

Spies get a bad rap



Markus Wolf of East Germany's Stasi wrote in his autobiography that he, like everyone else in his country, learned of the building of the Berlin Wall from the radio on Aug. 13, 1961. He was furious to have been kept in the dark about it, he said. He said he also learned from the television 28 years later, on Nov. 9, 1989, that the wall was coming down. Then began the process of having to take responsibility for what his ministry and the system had done, he said, even if the actions lay outside of his own command: The state security became the scapegoat. A young KGB officer in the GDR by the name of Vladimir Putin complained in "An Astonishingly Frank Self-portrait" that after the wall fell, Moscow went silent. Aggressive crowds gathered outside his building, he said, and there was no military support. He had to take things into his own hands and go out and quiet the people down. When he spoke with Henry Kissinger a few years later and told him about his days in the GDR, Kissinger responded: "All decent people got their start in intelligence. I did, too."

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