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DİPLOMASİNİN KAPISINI ARALAYAN BİR GÜÇ OLARAK SİLAHLI KUVVETLER: ALMAN DEMOKRATİK CUMHURİYETİ'NİN AFRIKA VE ORTADOĞU'YA ASKERİ DESTEK SAĞLAYARAK GERÇEKLEŞTİRDİĞİ DİPLOMATİK ATILIMLAR

Klaus Storkmann¹

Öz

Bu makalenin temel argümanı, Doğu Almanya hükümetinin Batı Almanya'nın diplomatik ablukasına karşı diplomatik bir atılım gerçekleştirmek için önemli bir araç olarak askeri destek sunduğunu kanıtlamaktır. 1949'da kurulduktan sonra, Alman Demokratik Cumhuriyeti, Sovyetler Birliği ve uydu devletleri dışında hiçbir ülke tarafından diplomatik olarak tanınmadı. Bunun nedeni Batı Alman hükümetinin tüm Almanya'yı ve tüm Almanları diplomatik olarak temsil etme iddiasıydı. 1950'lerde ve 1960'larda, Doğu Berlin'deki hükümet bu isme layık diplomatik ilişkiler kurmak için çok zaman ve enerji harcadı. Ortadoğu'ya ek olarak, Doğu Berlin'in bakış açısından, 1960'dan sonra Afrika'da hızla art arda ortaya çıkan yeni devletler, uluslararası dışlanmanın üstesinden gelmek için en umut verici fırsatları sundular. Özellikle askeri kanallardan geçen yol umut verici görünüyordu. Bu ülkelerdeki ordunun önemi göz önüne alındığında, özellikle askeri temasların gelişmekte olan ülkelerin GDR dış politikası için büyük önem taşıdığı açıktır. Bu makale, Doğu Almanya'nın Zanzibar, Tanzanya, Gine ve en önemlisi Mısır için askeri yardım ve silah teslimatı örneği ile bu kilit işlevi kanıtlamaktadır. Nasır'ın Mısır'ı ideal olarak kendisini Doğu Almanya'daki diplomatik ve askeri ilerlemeler için bir muhatap olarak sundu. Nasır, Batı Almanya'nın İsrail ile daha yakın ilişkilerine şüpheyle baktı. 1967'deki Altı Gün Savaşı'nda, Doğu Berlin'deki hükümet, Mısır'ın acilen ihtiyaç duyduğu silahları tedarik ederek büyük bir diplomatik atılım elde etme şansı buldu.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Küresel Soğuk Savaş, Almanya Demokratik Cumhuriyeti (Doğu Almanya), Federal Almanya Cumhuriyeti (Batı Almanya), Mısır, Diplomasi Aracı Olarak Askeri Güç.

ARMED FORCES AS A DOOR OPENER FOR DIPLOMACY: DIPLOMATIC BREAKTHROUGHS OF THE GERMAN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC BY PROVIDING MILITARY SUPPORT TO AFRICA AND THE MIDDLE EAST

Abstract

This article will prove how the government of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) used military support as a key tool to break through the West German diplomatic blockade. After the foundation of the GDR in 1949, no country in the world except for the Soviet Union and their satellites recognized this new state diplomatically. This was due to the West German government's claim to sole representation of Germany and all Germans. From the GDR perspective, it was primarily the Middle East and the states in Africa that emerged after 1960 which offered the most likely chances to overcome international isolation. The employment of military channels seemed to be particularly promising. The fact that military contacts played an essential role in GDR foreign policy toward developing countries was obvious given the importance of the military in those states. This article attests to this key function using the military assistance and weapons deliveries of the GDR for Zanzibar, Tanzania, Guinea and especially Egypt as examples. Nasser's Egypt was an ideal recipient of both diplomatic and military East German approaches. Nasser viewed the increasingly closer relations between West Germany and Israel with suspicion. The Six-Day War of 1967 finally opened a chance for the regime in East Berlin to achieve a major diplomatic breakthrough by delivering weapons that Egypt desperately needed.

Keywords: Global Cold War, German Democratic Republic (GDR, East Germany), Federal Republic of Germany (FRG, West Germany), Egypt, Military as Diplomacy.

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Introduction

According to Carl von Clausewitz, “war is the continuation of politics by other, violent means”, or in the exact wording of this often abbreviated quote: “It is clear, consequently, that war is not a mere act of policy but a true political instrument, a continuation of political activity by other means” (Clausewitz 1976, 87). Elsewhere, Clausewitz wrote even more succinctly: “War... is therefore policy itself, which takes up the sword in place of the pen.” (Clausewitz 1976, 610). It is not only war as the most extreme form of the use of the military that is policy, even at times of peace the military is an excellent means to achieve political objectives completely without letting the weapons speak. The military can also be a means of diplomacy, just as diplomacy is a way to end wars. The military can also be a door opener for diplomacy, it can even replace diplomacy, where the latter had not yet got a chance. How this worked will be explained using the example of East German efforts to establish diplomatic relations with the states of the Middle East in the 1960s. This article will substantiate the main argument: the government in East Berlin deliberately used its armed forces as a door opener to achieve the hoped-for diplomatic recognition of their state by peaceful means, without firing one shot.

In the 1960s, military contacts of the GDR were primarily shaped by intra-German competition. This was ultimately inextricably linked to the question of international recognition of the GDR. Intra-German competition was not a one-way street. The Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), too, used its military contacts with the Third World to articulate and enforce its position on the German issue: Until at least 1973, both German states “were fixated on each other on the international arena”, the “quest for recognition and non-recognition policy are mutually exclusive” as Hermann Wentker aptly analysed; he critically remarked that Bonn did not “want to allow even the tiniest territorial gains of its Eastern rival” (Wentker 2008, 246-47, 251). The struggle between both Germanies focussed also on their representations in Egypt. The East German leadership saw Egypt – with good reason – as the key to the recognition of its state in the Arab world. The Federal Government was no less aware of the importance of Cairo and tried to take countermeasures and blockade East Germany’s steps. Both German states competed for the favour of Cairo. FRG was able to offer investments and development assistance. The GDR had little to offer in reply to West German funding. Military aid seemed a promising approach. This article will provide pertinent evidence from archival sources. The author uses records from the GDR ministry of defence and the political leadership of the GDR (or to put it plainly: the party leadership) which are completely preserved in the Federal Archive in Berlin and Freiburg. The author did not consult archives in Egypt and Africa due to organisational and practical obstacles, among them the question of whether sources from the 1960s are preserved, accessibility for researchers from abroad and lack of

language skills. Therefore, by way of qualification it needs to be established and admitted that this paper reflects only the East German perspective of the decisions at the time.

1. David vs Goliath: The Fight Against the West German Diplomatic Blockade Against the GDR

After the end of World War II, the Western victorious powers in the west of Germany and the Soviets in the east of Germany (actually, with a view to the borders of Germany until 1945, it was not the east, but the very centre of Germany; it only became the East after the actual East was handed over to Poland) established separate administrations and later on two states modelled on their respective social and governmental systems. Both German states were founded in 1949, first the FRG in the west in May and then the GDR in the east in October. No country in the world except for the Soviet Union and the other Eastern European countries under Soviet rule recognised the German Democratic Republic diplomatically. The reason for this was the Federal Republic's claim to sole representation, to govern the whole of Germany and all Germans and to represent them diplomatically worldwide. The GDR also used the term *Alleinvertretungsanmaßung* (arrogation of sole representation) (Institut für internationale Beziehungen 1980, 31f). Erich Honecker, the last GDR head of state and SED party leader who was overthrown in 1989, used the latter term in his memoirs that were published in the early 1990s (Honecker 1994, 50). Hans-Joachim Döring spoke very aptly of an East German "trauma of the state and party leadership". He noted that West Germany's claim to sole representation hit them at their most sensitive spot: the sovereignty of their state and its legitimation under international law (Döring 1999, 1003-4).

The FRG's claim to sole representation of all Germany basically consisted in West Germany punishing all countries that recognised the GDR diplomatically by breaking off relations with these renegade states – including economic and trade relations (Dedering 2009, 214).² Thus, the power of the claim to sole representation evolved from the economic power of West Germany. No country wanted to voluntarily abandon economic relations with one of the strongest economies in the world if not absolutely necessary.

The threat to break off diplomatic relations was implemented only twice by the Foreign Ministry in Bonn: in 1957, when non-aligned and socialist Yugoslavia recognised the GDR diplomatically, and in 1963, when Cuba under the rule of Fidel Castro recognised the GDR.

² For research findings and controversial debate on the Hallstein Doctrine, see Kilian (2001). Regarding an uncritical view on the Hallstein policy, see Troche (1996); for a contrary assessment to Troche and therefore a critical stance on the Hallstein policy, see Gray (2003). For a review of Gray's work, see Wiesen (2005, 855-57).

In the 1950s and 1960s, the government in East Berlin spent a lot of time and energy establishing diplomatic relations that were worthy of the name. In addition to the Middle East and Southeast Asia, from the perspective of the German Democratic Republic, it was primarily the rapidly emerging new states in Africa in the 1960s that offered the most likely chances to overcome international isolation. The forced isolation drove the GDR to a policy of small steps: one step forward, a half, or sometimes one, step back. The GDR was able to count a half step forward that was sometimes achieved as its success.

Both German states engaged in a kind of race regarding the many newly emerging states that were about to become independent. It always involved a promise of economic aid for the new states. When the African country of Guinea became independent in 1958, both German states tried to place an ambassador there. The GDR established a trade representation, and shortly thereafter the Federal German ambassador started to work in Guinea. In 1960, however, Guinea sent an ambassador to the GDR. The Federal Government immediately recalled its ambassador from Guinea, whereupon the Guinean government declared that it had never sent an ambassador to East Berlin. Diplomatic relations between the FRG and Guinea were restored; the GDR had lost the diplomatic competition with the larger and economically stronger German state.

GDR foreign policymakers continued to try to establish full diplomatic relations elsewhere. GDR diplomats had no alternative to the path of small steps. Prior to diplomatic recognition, it was necessary to establish first contacts. The foreign ministry deemed the use of military channels likely to lead to success. For GDR foreign policymakers the special advantage of military contacts with developing countries did not lie in the actual military cooperation in the narrower sense but in the importance of the military in these countries.

In the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, officers often assumed government power in Africa, the Middle East and South Asia or had already exercised it per tradition. Well-known examples are the military rulers in the People's Republic of the Congo (Major Alfred Raoul as Prime Minister 1968-1969, Colonel Joachim Yhombi-Opango as President 1977-1979, Colonel Denis Sassou-Nguesso as his successor until 1992), in Mali (Colonel Moussa Traoré as President 1968-1991), in Madagascar (Commander (Navy) Didier Ratsiraka as President from 1975-1993) and in Libya (Colonel Muammar al-Gaddafi). According to the files of the Central Committee of the SED, they all had been invited to visit the GDR. The list of military regimes in the Third World was by no means limited to the partners of the Eastern Bloc, and many more examples could be added to this list. Those include the regimes of Joseph Mobutus, a former sergeant, in Zaire 1965-1997, and of Idi Amin, a former captain, in Uganda from 1971-1979.

The fact that military contacts in particular were made a priority in GDR foreign policy toward developing countries was obvious considering the importance of the military in those states. In the absence of other channels of communication, the initial foreign military contacts of the GDR went through its few diplomatic missions abroad and thus through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Berlin. In the process, diplomats acted not only as mediators and local points of contact. To a large extent, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs initiated first military diplomatic contacts and was the driving force behind them.

2. An Initial Breakthrough: Military Adviser in Zanzibar After Diplomatic Recognition in 1964

Despite its political insignificance and very small geographical size, the island of Zanzibar had been of great political relevance to the GDR since 1964. The reason for this was the diplomatic recognition of the GDR by the young African island nation in 1964. Having gained its independence in January 1964, the government of President Abeid Karume established diplomatic relations with the GDR and not with West Germany. The diplomatic success did not last long because as early as in April 1964, Zanzibar merged with the mainland of Tanganyika to become the new state of Tanzania. The embassy of the GDR in Zanzibar was downgraded to a consulate. Despite the loss of the embassy, the small island continued to be regarded as a key country in GDR's quest for recognition, as it was here that the first break through the West German diplomatic blockade (except for the aforementioned special case of Yugoslavia in 1957) was achieved.

Following diplomatic recognition, the Ministry of Defence in Strausberg immediately dispatched two officers to the island republic in early March 1964. The secret action was codenamed Film. The mission of the two lieutenant colonels was to advise on the setup and structure as well as on armament and technology of the future armed forces of the People's Republic of Zanzibar and Pemba. The East German military officers were to assist also in the organisation of military training. The local GDR ambassador supervised the activities of the officers politically. When in mid-March 1964, ten Soviet military advisors arrived on the island and took over the setup of the army, the East German officers became only second choice. The two officers and the ambassador reported to GDR government that Zanzibar had decided to "delegate the tasks originally assigned to us [...] to the expert group of the Soviet Army". And: "All our efforts to subsequently cooperate with the Soviet comrades remained unsuccessful" (Bundesarchiv 1964a, 74f). Deputy GDR Minister of Foreign Affairs Kiesewetter and Ambassador Fritsch gave the officers a new task – to prepare proposals for the coastal defence of the two islands. Before the end of their mission on 12 April 1964, they handed over their proposals including gifts from the East German Army to the President of the island republic Karume. The "gifts" from the GDR included

300 uniforms, tents and binoculars. Another 700 uniforms were promised (Bundesarchiv 1964b, 69-71; Bundesarchiv 1964c, 66-68). In the mid-1960s, the GDR gifted uniforms also to other states in Africa (more details below).

The seaward defence boats that were to be given from the People's Navy to Zanzibar from 1966 onwards would be free of charge and "in solidarity". East German National People's Army was also to consider the delivery of three helicopters (Bundesarchiv 1967, 79-81).³ The aid for Zanzibar was the first major GDR project in terms of material military support for Africa. In a letter of April 1966, Army General Hoffmann informed the Chairman of the GDR Council of Ministers (Prime Minister) Willi Stoph that the People's Navy would be able to deliver the requested three boats including technical equipment. The necessary training of the crews by the People's Navy was also ensured. The minister expressly stated that the delivery of the boats would not affect the combat power of the National People's Army (Bundesarchiv 1966b, 1-2).⁴ The three boats were delivered in 1966, including armament and ammunition valued at a total of 4.6 million Mark (Bundesarchiv 1977, 39-39z). The training of the Zanzibar crews in the People's Navy between 1964 and 1968 was closely connected with the delivery of the boats.

East German interests continued to focus on Zanzibar on a small and on Tanzania on a larger scale. The invitation issued in April 1968 to a military delegation from Tanzania to visit the GDR was based on the initiative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs which had also submitted the proposal. It began with the wish of the Tanzanian Chief of the General Staff, Ali Mafhud, to visit the GDR, and especially the Military Academy in Dresden (Bundesarchiv 1968c; Bundesarchiv 1968d, 45f.) According to the GDR Consul General in Dar es Salaam, this request was made against the background of a power struggle within the combined armed forces of Tanzania and Zanzibar. A group within the military would like to continue to train officers in England and Canada, whereas the President, the Vice President and the Minister of Defence wanted to cooperate with the socialist armies. State Secretary Kohrt closed his letter to Hoffmann with the assessment:

Almost at the same time, a decision was being prepared regarding an invitation to Colonel Himid, the Chief of the Zanzibar army, for an official visit to the GDR. During the stay of the GDR military delegation in Zanzibar, Rear Admiral Felix Scheffler had issued an oral invitation as early as in January 1968. In the subsequent months, the colonel repeatedly inquired with the GDR diplomats in Zanzibar when the official invitation would be issued and when he would be allowed

³ A later decision of 1968 confirmed that the Ministry of State Security (MfS) would coordinate all "non-civilian" measures for Zanzibar (Bundesarchiv 1968a, 77).

⁴ The delivery of seaward defence boats of the People's Navy "in solidarity" was probably related to the delivery of 15 new torpedo boats of Soviet production scheduled for the period 1968-1970 ("Project 206") or the delivery of Soviet combat vessels of "Project 159," also planned from 1968 on. On this cf. (Bundesarchiv 1966a, 39-40); Soviet answer in (Bundesarchiv 1968b, 166).

to travel. The GDR diplomats in Zanzibar and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in East Berlin therefore urged the East German Ministry of Defence to finally take action (PA-AA 1968a, 16). At first, the military leadership did not respond. On 3 July 1968, the chief of the Zanzibar military once again approached the GDR consul about the outstanding invitation. According to a new letter from the consulate, he was “visibly interested” (PA-AA 1968b, 8f.).

The previously unsuccessful and protracted process was considerably expedited by the intervention of the Soviet Union, and in particular the Soviet consul in Zanzibar, Rogov. “For political reasons”, an invitation to the GDR was necessary: “Comrade Rogov knows that Himid himself is very interested in a visit to the GDR. He had already approached Comrade Rogov several times and inquired about the state of affairs regarding his invitation to the GDR.” (PA-AA 1968c, 10f.) The urging of the USSR was due to information about a looming military cooperation between Zanzibar and China. Beijing had invited the Colonel for a study trip of four to six months to the Middle Kingdom and also offered to supply Zanzibar with weapons and aircraft. At the height of the Sino-Soviet split in 1968, it was impossible for Moscow to tolerate such cooperation. The Soviet consul informed his GDR colleague in an unequivocal manner that the travel plans to Beijing and thus “the Chinese intentions needed to be foiled”. Since the Colonel had been a guest in the USSR only six weeks earlier, a new invitation to Moscow was not possible. “It would therefore be politically right if the GDR now invited Himid in the near future and thus provided Himid officially with an excuse to evade the trip to China,” the Soviet diplomat opined in early July 1968 (PA-AA 1968c, 10f.). Just over a week later, the GDR Minister of Defence, Army General Heinz Hoffmann, issued the invitation. However, the visit of the Zanzibar Army Chief did not take place until May 1969 (PA-AA 1968d, 1f.).

The example of Zanzibar shows clearly and in an easily understandable manner that the GDR (also) used military aid to achieve its objectives regarding foreign policy and especially diplomatic recognition. After the general diplomatic breakthrough in 1973, and in response to Soviet objections, the GDR was less willing to continue to provide aid to the island.

3. Uniforms for Guinea as a Key Foreign Policy Issue

It was astonishing, how much the competition with the FRG prevailed in the decision-making processes, especially in the 1960s. For example, the delivery of fabric for uniforms to Guinea by the GDR military in 1969 was talked up as a key foreign policy issue by the GDR Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Military contacts with West African Guinea were also essentially initiated via channels of the GDR Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The files contain a first memo of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

dated May 1966. Therein, the trade representation of the GDR in Conakry informed about Guinea's possible interest in radio technology for its army (PA-AA 1966a, 120).⁵ In the same month, the foreign ministry requested all kinds of information material about the National People's Army from Minister Hoffmann to give to the Guinean Army leadership and to establish further contact with them. "For the time being, the final objective should be the exchange of military delegations." (PA-AA 1966b, 137f.) The East German diplomats left no doubt as to the reasons and motives of their commitment: in May 1966, the foreign ministry wrote to the minister of defence that after the "events in Ghana" (i.e., when the military seized power), it was necessary to "rethink the attitude toward some African states" (PA-AA 1966b, 137f.)

In line with the diplomats' proposals, the foreign ministry initially focused on arranging a visit of the Guinean Minister of Defence, Diané Lansana, to the GDR. Lansana was considered a "trustworthy representative of Guinea's anti-imperialist and non-capitalist development". In Guinea, there was a danger of a "coup from the right", the "principal danger" was the influence of the USA and, above all, West Germany, which had military advisors on site. In October 1967, Lansana explained that to date he had not accepted the invitation to the GDR because "at the moment" he "did not want to antagonize West Germany [...]." Out of consideration for these "constraints" of Guinea, the GDR Trade Representation proposed to postpone the planned visit of a military delegation in November 1967 by one week, since the inauguration of a military enterprise built by the FRG - "very probably in the presence of a military delegation from Bonn" - was scheduled for the day of the East Germans' arrival (PA-AA 1966c, 104f., 111-114; PA-AA 1967a, 127-129). For more than two years, Minister Lansana delayed his trip to the GDR, but at the same time he repeatedly and urgently invited his GDR counterpart to Guinea. The East German ministries of defence and of foreign affairs, in turn, firmly rejected this ("not practical", "not advisable") and insisted on Lansana's journey to East Berlin ("desirable", "expedient") (PA-AA 1967b, 99f.) In addition to Lansana's invitation to the GDR, the decision-making process between the ministry of foreign affairs, its local representation in Conakry and the MoND largely focused on the delivery of uniforms and equipment. The head of the trade representation in Conakry (whom the GDR internally referred to as "consul general", more in wishful thinking than reality) compiled a list "in accordance with the wishes" of the Guinean minister of defence and "in coordination with the ambassador of the USSR". This list included, among other things, electric generator sets, road building and agricultural machines, tractors and water pumps. There was not a single purely military piece of equipment, but nevertheless the list was referred to as "support in the military field". The ministry of defence was to provide and finance the machinery (PA-AA 1967c, 92-95).

⁵ The consul general immediately asked for sales brochures and price offers.

Guinea explicitly requested delivery within the framework of military cooperation and not within the framework of trade exchange. Consul General Gürke promised to forward the wishes to the MoD. In his letter, he recommended “speedy delivery” arguing: “we should take advantage of the current opportunity to develop cooperation with Guinea also in the military field. We should not be deterred by the military contract with West Germany.” (PA-AA 1967d, 63-68).

An internal memo of the East German foreign ministry of April 1967 indicates that the GDR diplomat in Guinea had obviously gone a bridge too far and thus incurred the displeasure of his superiors and probably the National People’s Army’s leadership in particular: “Comrade Gürke shall not become involved in military issues concerning equipment. This issue needs to be resolved together with the army here [that is: the East German army].” (PA-AA 1967e, 101)

A letter by Army General Hoffmann to Foreign Minister Winzer dated March 1968 also suggests disagreements between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defence. Hoffmann rejected the submission of a foreign ministry policy paper on the development of further military cooperation with Guinea and delayed the dispatch of a military delegation. In addition, he also objected to the outstanding supply of clothing and electrical devices by the National People’s Army to Guinea (PA-AA 1968e, 38). As a result of Hoffmann’s intervention, the foreign ministry was forced to redraft the submission. At the insistence of professional diplomats, the East German Army finally provided 5,000 field uniforms and 1,000 parade uniforms, which were sent to Conakry by ship in November 1968. The delivery was based on a decision made by the Politburo of the SED Central Committee to that effect in September of the same year. After the uniforms proved to be “completely unsuitable” because of the climate, they were immediately returned to the GDR (PA-AA 1968f, 23, 46-47).⁶

In 1969, another dispute broke out between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defence over the question of whether the deliveries should consist of fabrics for uniforms to be manufactured in Guinea or of complete uniforms. Guinea had expressed numerous new “military” gift wishes, again mostly uniforms. MoND provided for the delivery of the fabrics; however, the foreign ministry rejected this “from a foreign policy point of view”: the uniforms would be manufactured in “military factories established by the Bundeswehr” (PA-AA 1969a, 13).⁷ Government in Bonn could “interpret this as an example of cooperation between the GDR and West

⁶ The East German field uniforms proved to be “completely unsuitable” for the climatic conditions in Guinea. Handing over of the uniforms “could only be detrimental to the GDR,” the foreign ministry wrote to Major General Fleißner, Deputy for Technology and Armament in the East German MoND. The shipment of uniforms was returned to the GDR (PA-AA 1968f, 23, 46-47).

⁷ “It would be useful to once again inform Comrade Minister Fleißner or Comrade Minister Keßler by telephone about this foreign policy aspect, since we get the impression that some comrades [...] consider the matter already resolved” (PA-AA 1969a, 13).

Germany in a developing country”. According to Foreign Minister Winzer, this would “damage the foreign policy” of the GDR “beyond the borders of the Republic of Guinea”. In late March, Foreign Minister Winzer personally wrote to Colonel General Keßler, Chief of the Main Staff: “Under these conditions, the supply of fabrics to be processed in military factories could indirectly promote the foreign policy objectives of the government in Bonn toward Guinea.” (PA-AA 1969b, 11f). The supply of uniform fabrics was elevated to a key issue of foreign policy. In the end, Colonel General Keßler rejected the diplomats’ objection (PA-AA 1969c, 10).⁸ The example clearly shows to what extent the GDR and its diplomats paid special attention even to alleged trivialities. The main focus was always on possible consequences for foreign and often also for intra-German policy.

The fixation of the government in East Berlin on intra-German policy met with increasing response from the courted partners in the Third World. When analysed in greater detail, it turns out, they sometimes used the GDR argumentation verbatim and responded in the same manner back to East Berlin. For example, a letter of thanks from the PAIGC in Portuguese Guinea in 1966 stated that “the FRG [was] the most active ally of the Portuguese colonial government and had thus become an active accessory to the crimes committed by the colonial masters against the Guinean people” (Bundesarchiv 1966c). According to a memo of the GDR trade representation in Conakry the Guinean Minister of Defence Lansana “described West Germany as a deadly enemy of Guinea.” And: “it is involved in all plots against Guinea and the progressive regimes in Africa. [...] It is well-known that one must be particularly alert to the West German specialists” (PA-AA 1967f, 104f). What looked like “ideological consonance” (Döring 2001, 145) had, in fact, practical reasons and was not least motivated by a search for advantages. The GDR felt confirmed in its position, and the African states and independence movements could expect further and increased aid from GDR in return. The approach of the partners and the (expected) reaction of the GDR leadership were similar to the experiments on Pavlovian conditioning. The manifold political and material support of the developing countries – in East German parlance consistently referred to as solidarity – was always connected with the push for recognition. Diplomatic recognition, in contemporary parlance “normalisation of relations”, was the mantra of GDR politicians in talks and encounters with representatives of the developing countries of that time.

⁸ “At present, I am absolutely unable to produce uniforms for Guinea because there are no patterns and shapes available for this purpose. [...] For the above-mentioned reasons, I feel compelled to make the intended delivery [...] as agreed [...]”

4. Right into the Heart of the East-West Conflict: Military Aid for Nasser's Egypt

Egypt -like the whole Middle East- was a hotspot of the East-West conflict. Named United Arab Republic (UAR)⁹ since its unification with Syria in 1958, Egypt developed into one of the most important arenas of the global conflict between the Soviet Union and the United States. Under the rule of Gamal Abdal Nasser (1918-1970), the country on the Nile became increasingly close to the Soviet Union from the mid-1950s onward. Nasser's policy was significantly influenced and shaped by the permanent conflict with Israel, which was carried out in several wars. The culmination of this conflict was the Six-Day War in 1967.

In 1954, Egypt had approved a trade representation of the GDR in Cairo. Nasser used the threat to recognise the GDR diplomatically as a leverage to prevent West Germany from establishing diplomatic relations with Israel.

The major objective of the GDR was to establish full diplomatic relations with UAR. For East German foreign politicians Egypt had a threefold, if not fivefold significance as addressee of their diplomatic activities. In the 1950s and 1960s, Egypt under Gamal Abdal Nasser was considered the undisputed leading power of the Arab states in the Middle East. It was directly and permanently opposed to Israel and thus, in contemporary assessment, to US American imperialism. Moreover, due to its geographical location, it was the dominant power in North Africa. Cairo's voice carried much weight with the Organisation of African Unity (OAU). Nasser was one of the spokesmen in the Non-Aligned Movement. As a result, Egypt was extremely important as leader of the developing countries within the United Nations. Until the early 1970s, Cairo enjoyed the special attention of GDR regime. East Germany hoped that the recognition by Egypt would trigger a domino effect with other states. Military contacts were one field to achieve this.

A first major step was the state visit of the GDR head of state and party leader Walter Ulbricht to Egypt in 1965. Nasser's invitation to Ulbricht for a state visit was based on his anger about planned West German arms deliveries to Israel. Nasser's blackmail with the invitation to the East Germans was effective in Bonn and resulted in the withdrawal of the decision to deliver arms to Israel. Nasser, however, went through with his invitation, whereupon the government in Bonn temporarily withdrew their ambassador from Cairo. Ulbricht's state visit from 24 February to 2 March 1965 was the first official visit of a GDR head of state to a country outside the Eastern Bloc (Cf. Troche 2001, 39-51). The preserved records of Ulbricht's journey do not contain any explicit references to a possible military cooperation between the two states (Bundesarchiv, DY 30/3665).

⁹ In 1961, Syria left the Union with Cairo. Nevertheless, Egypt retained the name of United Arab Republic until 1972. Since 1972, the country has been called Arab Republic of Egypt. In a historical text, chronological precision is essential. When discussing the 1958–1971 period, this paper uses "UAR" in the context of official documentation and sources data while retaining "Egypt" in the narrative.

Military cooperation between the two armed forces began with military sports and the training of service dog handlers. As early as in 1960, Egypt had already approached GDR for training support from the National People's Army. In concrete terms, Cairo approached the GDR Ministry of Foreign Affairs with the request for a study stay of a major in the Army Sports Association *Vorwärts*. From August to October 1965, an Egyptian major was trained at the working dog schools of the Border Troops and the People's Police. Cairo had approached the GDR Ministry of Foreign Affairs via its trade agency in East Berlin with a request to this effect (PA-AA 1965a, 35f.).¹⁰ The request found its way via Foreign Minister Winzer to the desk of Army General Hoffmann, and after the latter's approval via the foreign ministry back to the trade representation of Egypt in the GDR (PA-AA 1965b, 33f.)

In October 1966, the Egypt Consulate General in East Berlin requested the deployment of a military dog trainer to Egypt for a period of one year (PA-AA 1966d, 16). "In view of the continuous development of the relations between the GDR and UAR, and the relations between the armed bodies of both countries that have been evolving especially in recent times" the East German foreign ministry supported the request from Cairo (PA-AA 1966e, 14; BArch, VA-01/14094, 266). It seems to have come to nothing. In 1967, the MoND in Strausberg repeatedly asked the East German foreign ministry for details regarding the requests from Cairo, however, there was no response from Cairo, at least until March 1967 (Bundesarchiv 1967a, 261-263).

Cairo wanted the East German Army to train not only dog handlers and military sports instructors. In August 1966, the Egypt armed forces approached GDR diplomats with the request to be allowed to attend the military academy. The East German foreign ministry forwarded the request to Strausberg. Thereupon the National People's Army's leadership offered Cairo at short notice a two-week stay for up to six senior officers at the Friedrich Engels Military Academy in Dresden and other officer schools (PA-AA 1966f, 19f.).

Preserved archive records mention considerations and arrangements with Cairo regarding the delivery of combat aircraft for the first time at the beginning of 1967. In January 1967, the Director of Procurement and Sales of the state-owned aircraft works or Aircraft Repair Plant *VEB Flugzeugwerft Dresden* visited Damascus and Cairo to make initial arrangements for the sale of aircraft. According to the report, Cairo's Air Force was "extremely" interested in the purchase of up to 20 MiG-15 UTI trainer aircraft. The director reported to the GDR Ministry of Defence that an offer needed to be prepared immediately (Bundesarchiv 1967b, 267-270).

¹⁰ Cairo explained: "the UAR armed forces are a good customer for dogs from the GDR."

In the subsequent months, the list of possible arms deliveries from East German army stocks was considerably expanded. At the end of May 1967, even before the beginning of the Six-Day War, an internal MoND memorandum contained the following information regarding UAR: we could sell used MiG-15 and MiG-17 fighter aircraft, T-34 tanks as well as infantry weapons and ammunition. In addition to infantry weapons, the GDR could provide communications technology and optical equipment from its current production. According to the memo, the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Intra-German Trade (MAI), its foreign trading company ITA and the company TechnoCommerce would be responsible for the handling of the sales (Bundesarchiv 1967c, 256). The events of the subsequent days accelerated the processes immensely. Instead of commercial transactions, however, the deliveries were now to be made free of charge.

The Israeli surprise attack of 5 June 1967 started the third Middle East War, which is now known as the Six-Day War. To the surprise and to the dismay of both the Arab world and the Eastern bloc, the war ended with an almost complete defeat of UAR, Syria and Jordan. The armed forces of Egypt and Syria, which had been modelled on the Soviet armed forces in terms of organisation, education and training, had suffered a “first-rate debacle” (Scheben 2006, 436).¹¹ The destruction of almost the entire Egyptian Air Force on the ground, in particular, was decisive for the rapid defeat. At the beginning of the war, Israel had already almost completely eliminated the Egyptian air forces. 90 percent of all Egyptian aircraft had been destroyed on the ground (Bundesarchiv 1967d, 31-33, 132f.). The very quick defeat of the Egypt and Syrian armed forces, which had been equipped with Soviet weapons, upset the equally equipped armed forces of the Eastern Bloc.

While the war was still being waged, or to be exact: only two days after the beginning of the war, on 7 June, the SED leadership decided to deliver weapons to Egypt and Syria (Bundesarchiv 1967e). As early as on 8 June, Colonel General Keßler, Chief of the Main Staff, submitted an initial report about possible National People’s Army’s services (Bundesarchiv 1967f, 251-255). Infantry weapons and ammunition were dominant among the 28 possible items to be delivered. Another two lists included heavy weapons and combat aircraft which could be provided additionally either immediately or within weeks or months after the necessary repairs would be completed.

¹¹ New research results on the evaluation and assessment of the Arab defeat in 1967 within the Warsaw Pact from Polish, Romanian and Czech sources in: Hershberg (2011) and Laron (2011).

Table 1: List of the East German MoND dated 8 June 1967 regarding additional deliveries from East German MoND holdings (excerpt)

Annex/ Item	Designation	Quantity	Possible date of delivery
2/1	T-34/85 tank	35	immediately
2/2	PMN anti-personnel mines	150.000	immediately
3	82 mm B-10 recoilless rifle	5	within a few weeks
2/6	107 mm B-11 recoilless rifle	5	within a few weeks
2/7	82 mm mortar	6	within a few weeks
2/8	120 mm mortar	6	within a few weeks
3/1	MIG-17F	30	within ten days
3/2	MIG-17F	20	After repair within several months

(Bundesarchiv 1967f, 251-255).

The deliveries were intended for both Cairo and Damascus. At this early stage, the East German MoD had not decided on the distribution of the items; it probably would not have been their decision, rather it would be a decision made at the political level. Another report dated 9 June included a further 125 positions, from aircraft engines to field telephones to flippers (Bundesarchiv 1967g, 44-49). For the sake of completeness, it should be added that the GDR supplied not only weapons and military technology to Cairo. Immediately after the end of the war, East Berlin quickly supplied food, drugs, clothing, tents and blankets worth six million Mark as emergency aid. Weapons were the most controversial and the most important issue to decide upon.

As a result of the planning of his ministry, Major General Fleißner submitted the lists of the envisaged supplies for Egypt and Syria, which had meanwhile been updated and completed, to the Office of the Council of Ministers on 14 June. In June 1967, Cairo was to receive some 90 guns and almost 10,000 small arms including a substantial amount of ammunition. In July 1967, 30 MiG-17F were to be handed over, with another 20 MiG-17 to follow in the fourth quarter of the year. The

supply of 29 RD-45 aircraft engines was planned for early 1968. Cairo's air force needed them urgently to repair the large number of aircraft that had been destroyed on the ground. According to Fleißner's calculation, the total volume of these deliveries to Egypt amounted to 10.6 million US dollars, excluding transport and incidental expenses. As a comparison: Syria was to receive military technology worth 2.5 million U.S. dollars (Bundesarchiv 1967h, Bl. 32, 33-40). The list included in the annex shows that armaments consisted of residual holdings of both the Wehrmacht (for example, 98 K carbines and light MG 34) and the Soviet Army (for example, PPSH 41) from World War II as well as of more modern weapons of Soviet production. World War II armaments were stored in East German army holdings, with some of it still in use in the mid-1960s. The MiG-17 and T-34/85 were also not state-of-the-art weapons of that time. From the outset, the military benefit for Egypt was limited against the state-of-the-art equipment of the Israeli armed forces. Nevertheless, Cairo gladly accepted the offer from East Berlin.

Cairo received an English translation of this offer of the East German MoND through the GDR Consul General there. On 11 June 1967, Prime Minister Sidki Soliman received the GDR Consul General and thanked him for the letter from East Berlin and the offers of assistance. They were "proof of the reliability of a true friend who combined political attitude with action". For Cairo, the reconstruction of its armed forces was a "vital matter", they needed to overcome the setback they had suffered (Bundesarchiv 1967i, 88f.). On 14 June, Consul General Scholz met the new Commander of the Air Force Chief, Air Marshal Abou El-Ezz. The topic of discussion was once again the letter by Stoph and the offer contained therein. When asked by the Egyptian, Scholz replied that the deliveries would be made without the conclusion of a contract, i.e., without payment, if requested. In view of its situation, Cairo reckoned on a donation, as the GDR Consulate General in Cairo reported (Bundesarchiv 1967j, 122).

In addition to other things, Egypt "immediately" requested from the GDR, like from all Eastern Bloc states, aircraft, tanks and heavy guns. During his talks in East Berlin in mid-June 1967, a senior Egyptian state bank official also asked for "aircraft, tanks and guns" (Bundesarchiv 1967k, 152-157). Egyptian partners demanded that the Eastern bloc states – whom Cairo called allies – should set up a protective umbrella over the country as the "imperialists", namely the United States, "established a protective umbrella over Israel with their aircraft". The demands were underpinned by reproaches addressed to the "socialist camp" that they shared responsibility for the defeat of the Arab armies because of their hitherto hesitant support (Bundesarchiv 1967l, 102-104).¹²

¹² Gerhard Weiß had a similar impression after his conversation with Fouad: the mood in Cairo was that the Soviet Union should have intervened (Bundesarchiv 1967m, 152-157).

Responding to Cairo's many wishes for heavy weapons, East German representatives repeatedly explained that "it was well known" that their country did not produce "heavy things" and therefore was unable to provide them. For "light things", however, there was "a great willingness to help quickly and effectively" (Bundesarchiv 1967n, 137-142). Further requests or rather demands from Cairo referred to military personnel of the GDR "both for instructional purposes and men to fight" as the Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers Gerhard Weiss noted in mid-June 1967. Weiss replied that so far there had been no thoughts to this effect since this question had never been raised before. Fouad urged Weiss to include this request in the report. Weiss believed that the request for the deployment of pilots and military advisers meant that Nasser obviously no longer had much faith in the personnel of his air force and army (Bundesarchiv 1967o, 152-157).

On 23 June, the foreign ministry in Cairo presented the GDR Consul General with new wish lists, including missiles for MiG-17, unspecified quantities and types of helicopters, 360 howitzers and 600 anti-aircraft MG (Bundesarchiv 1967p, 172, 177).¹³ At that time, representatives of the GDR foreign trade company *Technocommerce* were already in Cairo for "special negotiations" (Bundesarchiv 1967q, 51-54). The topics of discussion included the implementation of the already agreed deliveries. According to this, the majority of the material was to arrive at the port of Alexandria in late July/early August 1967. East Germany proposed to use Yugoslavia as the country of transfer for the MiG aircraft. Cairo's generals initially expressed concerns that NATO aircraft could jeopardize the security of the action. Instead, Cairo suggested that East Germany should organise the transfer with the help of Soviet transport aircraft. After the return of one of the trade representatives, Egypt's new requests reached the desk of General Fleißner via the office of the Council of Ministers. According to those requests, Cairo's Air Force urgently needed MiG-21 dummies, guided rockets as well as ammunition for aircraft and antiaircraft defence (Bundesarchiv 1967r, 226).

The main objective of Nasser and his generals was the re-establishment of an operational air force. After talks with ambassadors from other Eastern Bloc states, the GDR Consul General reported to East Berlin that Cairo would request "non-civilian command personnel and special forces" because their own "non-civilian" commanders and specialists "had failed politically at crucial points". It was impossible to train new personnel as quickly as needed. Apart from the GDR, Cairo had addressed such requests "unofficially but with an official mission" to Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria and Yugoslavia, among others (Bundesarchiv 1967s, 152-157). The term "non-civilian command personnel and special forces" meant air force personnel and pilots.

¹³ These lists would have to be submitted "directly and with the highest degree of urgency to W. Ulbricht for a decision", the answer would be "urgently expected", was explained to the Consul General.

5. Nasser Presses for Combat Aircraft and Pilots from the GDR

The visit of the Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers, Gerhard Weiss, to Cairo and other Arab capitals in early July, i.e., a few weeks after the end of the war, was of great political significance. He was accompanied by Paul Markowski, head of department at the SED Central Committee. Weiss explicitly travelled as Special Representative of Ulbricht. According to the Chief of the Main Staff of the National People's Army, Ulbricht's particular interest in supporting Egypt in the late 1960s was based on his successful visit to the country in 1965 and his personal ties with Nasser (Streletz 2009). Weiss informed President Nasser that Ulbricht himself had tasked him with discussing how the GDR might further improve its support for UAR. Nasser replied that Ulbricht should "urge and press the other socialist countries to overcome their indecisiveness". The socialist camp should finally "make immediate decisions and provide effective assistance". The United Arab Republic (UAR) had "been knocked down" and would otherwise be forced to surrender to the United States. First of all, his country needed aircraft with pilots "whether they would be referred to as volunteers or whatever". The USSR had already provided "tanks, guns and aircraft" but "this was not enough". The Egypt regarded itself as the "first line of defence for the socialist camp" and was ready to give up its non-aligned status. Nasser specifically asked the GDR also for combat aircraft. Weiss replied that the GDR did not have its own aircraft industry. Nasser painted a dark picture of the situation. He had asked the USSR to "send aircraft with pilots and to take over air command of the UAR". Israel had air supremacy. The only way was "a decisive step of the Soviet Union to break the air superiority of Israel." (Bundesarchiv 1967t, 95-111). In a first assessment of his talk with Nasser, Weiss concluded that Cairo proceeded on the assumption that another Israeli attack was imminent. Nasser's urgent request for Soviet military advisors was not only the result of the "failure" of Egypt's military leadership but also of "Nasser's justified political distrust of the senior officer corps" of his country (Bundesarchiv 1967u, 115f.). Markowski and Weiss promised Egypt military assistance worth 180 million Mark.

GDR focussed its attention not solely on the delivery of weapons. In the context of the promised military assistance, Weiss several times addressed the most important topic for GDR directly: the diplomatic recognition of the GDR. Ulbricht's envoy did not find a sympathetic ear with the Egyptians who were completely absorbed by the dire consequences of the defeat of June. Foreign Minister Mahmoud Riad replied that asking these questions now would "not be wise and would block the handling of other urgent issues." President Nasser replied that this was "not an opportune moment". Diplomatic relations would be established "as soon as [the] military and moral positions were consolidated once again" (Bundesarchiv 1967v, 20-31, 49-51). For the GDR, the generosity did not pay off politically as desired: Nasser postponed the anticipated diplomatic

recognition to a future date when the situation of the country would be improved (Bundesarchiv 1967w, 105-107).

Nasser's main concern was not the recognition of the GDR, but the Egyptian air defence. In his talks with Weiss, he openly addressed the weakness of his air force several times. Nasser explained that Egypt urgently needed aircraft with pilots. Foreign Minister Riad openly admitted that the air force, and in particular pilot training, had been neglected in the past. His country immediately needed "at least" 1,000 trained pilots (Bundesarchiv 1967x, 26f., 49). Weiss, Ulbricht and the GDR leadership, on the other hand, thought less of Nasser's air force than of the diplomatic recognition of their country. Nasser's current weakness seemed to increase the chances for that. In his report about Weiss' journey to Brezhnev of August 1967, Ulbricht focussed on such considerations without beating about the bush (Bundesarchiv 1967y, 53–64, Bl. 65-73). Prior to the visit of Nasser to Moscow in the summer of 1968, Ulbricht openly urged the Soviet party leader "to enforce the long overdue normal diplomatic relations by the end of the year" (Bundesarchiv 1968e, 79f., Bl. 81f.).

Increasing the diplomatic status also meant accrediting a military attaché in UAR. At least, in this respect the signs from Cairo were positive. As early as on 21 June 1967, the GDR Consul General raised the issue as a "personal question" at the Cairo Foreign Ministry. Due to "the complexity of the work involved and the required expertise" it would be "useful" to have an East German army officer on site as a "permanent advisor". It would be necessary, however, to accredit him to the Egypt Foreign Ministry and to the armed forces. The undersecretary replied promptly. The officer was "welcome at any time" (Bundesarchiv 1967z, 174). Foreign Minister Winzer immediately reported the good news to Ulbricht and to the party leadership: The "permanent advisor could [probably] also be employed as a military attaché". This would be in line with Ulbricht's suggestion to Minister of Defence Hoffmann to consider the deployment of military attachés to Damascus and Cairo (Bundesarchiv 1967aa, 173).

Less than seven weeks after the end of the main combat activities of the Six-Day War, a high-ranking East German army staff officer, Colonel Schönfelder, arrived in Cairo. He was to assume the duties of a military attaché with immediate effect. Officially, he served as Vice Consul at the Consulate General and worked in civilian clothing. It was Egypt and not the GDR that attached great importance to keeping the presence of the East German officer secret. During his first official visit to the head of the Office for Military Attachés in Egypt on 31 July 1967, the GDR colonel complained about "obvious misunderstandings regarding [his] status". He pointed out that his "official appearance will reflect the strengthening of relations between Egypt and the GDR to the outside world". The Egyptian colonel replied that "the decisive issue were not protocol matters, it

was the objective of our cooperation that was the focus". The Egyptian side prohibited the East German colonel from visiting other Egypt officials, including the head of the military intelligence service. These were only "unnecessary formal acts of politeness". Even liaison with the military attachés of the other socialist states would be "undesirable" in order to not jeopardize secrecy (Bundesarchiv 1967ab, 7f.).

Immediately after the establishment of full diplomatic relations in 1969, the cloak of secrecy regarding the de facto military attaché was unveiled. In an official procedure, the GDR embassy applied to the foreign ministry in Cairo for the agrément for a military, naval and air force attaché of the GDR in UAR. After Cairo's immediate agreement, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in East Berlin notified Minister Hoffmann and informed him that "Comrade Colonel Schönfelder could depart at once" (Bundesarchiv 1969a, 5). This request was probably part of an attempt to retrospectively disguise the officer's presence. His "departure" from the GDR to Cairo was no longer necessary after he had already been there for two years.

6. No East German Pilots to Egypt

Let us return to 1967. Nasser insisted on the deployment of East German air force pilots: in November 1967, while visiting East Berlin, Egypt or to be more precise: the Vice President of the ruling Arab Socialist Union (ASU) Ali Sabri approached Walter Ulbricht directly with a request for the deployment of East German military pilots. Ulbricht replied: "It was not a question of whether 20 or 40 aviators from the GDR would help UAR, volunteers could surely be found". He flatly denied the request several times as a "demonstration of a military solution". Ulbricht verbatim: "What good would a military demonstration on our part do?" Also, from the UAR's point of view this did not seem advisable to him (Bundesarchiv 1967ac, 171). Ulbricht seemed to implicitly oppose a new battle and commit to a political solution of the Middle East conflict. Sources confirm that the defeat of the Arab states came as a shock to the GDR. Soviet arms, strategy and tactics had clearly lost out to the Israeli armed forces. This might also have contributed to Ulbricht's realism in 1967. Ali Sabri replied that the despatch of pilots did not serve a military solution, but only the restoration of the military power of his country. Ulbricht explained that the GDR would be unable to provide heavy armament and aircraft since it did not manufacture them; Cairo should directly approach Moscow.¹⁴ The Egyptian repeated several times that the problem was not just about weapons, his country lacked trained pilots. It took four years to train them. References to time consuming training and the acute lack of combat pilots made a mockery of the assurance that the pilots would only be used for training and not be employed in combat. Ulbricht did not respond to

¹⁴ "The GDR itself does not produce weapons [...] because the Warsaw Pact states are uniformly equipped with Soviet weapons. [...] So it would not make sense for us to deliver Soviet weapons to UAR [United Arab Republic, Egypt]. It would be better for UAR to get them directly from the Soviet Union." (Bundesarchiv 1967ad, 174).

this obvious contradiction, however, he countered that he “had doubts whether pilots would be able to fulfil such a role.” He deemed an “effective defence against low-flying aircraft with rapid-fire weapons” much more important. Ali Sabri replied that in addition to firearms, they needed aviators to intercept attacking aircraft; Egypt did not have those pilots. Instead, Ulbricht recommended to expedite the setup of the ASU party organisation in the armed forces. It was necessary to “enforce the leading role of the party within the armed forces” and train workers to become commanders. A “strong and influential ASU [Nasser’s party Arab Socialist Union] in the armed forces was far more important than 20 or 40 pilots”, he lectured the Egyptian. The SED was ready to assist the Egyptians in the organisational setup of the ASU party. Ali Sabri insisted, however, that in view of the acute threat, “UAR above all needed an effective air defence.” The existing protocol states that the two politicians did not come to an agreement. They not only talked at cross-purposes with each other, they virtually ignored the positions of the other side (Bundesarchiv 1967ae, 174f.). What mattered in the end was Ulbricht’s firm rejection of a “demonstration of a military solution”.

The GDR did not deploy air force combat pilots to Egypt, however, its armed forces delivered combat aircraft from their holdings to Nasser: 30 MiG-17F aircraft were turned over to the Egypt Air Force in mid-August 1967. The place of transfer was the Yugoslav military airport Batajnica near Belgrade. After a last check at the Dresden Aircraft Works, groups of ten MiGs each flew to Yugoslavia where they were disassembled by East German air force experts and loaded into Egyptian transport aircraft. The subsequent assembly and instruction of the pilots in Egypt was also carried out by East German air force personnel (Bundesarchiv 1967af, 192-198). According to their commitment, the GDR was to turn over a total of 50 MiG-17F aircraft to Cairo free of charge (Bundesarchiv 1968f, 68). The GDR was probably only able to cede these aircraft because the GDR air forces introduced the more modern MiG-21 in the late 1960s. In April and May 1968, the GDR Commissioner in Cairo, Ernst Scholz, and the military representative acting as “special commissioner”, Colonel Schönfelder, urged the East German ministry of defence to promptly deliver the remaining 20 MiG aircraft: In anticipation of “further steps to consolidate the friendly relations between UAR and GDR”, Scholz asked, for instance in May 1968, “to re-examine all options regarding a possible earlier delivery date” (Bundesarchiv 1968g, 170f.). In late April, he had already pressed Gerhard Weiss to expedite the process: “In the context of further-reaching plans – we would thus be able to cite another weighty argument (contractual fidelity, mutual solidarity etc.)” (Bundesarchiv 1968h, Bl. 19-21). “Further-reaching plans” probably covered the all-dominating objective of the GDR: full diplomatic recognition by Nasser.

In October 1968, Major General Fleißner reported that the transfer of the 20 MiG aircraft was completed “in due manner”. The remaining 20 MiG-17 F aircraft were delivered to the Egyptian Air

Force after the necessary overhaul was completed in October 1968. The transfer took place at Dresden Airport not far from the Dresden Aircraft Works between 11 September and 4 October 1968 (Bundesarchiv 1968i, 129-134, 13f.). The aircraft were delivered by Egyptian transport aircraft and not by East German air force pilots. The GDR National People's Army initially paid all bills from its budget and later requested reimbursement from the ministry of finance (Bundesarchiv 1968j, 13f.).

7. 1969: Diplomatic Breakthrough and a Military Initiative by Ulbricht

Ulbricht's real interest with regard to Cairo continued to be the full diplomatic recognition of his state by Egypt. It was probably not by chance that his former Special Representative for Aiding Egypt, Gerhard Weiss, was the first GDR politician to learn of Nasser's intention to recognise the GDR diplomatically in 1969. On 30 June 1969, during his visit to East Berlin, the Egyptian Minister of the Interior informed Weiss about this intent.¹⁵

Whether the diplomatic breakthrough of East Berlin is partly due to military contacts remains a matter of speculation. All in all, the success of the GDR is the result of a favourable situation: the defeat in the Six-Day War and, above all, the strong Soviet influence on Cairo were certainly decisive factors. Ultimately, it was Moscow that earned GDR success in Egypt. However, the material support of the Egyptian military from East German army holdings probably had its share in the success of the GDR.

The diplomatic breakthrough in Cairo was – at least in terms of time – remarkably close to secret deliberations within the GDR leadership about the despatch of volunteers as “aviators, tank commanders and combat groups” to Egypt. Unlike in 1967, Ulbricht was obviously prepared to go very far to ensure and guarantee diplomatic recognition by Cairo. In a classified letter to Brezhnev in October 1969, Ulbricht explained that it was necessary to support the Arab forces in their “war of attrition” against Israel with “volunteers from the socialist countries”. But this “required careful internal preparations”: “It makes no sense to speak publicly about volunteers until certain command tasks are fulfilled.” The SED leader suggested a discussion concerning this matter among the first secretaries and chairmen of the councils of ministers of the Warsaw Pact states (Bundesarchiv 1969c, 118-120, 122-124).¹⁶ The controversial proposal had been agreed in advance with Honecker, Mielke and Army General Hoffmann (Bundesarchiv 1969d, 114f.). A reply from Moscow has not yet been found among the preserved documents. There probably had not been one, because Ulbricht

¹⁵ On 30 June 1969, Egyptian Interior Minister Gomaa informed Weiß that he was authorised by President Nasser to inform “his friends in the GDR” that he [Nasser] had decided to establish full diplomatic relations with the GDR, but requested that this information be treated as confidential. (Bundesarchiv 1969b, 142-144)

¹⁶ In letters, Ulbricht referred to proposals made by Brezhnev at the meeting on 07 October 1969. On this day, the CPSU Secretary-General Brezhnev had attended the celebrations to mark the 20th anniversary of the GDR in East Berlin.

repeated his idea in February 1970: in a meeting with the Soviet ambassador in East Berlin, he referred to his proposal to “consult with President Nasser about the expedience and time of the employment of volunteers from socialist countries” (Bundesarchiv 1970a, 154f.). So far, a reply or even a decision about the employment of “volunteer” military personnel and pilots in Egypt has not been found. The unusual proposal from East Berlin must be considered in the overall context of Moscow’s increasing military commitment to Cairo and Damascus.

The preserved and researched records do not provide any information regarding the deployment of East German military personnel in whatever capacity to Egypt and/or other Middle East states. On the other hand, they contain an unambiguous communication from Hoffmann to Ulbricht on these issues. In early August 1970, the SED leader had requested a statement from the Minister of Defence with regard to West German press reports on East German soldiers in the Middle East. Hoffmann clearly stated that such reports were incorrect. The GDR had not deployed any officers to the region. The Minister referred to weapons and equipment deliveries of his National People’s Army to Egypt, Syria, the Yemen Arab Republic and other states (Bundesarchiv 1970b, 70f.). Although Hoffmann mentioned only that there were no deployed GDR “officers”, it is more than unlikely that lower-ranking personnel would have been despatched without officers. What remains unclear, however, is why the SED leader requested the report from Strausberg at all. Ulbricht should have been informed about such deployments, especially since he himself had repeatedly pushed for such deployments in Moscow, as has been proven. The reason for the unusual request could have been the increasing isolation of Ulbricht within the SED leadership. As already explained in great detail, Honecker had largely seized the decision-making and information channels on security issues.

Conclusion

In the 1960s, East German military contacts with the Global South were primarily characterised by intra-German political competition. Ultimately, this issue was inseparably linked to the international recognition of the GDR. Both spheres of politics influenced each other and were mutually dependent. The conflict with FRG was also and especially an ideological struggle that was fought in a variety of ways, including power politics, culture and other areas, like military relations abroad. Internal sources attest the strong intra-German motivation behind the foreign contacts of the East German military even more clearly than public speeches and statements. It is surprising to what extent the competition with the FRG influenced the decision-making process. For example, the East German Ministry of Foreign Affairs elevated the supply of fabrics for uniforms from the ministry of defence to Guinea in 1969 to a key issue of foreign policy. German-German

competition, however, was not a one-way street. FRG, too, used its military contacts with the Third World to articulate and enforce its position on the German issue.

As its main argument this article has proved how and why the German Democratic Republic used its military to achieve a long hoped-for diplomatic breakthrough against the West German diplomatic blockade in two ways: first through military diplomacy and later, and more importantly, by delivering weapons. The examples show how the initiative originated in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, at least in relation to the decision-making process within the GDR. The driving force behind the establishment and development of early military contacts were GDR diplomats in East Berlin and in the field. The overriding objective of East German diplomats was the full recognition of the GDR in international policy. In the process, they also used military contacts to make their diplomatic ambitions heard. The examples also show, however, that in more than a few cases it was the African or Arab governments or military that took the actual initiative. GDR diplomats or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in East Berlin directly welcomed these wishes and requests and initiated the decision-making process.

Another possible explanation for why the GDR became involved in Africa militarily from 1967 on could be the increasing competition between the Soviet Union and China. In order to contain Chinese ambitions in Africa, the Soviet Union and states loyal to Moscow needed to increase their activities there. GDR armed forces, too, received their orders from Moscow.

The struggle between FRG and GDR focussed also on their representations in Egypt. The East German leadership saw Egypt – with good reason – as the key to the recognition of its state in the Arab world. The Federal Government was no less aware of the importance of Cairo and endeavoured to take countermeasures and block GDR's steps. Both German states competed for the favour of Cairo. The Government in Bonn was able to offer investments and development assistance. The GDR had little to offer in reply to West German funds. Military aid seemed a promising approach. Egypt's demand for weapons was immense – its armed forces were largely focused on Soviet-made equipment. The GDR clearly met an existing demand and supplied tanks, combat aircraft, firearms and ammunition. In a nutshell: East Germany countered West Germany's funds with weapons deliveries.

An assessment of the decisions for military aid merely from a GDR-specific or -domestic perspective would underrate the historical context of the Cold War. In view of these larger contexts, the decision-making processes cannot be restricted to GDR entities alone.

As a matter of principle, the GDR coordinated its activities with the leading power of the Eastern bloc, i.e., the USSR. This was true for the military assistance as well as for nearly all fields of the

East German foreign and security policy. Not every case of coordination can be proved by archived documents. Nevertheless, it should be noted what Minister of Defence Hoffmann declared towards his Soviet counterpart in 1978 and what his deputy, Colonel General Fritz Streletz, expressly confirmed in a contemporary witness interview with the author: “The GDR Ministry of Defence has so far coordinated all deliveries and services regarding military support for developing countries with the general staff of the USSR.” (Bundesarchiv 1978, 14f.). Streletz emphasized that military contacts and military aid had never been a solo effort of the GDR (Streletz 2009). The premise of consultation with “Moscow” applied.

The diplomatic blockade of East Germany by the stronger West German government ended in 1973. Chancellor Willy Brandt, who had been in power since 1969, and his social democratic-liberal reform coalition also reformed the outdated foreign policy. A basic treaty signed between the two German governments at the end of 1972 did not mean full diplomatic recognition of the East German states, but it was a *de facto* arrangement. In 1973, the flags of both German states were hoisted in front of the UN headquarters in New York. Both states became members of the UN. Embassies of the USA, Great Britain, France and many other Western countries opened in East Berlin. GDR ambassadors were accredited worldwide. Goal achieved. All good for East Germany?

No. West Germany’s diplomatic blockade brought about an inferiority complex of the GDR leadership in foreign policy, which shaped East Germany’s appearance on the international stage beyond 1972 until its end in 1989. Psychology knows the deficiency personality which seeks to counterbalance a perceived deficiency with overcompensation. As a result of the long-term competition with the FRG and its lack of internal legitimation, the GDR leadership developed an inferiority complex that sought compensation in foreign policy in the form of recognition of its statehood. This kind of overcompensation is clearly evident in the emphasis it put on protocol issues, even with regard to military delegations.

The patterns of thought and action that were established in the years of the struggle for recognition also shaped the foreign relations of the GDR and its appearance on the international stage until the end. In this respect, the West German diplomatic blockade of the GDR continued to have an effect beyond its end in the early 1970s until the end of the GDR in 1989/1990. The GDR leadership always understood solidarity with the countries of the Global South as an instrument for the recognition of its statehood and continued to do so after 1973. This solidarity with the Global South also included military support and aid for the armed forces of allied governments or liberation movements.

Success or Failure? Evaluation necessitates consideration of perspective. Different perspectives for evaluation are: that of the GDR, of the states in the Third World – additionally

differentiated according to a contemporary and today's point of view – and the perspective of today's state of research. If the diplomatic breakthrough for the GDR is the only yardstick of success or failure then the military commitment of the GDR in Egypt was successful. However, considering the long-term effects both from the contemporary perspectives of Moscow and East Berlin and today's perspective of the Arab States, the military support of Egypt provided by the GDR and the Eastern bloc was not successful. Neither extensive Soviet military aid nor the very humble GDR military aid were able to decide the wars against Israel in favour of the Arab states. In the case of Egypt, the military aids ultimately did not achieve success in a twofold sense: On the one hand, the weapons delivered by the GDR and other socialist states experienced heavy defeats in the hands of the Egyptians. On the other hand, the Eastern bloc and thus also the GDR suffered a political defeat in Cairo in the long term. In the first half of the 1970s, Egypt's leadership turned towards the United States and the Western camp. Cairo's change of allegiance was a slap in the face of the Warsaw Pact – in terms of system confrontation. Soviet Union and GDR regarded the wars between Israel and its Arab neighbours primarily as part of by the global East-West confrontation. In this thought pattern, Israel's approach was regarded as part of the “global strategy of the United States.” In the evaluation of the “East” Anwar as-Sadat's change of fronts and Egypt's future peace with Israel considerably weakened the position of the Eastern camp in the Middle East.

The extent of GDR military aid cannot be properly evaluated without consideration of benchmarks. Weapons deliveries were a usual international practice at the time, and continue to be so. The big and economically powerful FRG was far more involved in arms deals with the Third World than the GDR had ever been and was able to be, given its meagre financial and economic capabilities (Storkmann 2019, 341-351). The arms exports and other forms of military support provided by West Germany to the Middle East, in particular to Israel, and to Africa open a wide field for exciting historical research. The results of such research can be ideally compared with the results on the GDR as presented in this article. Research from the perspective of the recipients of military aid from both German states would also be very interesting. Reflecting the decision-making processes in those states with the corresponding processes in both German capitals would be a worthy challenge for future research efforts.

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