

COVERNAME:

DALI

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Abstract: *This is a revised lecture, which the author held at the “Conference on “Cryptography & Intelligence”/”Secret of Ciphers” in Prag, June 1, 2011. The author was recruited by the German Foreign Intelligence Service, BND, to work as a secret service member under the cover of his journalistic work. He gave some insight into the character of the BND’s Middle East operations in the 1980s and early 1990s, into some of the practical day-to-day activities of secret service work and wrote about some of his missions in the Middle East. Of course, he is writing from his personal experience about this divided professional life. And, of course, about the basic interaction between intelligence organizations, open reporting and public awareness.*

Keywords: *BND, counterterrorism, intelligence operations, information and media operations, public knowledge*

Bundesnachrichtendienst (BND)

In the course of my life, twice I got very close to the German Foreign Intelligence Service – the Bundesnachrichtendienst or **BND**. First, there was that huge authority, recognizable very secretly and shadowy, being by any means an

unknown something for the majority of the German population. During that time foreign countries still knew less about the German Foreign Intelligence Service, This was o.k., as the organisation worked as a secret service and was supposed to find out everything beyond the borders being necessary for the security of the old Federal Republic.

In the early years of the BND everything had to be tuned with the American friends, later – appropriate to the respective historical times - with European partners or possible new confidants; Israelis, for example. The Foreign Intelligence Service was no domestic state security service. If it was looking after Germans during that times, there was always a massive international connection, and of course a political in addition.

This mysterious establishment, sitting for decades behind high walls in the Munich noble suburb of Pullach, to the public was not existent at all. Under normal circumstances, none of its employees ever should refer to it. If ever a curious question concerning their job emerged, they'd have to murmur something about the Federal Administration of Properties or so. No one was allowed to speak about further details without need.

Each employee was – in the case of someone asking about his or her job - supposed to change the subject or in very extreme cases leave the asking person in the rain. No stranger was allowed to find out something about our Foreign Intelligence Service. Thus also was inculcated upon me the day I signed up. This was the rule. We did not offend against our rules because it could have endangered the whole job and with it our very own existences, of colleagues and informants. Conspiracy was everything, very confidential gathering of data in the name and order of the Federal Republic the aim.

If we would have been an organization like many others, we could have adopted the CIA definition of intelligence, because it sounds so harmless:

“Reduced to its simplest terms, intelligence is knowledge and foreknowledge of the world around us. The prelude to decision and action by policymakers. Intelligence organizations provide this information in a fashion that helps consumers, either civilian leaders or military commanders, to consider alternative options and outcomes. The intelligence process involves the painstaking and generally tedious collection of facts, their analysis, quick and clear evaluations, production of intelligence assessments, and their timely dissemination to consumers. Above all, the analytical process must be

rigorous, timely, and relevant to policy needs and concerns."

We understood this to be honorable – and important. We did back up the "store" how we trivialized the Foreign Intelligence Service ironically (and for our own privacy it was an anonymous term), and the service backed us up. We lived in this scenery of feelings, at least during that certain time which today seems so awfully far away. Why and how still has to be explained without praising the corps mind of the Old Boy Network as only true.

Meeting the BND personal

But let's go back to the year 1982. I had given up safety of an editor's contract with the weekly magazine **QUICK** long ago and had exchanged for a book contract with Droemer Knaur Publishers. For this, I travelled quite intensely to Near and Middle Eastern countries, investigated and researched about "**Secret commandos of Islam**". Thus later being the subtitle of the book „**Holy War**". Of course, the BND was aware of that and not later as I did request journalistic background talks referring sensitive regions at their public relations office in Pullach, I was not to be overlooked any more. After I'd ride some daredevil actions, for example the one in the Syrian city of **Hama** where the Assad regime just had survived an Islamic coup, BND's friendly spokesman contacted me, asking whether I could imagine to carry out a non-journalistic background conversation with his Near and Middle East colleagues. Well, I did not only imagine, I went for it.

The first meeting took place at Sheraton Hotels & Towers in Munich-Bogenhausen. Undiluted and pure casting. Two future colleagues tried to get to know me, through listening. About Hama. How I did get in and out alive, from my experiences and relations in other corners of that tinderbox "Middle East". We spoke about the menu of the Italian restaurant at the first floor of the five star Cham Hotel in **Damascus** and about a Syrian airbase which one could overlook from a certain spot on the road to **Palmyra**.

We also touched quite personal, informal things: My activities during ten long years as a journalist, my visions for the future. Both "auditors" wanted to know, why I would turn my back just now to a well paid employment and how would loyalty look like in case of confidential activity.

„Can you imagine receiving information, reporting and sharing them exclusively with us, in case whatever you

get to know would also be of great interest and use to you as a journalist?"

Would wandering on the narrow ridge between both jobs and two separate existences be applicable for me?

"You must understand that you never ever will be able to open up about whatever your job would be at the Foreign Intelligence Service. No outsider may get to know about it or suspect. This is for your own good and very own interest."

Responses must have been positive to the two officers as the unusual meeting concluded very cordially and a further second round was supposed to take place within days. For me, everything was clear. My interests were about the Near and Middle East. The BND would crisis-proof bolster me for this specialization. There were no questions of ethics and morality as it is raised today again and again. It was a regular employer-employee relationship and after all – this aspect always is embezzled – it served West German security.

Working for the BND

It should last weeks and several detailed meetings, until the frame of a future cooperation was recognizable. My new partners were part of **Department 16A**, responsible for intelligence in the Near East. The department was led by an old warhorse called Cornelis Hausleiter, who mostly appeared at the Pullach headquarters with his fictitious name Carl Hagemann – at some opportunities as well as Bernhard Fischer or Curt Hausmann – and who was a man of the very first hour.

I had never before heard about Cornelis Hausleiter, as he had avoided all headlines and so far nobody ever talked about him. During those times the Bundesnachrichtendienst did not provide an endless chain of scandals and headlines; behind the high walls of the old Nazi camp "Nikolaus" a really sworn in community lived in the elegant south of Munich. At that time the cold war had just reached its climax. Absolute secrecy was the most important duty. We took this unconditional serious and did stick to it.

This was one of the reasons why it took me quite some time to understand that the abbreviation "16A" stood for a quite small unusual squad. It was composed from die-hard civilians, also former armed forces and daredevils in the best sense, who after being dismissed from Foreign Intelligence

Service did not see any problem in coaching Gaddafis body guards and others being devoted to development and distribution of complex security technology. 16A, also this I learned step by step, with pleasure explored own ways, those not always being really transparent to the Pullach hierarchy higher officials.

Therefore, Hausleiters men also received unusual orders and assignments with Near and Middle East not even being a camouflage. 16A again and again served as a sort of fire brigade, and its employees very well controlled the art of alarm take-offs. Very often we departed because political arsonists in the widest sense had already started their business, or cause we expected somewhere in our area of interest a major wildfire to inflame.

16A stood in absolute contrast to boring rituals at other departments where they fiddled for days in order to just organize a simple official trip. 16A, were the practical people, reason for success of my ten years and eight months as a member at the BND.

I still lacked numerous tips for daily life every newcomer was supplied with, orders and bans, knowledge of the organisations' own language which consists of many abbreviations. Conspiracy was important, the lasting firewall against friends and even family. Everybody was to believe that I was operating my numerous trips to more and more exotic places as part of my already most busy journalists life.

I had to carry on my normal and usual professional duties, should not spend a lot of cash of unexplainable origin or give speeches about my „new possibilities“. Nobody should be aware or should think of a sudden change. This was not really easy as all transactions of the BND were exclusively executed in cash. Travel expenses were paid in advance and after my return complete accounts and fees were to be settled in cash.

My favorite position was the so-called "activity fund". 180 German Marks per day provided for all times solvency and the moneys use did not have to be specified afterwards. Of course I did pay off my resources (informants) in cash. Later, as the mighty machinery was moving more or less by itself, I was allowed to transfer money to my informants abroad. The given reasons for the payment were absolutely harmless of course and delusive for outsiders. It could be for instance, that I paid debts out of a shipment to an Arabian importer of the glass manufacturer Swarovski in Austria. The businessman then forwarded the money to one of my informants.

The work itself did not offer any surprises. I researched and investigated as I would have done as a journalist. During those times in journalism the bar was set for investigation and the job itself was not at all so far from everyday procurement of Secret Services. Only, at the BND without exception, only very specific and mostly top secret details were interest.

Which real journalist would have tried to get the manual of the new MiG-29 in order to write an article series about it? Or even print the booklet as a facsimile. Who would ever want to publish the conspiratorial procured travel data of a possibly quite dangerous Lebanese in his newspaper? The secret service job was similar to journalism, and nevertheless, in many ways completely different.

Of course a meeting in a foreign town, being the very first meeting with a new informant or a not so well known informant, made me think of suitable safety measures. I used to arrive one or two days in advance, hanging around, getting to know places and orbiting the later point of meeting, taking a close look at entrances and exits, underground parking, possible escape routes as well as access roads. In most cases meetings took place in a hotel or a restaurant. For safety reasons and as a rule, I did stay at another hotel. In no case I was hazardous or was to leave the lead role to others – by any means I did have to remain in charge for whatever was to happen. Only in very special occasions I was willing to change the meeting point on short telephone notice – a tactical method by secret services to be able to determine further developments.

During all my intelligence trips I did very much pay attention not to carry out well-worn rituals. In case I did announce my arrival with the 6 p.m. plane, I'd already arrive at noon, I did never use the direct road to the meeting place, most times a wide detour took me there. I'd not use a taxi, but the underground. I abandoned possible pursuers, crossing a department store, the underground parking of a hotel, sneaking in at on one side, out at the other, or used the multiple possibilities of a railway station or the labyrinth of a big company where no one knew me. Only if I had made sure that nobody followed, I headed for my real destination, acting similar on my way back.

In the BND there was no "Q" like the one we know from the Bond movies. No head of a research or developing department appeared before starting an official trip presenting new technical gadgets. I remember only two opportunities where I received some appliances. After an **Arab League conference (1989 in Amman)** I flew out to

Cyprus and wrote a long report for headquarters. I then used the early version of a relatively small laptop with a separate modem supposedly developed by our own technicians. The modem encoded my texts. Later they told me that everything had worked out fine.

For emergency cases I received an old fashioned note pad with paper sheets whose pages would resolve automatically while contacting water. In seconds the snow-white sheet of paper became a milky sludge which one had to rinse down the sink. Nobody ever would be able to put the contents together. The process itself seemed to be a magic trick.

There was some more distinction between us and James Bond or Jack Ryan: BND agents don't use hand guns, no weapons at all. We collected informations with pencil and ballpoint pen; in rather rare cases with recording devices and cameras. No doubt about it: Having a choice, we preferred complete files and official documents. Paper is heavy stuff, so sometimes I could hardly carry the material. These years, there was no USB stick, no flash drive, not even a notebook available.

In summer of 1982 the commodity "news" for me suddenly had a new quality. Also this fact prevented me from mixing up both occupations. Quite clear, I was able to see the border between media and intelligence service and adjusted myself to it. I did not have or get any problems as I carried out both activities exclusively and professionally. The BND became my most important assignment. When I knew the inside of the institution, it disenchanting itself. Never ever I showed temptations acting as sort of 007. Anyhow, my regional fields of work didn't really provide us with Bond girls or even lookalikes.

The German Foreign Intelligence Service was and is a hardly flexible bureaucracy where the limitations of daily office hours and surcharges for official trips play an immensely important role. At least during my time pencils were substituted by an artificial lengthener so that they could be used up to the last centimeter. And, moreover: Von der Wiege bis zur Bahre – Formulare, Formulare, Formulare. In English it doesn't rhyme: From the cradle up to the stretcher – forms, forms, forms. This is a basic proverb in the BND community. A guideline through the official tracks of Pullach – and today of Berlin.

Fortunately, I dealt with it only a little. I avoided the paper trail, because my handlers took care of it. I had to concentrate exclusively on the procurement of information, new sources and the communication with our informers. It

was exhausting enough. From the early Eighties into the Nineties I was working for the BND under my my real name and – internally – under aka "Dali" all over the area of crisis between India and Tunisia. I maintained comprehensive contacts with high ranking executives, operatives of intelligence services and members of liberation movements.

No questions about it: In the old days, some of them have been our partners, today they are considered to be terrorists. One example out of many: **Golbuddin Hekmatyar**, the Afghan warlord. In the Eighties we had lots in common with him, today his name is on the same wanted list as **Bin Ladens**. I covered the wars and military skirmishes of the Eighties, sometimes from a first row seat. The BND was always interested in background and inside knowledge of every war theatre, the situation of the opponents, their equipment as well as the identity of their suppliers. The same old story was repeating itself from **Afghanistan** to **Iran** and **Iraq**, from **Lebanon** down to **Yemen**.

In addition, I was collecting data on political and business developments, military and police secrets, about arms trade and drug trafficking – and, of course, international terrorism became more and more important for us. For years I followed the trail of **Carlos** and his gang. It was a bunch of brutal mercenaries, far away from the fake political image they tried to spread.

I managed to penetrate the organization of the Palestinian separatist **Abu Nidal**. For a while, we were able to oversee the travel movements of his operatives. From insiders I purchased the real names and personal data of many activists, in a number of cases even informations about their intentions and aims before they even started to travel. According to the internal statistics, I submitted 856 reports during my cooperation with the BND. In comparison, it's quite a lot.

For 130 months of cooperation with the Bundesnachrichtendienst I received a salary of about 234 000 Deutschmarks , and 418 000 Marks for the travel expenses. In other words: I made 1800 Deutschmarks a month. This is definitely an amount on which in my social sphere nobody can live. Who earns 1800 Marks a month, must still have a second job which is paid substantially. German press reports which accused me in 2006 of a BND salary of 650 000 Marks and more were pure rushing and disinformation.

Work for the BND came to the end

My liaison with the BND ended in early 1993, being 008 the reason. This was the nickname of **Bernd Schmidbauer**. The then Minister of State in the Office of the German Chancellor. He always smiled when someone called him 008, as he liked this nickname. Intelligence work was his most favorite pastime and so he enjoyed dealing with the complicated case of two German hostages in Lebanon. Not just Schmidbauer, many colleagues from the BND were busy with it. Myself, I was involved in all the German hostage cases between the years 1987 to 1992.

What was the background? Some of you might know, that two members of the Lebanese Shiite Hamadi clan had been arrested at Frankfurt Airport because of their involvement in terrorist acts. In return, the Hamadis kidnapped Germans in order to exchange them for their relatives. In the Eighties Lebanon was a real hotspot for abductions. Through mediation of the United Nations in June 1992 the very last hostages have been released after 1128 days of captivity. Their names: **Heinrich Strübig and Thomas Kemptner**. Minister Schmidbauer being involved in the case only since the end of 1991 travelled to **Beirut** in order to accompany them back home to Germany.

The ambitious Politician took his chance to put himself in the spotlight, so the rest of the world would have to believe in him as the “rescuer”. He never rectified this impression created by the media, instead quite enjoyed the image of being a hero. Even Germany’s daily “Süddeutsche Zeitung” being considered critical, which had earlier on published impertinently that hostages would “not be freed because of Schmidbauer, but in spite of him” now helped creating and keeping the fairy tale alive: Schmidbauer accomplished „the release of German hostages in Lebanon“

Already in summer 1992 grumbling went through BND-rows. Some old hands who had worked for years on a positive outcome and solution for the kidnapped Germans, saw such headlines with astonishment. They rejected Schmidbauers strategy, that all success would be for the politicians, for the chancellor's office, better understood for the chancellors party, the CDU. No doubt, Schmidbauer was the coordinator of the Federal Intelligence Services, this giving him the power to act the way he did. If his behavior was ethical and morally correct, is a different issue.

A short period of time later I did attend an international terrorism conference that took place in Budapest. I was invited to this conference due to my membership at the Bonn

based **Institute of Terrorism Research** and because I had published several essays concerning this topic. Official discussions included how Germany had dealt with the problem of hostages in Lebanon. Schmidbauers "heroism" concerning this issue was made a subject and openly celebrated.

I was very much afraid that this untrue version would in effect become a true fact for the experts of the conference. I had my say and in a short statement I tried to explain the background of the misunderstanding, Schmidbauer had "liberated the kidnapped NGO-workers".

My **Budapest** remarks immediately was teared to shreds by the keepers of BND-internal political correctness, heralding the beginning of the end of my cooperation with BND, which did not hit me as a stroke of fate as it was predictable for me.

My nerves were on edge already for long, as often I did have to learn that increasingly my own and personal security during extreme and dangerous activities for BND was only of low importance.

Already, in the Middle East I experienced growing mistrust during meetings with local officials. Did other services start to investigate about me; did they check any concrete suspicions against me? In theory a plausible denial is always ready, but let it become a life threatening situation.... I was not keen to experience it.

These days Pullach wasn't much more but the automatic execution of acquisition missions. The cordial warmth, the informal familiar atmosphere of the early years, which had been above all the base of confidence had disappeared with colleagues and liaison officers the day they had retired.

In case an operation ended successful, this achievement would be taken over sooner or later from other departments scoring for it. We were only a cog in the machinery and the caravan moved on.

X-Mas time 1992 as usual was very busy, this being the reason that "divorce" wasn't to be executed still in the old year. Then in 1993 the separation – ironically at the same spot where we met the very first time, at Munich Sheraton – was formalized. A deputy director of department I read the security advice. He told me, to be absolutely discrete concerning all matters during my years with BND. He listed half a dozen countries which for security reason I should not visit during the near future.

An important period of my life had found its conclusion.

Many years later, after my cover was blown by the BND itself, I became a media object. It was quite a new situation

for me, an unusual one. Most of the media was very hostile and so I had to defend myself continuously.

Let's get back to the chronology. After leaving the BND, I became a fulltime journalist, again. From 1993 until 2004 I worked for a newsmagazine, called **FOCUS**. Of course, I became an expert on security matters, whatever that is. In some of my articles I was critical of my former employer, but in a constructive way. 1997 I wrote a book about the German hostages in Lebanon, the seven year long international affair I was very much involved for the BND.

„Bedingt dienstbereit“ – how the problems had began

My real troubles began in 2004 when **Norbert Juretzko**, a former BND case officer, and I published a common book about the organization. It's title translates roughly into "**Limited readiness**"/**Bedingt dienstbereit**. In his clandestine work, Juretzko had utilized many senior sources, particular Russian army officers following the collapse of the Soviet Union. He befriended himself with quite a number of Russian officers who were about to leave their barracks in East Germany in order to go back home. Everything was for sale then, from the Russian army. Arms, documents, state secrets. Juretzko was very successful in his work.

One day, Juretzko received documents which contained clear hints that Volker Foertsch, one of our most senior superiors, was a double agent, working for the **KGB** as well. The BND and the Federal Prosecution Office in Karlsruhe set up secret commissions of inquiry, which not only rebuffed his allegations but accused him of disseminating false information, fabricating intelligence reports, extracting money fraudulently and falsely accusing his colleagues.

Juretzko was tried behind closed doors, found guilty of some of the offenses and given an 11-month-suspended sentence. Juretzko's revenge was a book co-authored with me.

The BND tried to prevent the book by all means, some of them quite illegal and unlawful. The intelligence service always had an eye on us. One of these days, the BND decided to take personal revenge by including me in an already ongoing scandal. They added my name to a list of journalists who spied on their colleagues in the service of the BND.

My response was a book about my real work in the Middle East and the work with the BND as a secret service. It's title: "**Deckname: Dali**" (Covername Dali). In addition I

filed a complaint against the former President of the BND, August Hanning, and his successor Ernst Uhrlau, for disclosure of state secrets, revealing my name as a former employee of the organization. According to German laws, it is a crime uncovering an intelligence official. Both cases were rejected. They never reached court.

I went to court with some of the media, suing them for libel. The results were mixed and awfully expensive, but for my own peace of mind I had to go through these trials. But the damage was already done, mainly on my side.

Intelligence services and the journalists

Israeli author **Yossi Melman** from the well-known newspaper "**Haaretz**" – a leading expert on intelligence matters - was asking **David Halevy**, one of the elder statesmen of journalism, for a comment. We know each other for approximately 25 years, but I had never told him about my intelligence past. Let me quote his statement:

"From the viewpoint of a journalist who covered and rubbed elbows with espionage agencies, a journalist is always into trading – give me and take from me".

Halevy says.

"The boundary between journalism and espionage is very blurred, and it's almost impossible to define when you are engaged in one or the other, so that a journalist who works for an espionage service does not surprise me. The fact that Willy was a journalist and that journalistic skills and experience aided his ability as an intelligence man. It's the ability to cross borders, to wander about in the world and obtain legitimacy to collect information and recruit people. Journalists can approach sources without arousing suspicion. A journalist can pay for information and it looks natural."

"Haaretz" was asking me for comment:

"What does Dietl think about the possible implications of his spying for the security of journalists in regions of conflict?"

My answer was:

"Today, in many areas of tension in the world, the belligerent sides are suspicious of journalists. It was different in my time. Times have changed. The reason is that nowadays espionage agencies send their people out

in the guise of journalists. They are amateur spies posturing as journalists. I was a real journalist. The problem lies in the `dosage`. In my time there were very few journalists who operated as I did, so there was less danger, both for us and in terms of not endangering other journalists. I am proud of what I did. I acted out of belief in values and ideals. By my actions I exposed dangerous terrorists, thwarted their operations and saved human lives. I have no need to apologize.”

Interestingly, the media outside Germany was always objective and open on this subject. They did not join the strong efforts of others to ruin my reputation.

And, whenever I achieved one of the rare victories in the courthouse or somebody spoke in my favour, the media showed extremely low profile or neglected it altogether. There is a basic law: Whatever is printed, should not be reversed, even if it's a proven lie or simply disinformation. So it went when I sued the BND because of his observation activities over the years. On July 20, 2011, we met in a Munich court. From the first minute, the “other side” encouraged an arrangement. They didn't want to discuss the case in public. Finally the BND committed itself to 7500 Euros of smart-money (Schmerzensgeld) and took care of the court fees. That was that. The core of the dispute is still to be solved – the false accusations of 2006, the high treason the BND committed on me and other former collaborators.