

Neo-Nazi network in German army larger than previously thought

By Johannes Stern
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The neo-Nazi terrorist cell in the German army (Bundeswehr) is much larger than previously thought. This conclusion is based on a detailed article in the latest edition of *Der Spiegel*.

According to the news magazine, investigations are on-going into seven people who were allegedly involved in preparing attacks against high-profile German politicians, including former President Joachim Gauck, Justice Minister Heiko Maas (Social Democratic Party—SPD) and the minister president of Thuringia, Bodo Ramelow (Left Party), as well as Jewish and Muslim organisations.

Along with Franco A, Matthias F and Maximilian T, who are all in custody, the right-wing extremist circle was likely “composed of at least seven people, according to information from investigators,” *Der Spiegel* wrote. The suspects include “a man who lives in the French city of Strasbourg,” “a lieutenant in the reserves who studies in Vienna,” First Lieutenant Josef R, who, like Franco A, was stationed at the German-French barracks in Illkirch, and First Lieutenant Ralf G.

Ralf G was based at the General Field Marshall Rommel Barracks in North Rhein-Westphalia. The barracks are named after Erwin Rommel, who, as commander of the Africa Corps, was built up by Hitler as a people’s hero. Colleagues had taken note of Ralf G because of his right-wing comments. He allegedly said, “Königsberg was German, is German and will always remain German,” and “if the refugees on the borders at least had weapons, we could shoot at them.”

There is much to suggest that Ralf G is part of a more widespread neo-Nazi network, which, like the Freikorps in the Reichswehr during the Weimar Republic, is preparing to murder politicians and suppress revolutionary unrest. According to

information *Der Spiegel*, Ralf G from was known to Maximilian T, the suspected author of the death list. Ralf G had boasted to Maximilian T: “In Illkirch, there is a group of officers prepared to commit acts of violence who are gathering weapons and munitions to be ready to fight on the right side if a civil war breaks out.”

It is clear that the neo-Nazi network is present in several barracks and has been built up over many years. According to a soldier stationed in Illkirch between 2010 and 2013, a “right-wing extremist network” already existed shortly after the establishment of the German-French unit in Illkirch, Donaueschingen and Hammelburg. He said that “no secret was made of their right-wing ideas” among officers and soldiers. They “chanted right-wing slogans” and insulted soldiers with Eastern European roots, calling them “canister heads.”

The exposure of a neo-Nazi network in the army is the sharpest expression of a major shift to the right by the ruling establishment. Hardly anyone in the political establishment or the media has expressed outrage or demanded that there be consequences. Instead, what has predominated are right-wing attacks against the Defence Ministry for initially offering quasi-criticisms of the army and calling for minimal measures in response to the scandal, even as it sought to downplay the scale of the terrorist cell and its broader significance.

“It is totally inappropriate and absurd to place the entire army under Wehrmacht [the name of the German army under Hitler] suspicion,” former Defence Minister Volker Rühle (Christian Democratic Union—CDU) complained in *Welt am Sonntag*. This amounts, he wrote, to a “caricature of the army.”

The chairman of the parliamentary Defence Committee, Wolfgang Hellmich (SPD), described

Defence Minister Ursula Von der Leyen's order to search all locations for Wehrmacht memorabilia as a "hectic response." He criticised the minister for speaking of a "cleansing process."

Such statements are in line with those of the far right. The chairman of the Berlin State Alternative for Germany (AfD), Georg Pazderski, described Von der Leyen's searches as a "threat to the internal integrity of the force." He denounced the measure as an effort to train soldiers to be "yes men" and "informers." Von der Leyen was, he said, emerging as "the army's gravedigger."

The AfD's anger was also directed at an order from Von der Leyen to stop the distribution of the current edition of the army songbook, which includes songs from the Nazi period, such as the "Westerwald Song" and the "Tank Song." In an interview with DPA, Pazderski raged, "Censoring the army's traditional songbook is paranoid." He denounced Von der Leyen for setting into motion a wave of "intellectual terrorism" and censorship that threatened to strip the army of "its last bit of identity."

Pazderski's remarks say a great deal about the character of the army, which has, in reality, always stood in the militarist traditions of its forebears, the Reichswehr and Wehrmacht. It was initially called the "New Wehrmacht" and was built up by Hitler's generals and former Wehrmacht officers in the 1950s. Pazderski knows this "identity" very well. He was a soldier for 41 years and retired in 2012 with the rank of colonel in the general staff.

The dangerous developments in Germany confirm the warnings made by the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SGP) and the *World Socialist Web Site*. The return of German militarism and the systematic restructuring of the army into an interventionist force capable of waging war to uphold the interests of German imperialism around the world require the revival of the old fascist traditions and structures. The same right-wing extremist circles that described as "intellectual terrorism" criticism of statements such as "Hitler was not vicious" (Humboldt University Professor Jörg Baberowski) are now agitating along the same lines against criticism of neo-Nazi tendencies in the army.

They are intervening so aggressively because strong antimilitarist sentiments predominate in the population.

According to a poll published on Thursday evening by ARD Deutschlandtrend, Germans' trust in the army is falling rapidly. While 59 percent said they had "strong trust" or "trust" in the army in July 2016, only 49 percent feel this way now. Just as many have little or no trust.

Another recent survey, conducted by the European Broadcasting Union, found that 78 percent of young people in Germany observed a rise in nationalism and thought this was a bad thing. Only 11 percent viewed growing nationalism as a positive development. Almost two-thirds of young people declared they were not ready to fight in a war. By contrast, the poll showed that more than half of young people in Europe were prepared to take part in a "large uprising against those in power."

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