a more benign purpose than any witness had alleged. Wiechmann’s staff interviewed Dr. Wagner, whom Otto identified as the author of the BDJ’s “Personnel” file on socialists, and who also worked as the financial manager of Bavaria’s Block der Heimatvertriebenen und Entrechteten (BHE), a conservative refugee party. Wagner testified that he had been hired by Lüth to compile data on Social Democrats. But Lüth’s alleged reasons for hiring Wagner did not conform to the version offered by Otto, Rietdorf, or Breitkopf. According to Wagner, while Peters pathologically feared and distrusted socialists, Lüth sought to build political bridges with the SPD, a point Otto affirmed during his testimony to the German-American commission.86 Wagner testified that Lüth had hired him to ascertain not prospective enemies, but rather “white” or “right-wing” socialists, whom the BDJ might solicit for logistic and financial support.87 Wagner’s explanation certainly accounts for the presence of the moderate Social Democrat Kaisen, and the absence of more hard-left SPD figures, such as the party’s ailing chief, Kurt Schumacher, in the “Personnel” file, if this index served to identify allies, not enemies, of the West. Wagner’s account in turn suggests that doctrinal differences, as much as security concerns, helped impel the break-off of Erhard’s Technical Service from Lüth’s BDJ.

Given that the United States admitted backing the Technical Service, Wiechmann concluded that TD members had not technically broken any laws by keeping their organization secret. Not only was their subservience to the U.S. Army consistent with the Allied Occupation Statute, which reserved to the occupiers the power to oversee and direct German military affairs. The defendants also believed that their American protectors acted with the full consent and support of the German government. As evidence, Wiechmann mentioned that Peters in May 1952—at the precise moment that Peters’s own trustworthiness had come under scrutiny—appealed to high-ranking officials of the BfV to take over funding of the Technical Service. Wiechmann did not believe that, if Peters truly thought that the
Technical Service was illegal, or that the federal government was completely ignorant of its existence, the TD chief would bring attention to himself or the paramilitary group.88

The federal government refused to outlaw either the BDJ or the Technical Service and ultimately dropped all charges as Wiechmann recommended.89 State investigations proceeded; between January and March 1953, Hesse, Lower Saxony, Bremen, Hamburg, and Baden-Württemberg—all Länder with a strong SPD presence—outlawed not only the Technical Service, but also the BDJ, on grounds that both groups had engaged in “criminal” activities by trafficking in forbidden weapons and generally threatening public safety and order. CSU-dominated Bavaria outlawed only the Technical Service; and CDU-governed Schleswig-Holstein, Rheinland-Pfalz, and North Rhine-Westphalia refrained from disbanding either organization.90

The findings of the German-American Investigatory Commission anticipated the conclusions of the federal inquiry. Already on 18 November, Deputy U.S. High Commissioner Samuel Reber released a statement on behalf of HICOM and the Hessian Interior Ministry stating that “by mutual agreement,” the German-American commission had “suspended its investigation into reports and documents bearing on the possible illegal and inner-German political activities of the Technical Group connected with the BDJ.” Reber announced that the group had “heard certain of the persons concerned and examined the documents. The High Commissioner is satisfied, and the Minister President accepts, that no illegal inner-political activities of any kind of the Technical Group were known to or countenanced by the U.S. authorities.”91

American occupiers almost certainly knew more about the Technical Service’s activities than Reber suggested. U.S. documents on the BDJ affair remain largely unavailable to scholars. But a close reading of other key American records, combined with suggestive German sources, indicate that the CIA’s Office of Policy Coordination (OPC), along with the U.S. High Commission and the Bonn government, directly or indirectly aided the Army Counterintelligence Corps in preparing ex-Nazi and Wehrmacht soldiers to contest a Soviet invasion.

This enlistment of nationalistic veterans in the anticommunist cause transformed potentially antagonistic forces into allies of the United States. State Department analysts feared that the triumph of hostile nationalism “in even one of the major continental countries” would prove “a near-fatal blow to our objective of a voluntarily and democratically unified Western Europe.” But should communists provoke civil strife, a “powerful wave of
opinion would develop supporting ‘order’ and ‘discipline,’ typically the kind of atmosphere in which men on horseback ride in and take charge.” Authoritarian forces, if persuaded “effectively to channel their radicalism . . . in favor of a realistic supra-national political target . . . could turn out to be active and effective allies” in the Cold War.92

World War II veterans offered an obvious target for U.S. co-optation. Many ex-soldiers, though staunchly anticommunist, felt mistreated by the occupation powers and by the Bonn government, which withheld veterans’ pensions, maintained harsh POW camps, and denied public honor to Hitler’s former fighters. Numerous political and civic organizations sought to regain veterans’ lost place in the postwar social order.93 Otto Ernst Remer, founder of the neonazi Socialist Reich Party, stirred up veterans’ resentment with his call for a nonaligned, reunified, rearmed Germany. The famed tank general Heinz Guderian condemned the “robbery” of Germany’s eastern territories by the Soviet Union and Poland and urged soldiers to oppose German rearmament until “our rights and our freedom” were restored.94 Though always minority voices, such figures gleaned public notoriety and support by voicing latent popular resentments.

Training for D-Day helped siphon off such anti-Allied hostility. By granting status-deprived veterans a renewed sense of purpose, the Technical Service directed negative neutralist-nationalist urges into the positive and controlled enterprise of defending the West from tyranny.95 This strategy complemented the American policy of cooperating with Christian Democrats while openly containing neutralist-nationalism and communism. All three approaches aimed to enhance U.S. hegemony in Europe by strengthening ties with friendly forces and weakening the power of America’s critics.

Numerous postwar American military and intelligence initiatives laid the groundwork for U.S. co-optation of nationalistic German veterans in 1951–52. Beginning in 1945, the U.S. government began employing dozens of former Nazi-allied German scientists. Among the most famous were Walter Dornberger and Wernher von Braun, the latter of whom helped engineer missile and space technology for the Department of Defense and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration.96

The Army Counterintelligence Corps simultaneously recruited ex-Waffen SS officers to fight a covert Cold War within Germany itself. The 1,400-man-strong 970th, 7970th, and 66th Detachments of the CIC laced that country with a web of regional and field offices throughout the postwar half-decade.97 While ostensibly charged with rooting out Nazism and militarism (and responsible for apprehending over 120,000 suspected war
criminals), the CIC sponsored the “Gehlen Organization,” an intelligence outfit led by Hitler’s former intelligence chief on the Eastern Front, General Reinhard Gehlen, who went on to head the West German Federal Intelligence Service (Bundesnachrichtendienst) beginning in 1956.98 The CIC also protected the notorious war criminal Klaus Barbie, who provided the United States with intelligence data on German communists, then escaped war-crimes prosecution with U.S. help.99

The well-known rivalry of the CIC with the CIA in postwar Germany raises questions about whether the Technical Service was solely the province of the U.S. Army.100 Army Secretary Kenneth Royall and Brigadier General Robert A. McClure, a leading psychological warfare strategist of World War II, steadfastly maintained that their service should have “nothing to do” with civilian-controlled covert action.101 By 1952 the Army had in place its own program to recruit and train guerilla fighters at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, while the CIC at its administrative headquarters at Fort Holabird, Maryland, compiled a “Central Personality Index” of perceived U.S. allies and enemies that recalled the TD’s own “Proscription List” and prompts questions about whether the TD project might have ultimately served a larger U.S. Army project of cataloguing dissidents at home and overseas.102

Yet other data implies that the CIA’s Office of Policy Coordination (OPC) aided and possibly oversaw the West German guerilla scheme. Numerous national security directives of 1947–51 endowed the CIA with authority for covert action, including “ranger and commando raids, behind-the-lines sabotage, and support of guerrilla warfare.”103 Beginning in June 1948, the OPC executed these secret operations. Headed by the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) veteran and covert action enthusiast Frank Wisner, the OPC technically reported to the director of Central Intelligence. But because the CIA’s first leading officers Rear Admiral Roscoe K. Hillenkoetter (1947–50) and General Walter Bedell Smith (1950–53) wanted no “dirty tricks” soiling their agency, the OPC enjoyed “direct access to the State Department and ... various elements of the military establishment without having to proceed through the CIA administrative hierarchy in each case.”104 The OPC “hovered with little accountability” among several U.S. offices, enabling Wisner to make use of an array of resources while remaining relatively free from civilian or military supervision.105

Until the OPC’s dissolution by Smith in August 1952, Wisner and his team executed numerous clandestine overseas operations. The OPC subsidized anticommmunist labor unions, newspapers, political parties, and
front organizations throughout Europe; provided clandestine support for the ostensibly private, anticommunist National Committee for a Free Europe and other nationalistic East European exile organizations; engineered the launching of gigantic, propaganda-filled, polyethylene balloons over Communist countries; and organized the “Congress for Cultural Freedom” to promote and defend Western values overseas. They also recruited former Axis-allied refugees and military officers for ill-fated “rollback” missions in the East and trained cadres throughout Western Europe in clandestine sabotage and paramilitary techniques to defend their home countries in the event of a Soviet invasion.106

The OPC likely helped sponsor the Technical Service as well. The testimony of CIA veteran Peter Sichel provides one clue. According to Sichel, who was stationed in Germany during the early 1950s, the Technical Service’s chief architect was “a tubby blond ex-Austrian labor organizer who spooked as Henry C. Sutton” for the OPC.107 Sichel’s claim conforms with Otto’s assertion that an American of “Austrian ancestry,” whom Peters and Lüth called the “Great Siegfried,” served as the BDJ’s chief financier.108 Peters, moreover, alleged that both U.S. military and civilian officers attended him during his protective custody, suggesting some degree of interagency collaboration. The OPC and the U.S. Army already co-orchestrated a “unity campaign” designed to drum up pro-Western sentiments among German youth.109 And the planned use of German veterans as anticommunist paramilitary fighters mirrored similar programs carried out under the auspices of the CIA and NATO in Italy, Austria, France, and other Western European states the during same period.110

The CIA’s top official in Germany, Lucian Truscott, apparently exerted some authority over the Technical Service, even as the old general likely acted as a critic, not an advocate, of the guerrilla warfare project. Truscott himself was no stranger to covert action, having led commando raids behind enemy lines during World War II.111 But while this “tintype handsome” Southerner himself had certain aristocratic habits (he demanded flowers and Oriental cuisine in his tent, even during combat), Truscott scorned the “old-boy network” of East Coast, Ivy League–educated civilians that peopled the Office of Policy Coordination.112 The cantankerous Truscott relished giving even high-ranking CIA young bloods their comeuppance, especially following a few drinks. Towards the end of one heated meeting in 1952 with Deputy Director of Plans Allen Dulles, a well-oiled Truscott barked, “Sit down!” and then continued to rant. A year or so later, following a similar exchange with Wisner, Truscott irritably snapped at the OPC chief, “Why can’t you write in plain English?”113
Truscott shared CIA Director Smith’s doubts about the viability of peacetime covert action as a tool of statecraft. One of Smith’s first tasks as CIA director was to consolidate CIA control over OPC, and, by at least one account, Smith sent Truscott to Germany with the express purpose of having Truscott rein in the OPC’s more outlandish schemes. “I’m going to go out there and find out what those weirdoes are up to,” Truscott announced on his way out the door.114

The Technical Service was just the sort of operation that Truscott loathed—poorly planned and thinly disguised, with a low probability of success. CIA officer Thomas Polgar claims to have had the “unenviable” task of accompanying Truscott to the office of Hessian Minister-President Georg August Zinn shortly after the “shit hit the fan” and the BDJ scandal broke. Truscott and Polgar told Zinn that “this whole thing was sort of the unauthorized activity of a couple of careless junior officers,” and that the entire program had already been dismantled.115

Whatever Truscott’s distaste for the enterprise, the CIA’s Germany chief had not been completely forthright with Minister President Zinn. The Technical Service was indeed a reckless affair. But it was no rogue operation.

As early as October 1948, U.S. Army authorities promised OPC Chief Wisner “whole-hearted cooperation” with his political warfare program in Germany.116 Forrestal transmitted these instructions to Military Governor Lucius D. Clay, who subsequently facilitated OPC efforts to recruit propaganda broadcasters from among refugee groups in Germany.117 Clay’s successor, U.S. High Commissioner for Germany John J. McCloy, also knew of and approved the broad parameters of OPC action in Germany. On 1 June 1949, just weeks after taking over his new post, Wisner briefed McCloy on the “general significance and origin of the OPC” and its “present and prospective operations in Germany.” McCloy, who as assistant war secretary during World War II had energetically promoted Army psychological warfare, appeared impressed by Wisner’s account.118 According to Wisner, McCloy “wanted to know whether and to what extent he would be kept informed of our activities in Germany and what precautions would be taken to make certain that our activities there would not interfere or conflict with his responsibilities for policy and administration.” Wisner replied that “we would be prepared to keep [McCloy] as fully advised as he might deem advisable—but that we felt he would probably arrive at the conclusion that he would not want to know the minutia of our business.” McCloy affirmed that he wished to stay only “generally informed” of OPC operations in Germany.119
McCloy's arrangement with Wisner helped protect the U.S. High Commission from accusations that that body supported and sanctioned the Technical Service's seamier activities. Indeed, HICOM's claim that “no illegal inner-political activities of any kind” were “known to or countenanced by the U.S. authorities” was probably correct. The low-level Mr. Garwood clearly approved the Technical Service’s fastidious lists and plans for political warfare. For McCloy to have had detailed knowledge of these volatile (and prospectively illegal) activities would have endangered the stature of both the office and the man.

Yet McCloy probably knew a good deal more than he let on. As one high-ranking CIA officer later recalled, “McCloy was cued into the intelligence world.” The high commissioner “didn’t want to know when you were dropping an agent,” but he always knew the broad contours of an operation. Not only would the training of anticommunist guerrilla cadres have constituted a general activity about which Wisner responsibly ought to have informed McCloy; McCloy himself had overseen intelligence activities as assistant war secretary, and, in the “Black Tom” case of the 1930s, had investigated German wartime sabotage against the United States. As West Germany’s high commissioner during the height of the Cold War, McCloy again advocated psychological warfare, and he authorized a wide range of information gathering, propaganda, and paramilitary activities, including the CIC’s program to help Klaus Barbie escape extradition to France for war crimes.

Other factors suggest that the United States’ chief ally in West Germany, Christian Democratic Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, also bore some responsibility for the foiled guerilla scheme. Adenauer professed ignorance of the Technical Service’s “Proscription List” and other problematic activities. Those denials, like McCloy’s, were probably authentic. Although Bonn openly endorsed the BDJ itself, Adenauer was too shrewd to have sullied his stature by backing hare-brained schemes to eliminate political dissidents.

But the Technical Service resembled a separate, unsuccessful effort of Adenauer to establish an Allied-directed, federal police force (Bundespolizei) just months before American officers founded the Technical Service. Seeking rearmament as a route to West German security and international credibility, but sensitive to widespread fears of resurgent militarism, the chancellor in April 1950 proposed to Allied officials a 30,000-man-strong West German militarized police force. This body would not technically constitute an army, as it would primarily be equipped for internal security and would operate under Allied supervi-
sion. But the Bundespolizei could be mobilized in a national emergency to protect Germany’s vulnerable East-West border. The Allies could bolster West German defense without violating the Petersberg Protocol or betraying the promises of Potsdam itself.122

Adenauer believed his plan would receive a sympathetic hearing in the Allied High Commission (AHC), given the recent emergence in East Germany of the so-called People’s Police (Volkspolizei), a 60,000-man-strong paramilitary force that appeared capable of launching a cross-border attack.123 The Korean War provided an additional incentive to arm the Federal Republic. Fearful observers—including Adenauer himself—dreaded a Soviet invasion from the East that approximated North Korea’s invasion of the South.124

Reactions in the AHC to Adenauer’s idea were mixed. British High Commissioner Brian Robertson proved receptive, and he secretly encouraged Adenauer’s pursuit of a centralized police force.125 McCloy, too, privately agreed that West Germany could become a trusted Western European power “only on a basis of full equality,” which “included the right to maintain defense forces.” But the U.S. high commissioner feared alienating France by endorsing any proposal that smacked of German remilitarization.126 After debating numerous versions of this scheme between April and September 1950, the Allies left West Germans themselves to decide the question once the contractual agreements went into effect in May 1952.127

Could U.S. establishment of the Technical Service have served to assuage Adenauer’s frustration in the wake of his failed bid to form an Allied-controlled Bundespolizei? Both plans envisioned using lightly armed security units to contest a Soviet invasion. And German records reveal that, notwithstanding McCloy’s public opposition to Adenauer’s proposal, the high commissioner’s deputy, General George Hays, in mid-1950 met secretly with two of Adenauer’s top advisors, Herbert Blankenhorn and ex-General Gerhard Graf von Schwerin, to discuss how Germany could aid Western defense without explicitly rearming. During one such meeting on 17 July, Hays advocated strengthening existing “Labor Service” groups. These so-called “industrial police” networks putatively cleaned up rubble, guarded POW camps, and provided some 80,000 displaced persons with food and shelter. But the Labor Service’s secret mission was to provide a postnuclear strike force capable of fighting behind the lines in Soviet-occupied territory.128 To Graf Schwerin’s scornful remark that the units were “militarily worthless,” Hays replied that ostensibly civilian organizations provided valuable cover for military action. As rearmament was “not
yet possible,” the Labor Service groups had the advantage of bringing together men with military training and experience who could, in dire circumstances, be whisked away, armed, and reinserted into an international conflict alongside Allied troops.\textsuperscript{129}

Hays further asked Graf Schwerin whether former German soldiers—“members of certain Panzer divisions,” for instance—could be asked to support Allied forces in the event of a Soviet attack. Such individuals might on D-Day convene in safe locations and form combat units to fight under Allied command. Graf Schwerin affirmed the plausibility of that proposal, which, like the former one, anticipated the TD’s own envisioned scenario for Case X.\textsuperscript{130}

That McCloy, with Adenauer’s approval, took steps to strengthen Labor Service and Industrial Police groups suggested that the U.S. High Commission acted upon at least some of the proposals raised during this secret U.S.-German meeting.\textsuperscript{131} Such initiatives fell short of a sweeping program to arm West Germany. But by seeking covert West German aid to the Allied cause, both McCloy and Adenauer signaled their support for clandestine options when international and domestic pressures prevented them from openly pursuing their goals. Within such a context, the creation and sustenance of an organization such as the Technical Service might be seen as broadly sanctioned by both the U.S. High Commission and the Federal Republic, even if neither McCloy nor Adenauer knew the particulars of that organization or its questionable activities.

This, then, was the likely scenario surrounding the Technical Service’s birth and timely demise: the U.S. Army Counterintelligence Corps, with the backing of the OPC and the implicit approval of the U.S. High Commission and the Adenauer government, recruited former German soldiers and SS officers into a paramilitary unit designed to stay behind and sabotage any Soviet invasion and occupation. The ideals and tactics informing the effort grew out of numerous civilian and military psychological warfare directives of the period. The Korean War, Adenauer’s unsuccessful campaign for an Allied-controlled federal police force, and the perceived imperative of German rearmament all gave momentum to covert efforts to defend West Germany from communist subversion.

Ambitious in intent but flawed in execution, the U.S. strategy of co-opting German nationalists bore little fruit. To start, no one in the Technical Service itself appeared to agree on the organization’s final mission. Everyone thought that, given a Soviet attack, some fighters would remain in Germany and commit sabotage while others exited to secure locations in the Alps, later to return and fight side-by-side with Allied
troops. Yet no clear contingency plans emerged. Notwithstanding the reams of data compiled on Social Democrats and Communists, the goals of TD record keeping remained uncertain. Witnesses could not verify whether the Technical Service sought to coddle right-wing socialists or kill them. No one knew, in any case, whether German saboteurs or U.S. forces would execute foes. Such glaring discrepancies, by raising doubts about the parameters of the “Proscription List,” prompt skepticism about the efficacy of the organization as a whole.

TD members themselves scarcely appeared dependable. Peters, and possibly Garwood, lined their wallets with TD funds, and internal discord fragmented unity of purpose. If Rietdorf and Breitkopf accurately portrayed Otto as an alcoholic womanizer, the former intelligence chief was vulnerable to blackmail within the organization and without. At the very least, he endangered the secrecy of the Technical Service by carousing with prostitutes in the company car.

U.S. recruitment of former officers into the Technical Service clearly served the American objective of establishing a guerilla brigade composed of seasoned soldiers. But beyond the troubling ethical questions raised by U.S. recruitment of former Nazis, this tactic subverted larger American security objectives by employing a fighting force that from the outset was probably unreliable. As the scholars Peter Dudek and Hans-Gerd Jaschke have shown, almost all of the TD’s members were over thirty years old and had previously enjoyed high military rank. After the war, Hitler’s elite fighters ailed in POW camps or were driven into menial jobs as shop clerks, poultry farmers, and day laborers. Many were chronically sick and needed money for staples and medical care. The Technical Service offered a chance to restore lost status and income. Yet even TD county leaders received at most a few hundred DM per month. Rank-and-file members earned less. The promotion by the BDJ of a stridently pro-Western agenda signaled the strength of the Atlantic consensus, even among jaded World War II veterans. But Otto’s snitching to the Frankfurt police, corruption and division within TD ranks, and the modest pecuniary rewards of service all suggested that the United States never secured full loyalty from the Technical Service. Members were apparently motivated more by desperation and opportunism than by democratic idealism.

The BDJ affair also alienated U.S. allies within the federal government. As a condition of participation on the German-American Investigatory Commission, which contained two HICOM officials and three appointees of the Bonn government, U.S. officials insisted that all proceedings be kept
secret from the public. They mandated that the committee be unanimous in its final report; and they refused to permit HICOM employees to testify in any state or federal investigation.137 These stipulations implied that Americans would cooperate in form, but not in spirit, with German democratic processes that threatened to embarrass the U.S. government.

At least one American on the commission bred ill will by bullying his German counterparts. Transcripts of only two meetings of the committee survive. But, according to the minutes for 31 October 1952, a near-brawl ensued after U.S. delegate S.H. Gaines determined that the German chair, Herr Maneck, had erroneously recorded Rietdorf’s testimony from the day before. Allegedly absent was a passage wherein Rietdorf claimed the “Proscription List” was “never sent to Mr. Garwood,” a contention that bolstered U.S. claims that Americans knew nothing of the TD’s murder plans.138 Gaines, having discovered this omission, “screamed” at Maneck for recording “lies” (“Unwahrheiten”) that “must be corrected.”139 “I will not tolerate being screamed at by you!” a shocked Maneck indignantly replied. “There is nothing for you to tolerate!” Gaines roared back, louder than before. A row followed, with all the German members taking Maneck’s side, and that day Maneck resigned his membership on the committee.140 Just two weeks later, the commission disbanded and released its tersely-worded conclusion that neither American nor German officials knew of or endorsed any illegal activities of the Technical Service.

The affair had domestic political consequences, as well. The BfV’s director Otto John called Zinn’s speech “a revolt by the Land government against the Federal government and the American occupation authorities,” and if Zinn’s speech was not exactly a call for revolution, the affair certainly sharpened tensions between the state and national governments, as between Social Democrats and Christian Democrats.141 SPD-dominated Hesse had unsuccessfully waged a long postwar battle against conservative U.S. occupiers and Christian Democrats who opposed economic centralization. In this latest episode, the United States, with the sanction of the CDU-dominated federal government, armed and trained a secret guerrilla organization composed largely of ex-Nazis, possibly breaking both federal and occupation statutes. Zinn divulged the affair in large part to discredit the CDU, which narrowly controlled the national legislature. Socialist deputies in the Bundestag followed Zinn’s lead, demanding federal accountability and forcing drawn-out investigations lasting into the mid-1950s.142 The United States’ image suffered from this exposure—“disastrously,” in the view of one HICOM analyst.143 The U.S. goal of a politically stable and pliant West Germany was hence ill served by an operation
that inflamed partisan tensions, sullied the United States’ reputation, and possibly endangered the United States’ foremost ally in Germany at a time when Americans feared the vulnerability of their own power throughout the West.

The BDJ affair did not permanently scar U.S.-German relations. Although the German leftist press energetically covered events in an effort to discredit the Adenauer government, the Christian Democrats handily won the 1953 Bundestag election, and the CDU retained control of the parliament into the 1960s. U.S. media outlets barely reported the scandal, ensuring that the affair was ignored, then forgotten, within the United States. Both German and American historiography have largely neglected the matter, testifying to the resilience of the Atlanticist consensus. The scandal posed but one of many tests of an official U.S.-German friendship that, forged in the Cold War, survived a half-century of conflict and change to emerge intact in the twenty-first century.

The episode nonetheless showed that, even as American and German allies cooperated to contain hostile nationalism, they secretly enlisted marginal rightists in the anticommunist crusade. These contradictions temporarily undermined the United States’ larger goal of a stable, prosperous, pro-American West Germany and illuminated the opportunism latent in U.S. foreign policy itself. While the resulting “blowback” did not forever damage German-American ties, the affair exposed the risks inherent to a U.S. strategy that empowered untrustworthy former foes, then provided insufficient incentives to keep those co-opted allies loyal.