

Three-star general stands for far-right Alternative for Germany in mayoral election

By Christopher Lehmann
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On Tuesday evening, the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) selected 64-year-old Joachim Wundrak, with 98 percent of the vote, as its candidate for the Hannover mayoral election on October 27. The former three-star general is the highest-ranking military figure to openly support the AfD.

Wundrak was one of 10 Luftwaffe (air force) lieutenant-generals until September of last year. This is the second highest rank in the Bundeswehr (armed forces) in peacetime. He was only outranked by Inspector General Eberhard Zorn, a four-star general. Wundrak was recently commander of the Air Operations Centre and the Combined Air Operations Centre (CAOC) in the cities of Kalkar and Udem, in North Rhine-Westphalia.

Wundrak's work enabled him to develop a close international network. Among others duties, he commanded the Joint Force Air Component Headquarters. This headquarters plans and leads the use of the air forces of several nations, e.g., in the context of the NATO Response Force or the European Battle Group.

The Air Operations Centre, last commanded by Wundrak, currently directs the deployment of the Luftwaffe in Estonia, where German Eurofighter jets are operating together with NATO partners at the Russian border. From August 8, 2008 to March 31, 2009, he served as chief of staff of Operation Althea, formally the European Union Force Bosnia and Herzegovina (EUFOR), on assignment abroad in Sarajevo. In Kabul, Afghanistan, he served as deputy chief of staff for air in the International Security Assistance Force's Joint Command from February 21, 2011 to December 7, 2011.

According to representatives of the Bundeswehr, Wundrak enjoys an extraordinary reputation both

within Germany and abroad. He "has made a significant contribution to the further development of the use of air forces in the transatlantic alliance." He was awarded the Federal Cross of Merit, the highest and only merit award of the Federal Republic of Germany.

Last September, Wundrak retired after 44 years in the Bundeswehr in a large-scale farewell ceremony. At that time, he was keeping his AfD membership secret. Immediately after the military tattoo, a martial event in which soldiers held a torchlight parade in their combat helmets in the market square of Kalkar in the evening, Wundrak announced that he had been a member of the AfD since January. "The AfD is the only party that still values the sovereignty of Germany," he said.

When younger, he explained, he had been close to the Social Democratic Party (SPD). The right-wing SPD hardliner Helmut Schmidt had been his "political hero." However, because the policies of the SPD became far too "left-wing" for him, he had joined the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) in 2008. The general stressed that he had resigned from the CDU before the 2014 refugee crisis. Referring to his good contacts in the Federal Police, many of whom share his opinions, he said that the crisis had been foreseeable and he had not really felt "at home" in the CDU.

Three-star general Wundrak is the highest-ranking military figure in the AfD so far, but by no means the only one. The AfD is teeming with former and active officers and members of other sections of the state security apparatus among its officials and parliamentarians.

Retired Colonel Georg Pazderski is deputy federal chairman of the right-wing extremist party and leader of its Berlin state association. He greeted Wundrak with the words, "I am happy about every comrade who

finds his way to us and gets involved. General Wundrak is a great asset for our party.”

Uwe Junge, a retired lieutenant colonel, also welcomed Wundrak, tweeting, “Those who want to serve their country, are right with us! Welcome aboard, general!” Junge heads the state association and the AfD parliamentary faction in Rhineland-Palatinate. On Twitter, he commented on the appointment of the new defence minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer with the words, “When will we finally see the rebellion of the generals?”

The AfD state association in North Rhine-Westphalia could also soon be led by a former Bundeswehr officer. Retired Colonel Rüdiger Lucassen is presently under discussion for the office. Lucassen is currently the AfD co-chair on the Defence Committee of the German Bundestag (parliament) and defence policy spokesman for its parliamentary group. His comrade and party colleague Jan Nolte, who maintains close links with the far-right camp, is also a member of the defence committee.

According to the *ild* newspaper, the AfD estimates that at least 2,100 of its 35,000 members are professional soldiers. In addition, the party said there were currently 11 former professional soldiers representing the far-right party in the Bundestag. On the one hand, the high proportion of active and former soldiers in the top echelons of the AfD shows the great influence the party has on the Bundeswehr, in which there are large right-wing extremist networks. On the other hand, it expresses the turn by the ruling elites and the military towards the AfD.

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party) has stated: “Like the rise of the Nazis, the AfD is not an industrial accident. Under conditions of the deepest crisis of capitalism since the 1930s, wars all around the world and growing conflicts between the major powers, the extreme right is being deliberately encouraged by the ruling class in order to push through its policy of militarism, stepping up the powers of the state at home and abroad, and social cuts against the opposition of the population.”

The ruling class in Germany, including major parts of the Bundeswehr, is well aware that it can only suppress the massive opposition to militarism, war preparations and great power politics with the help of the right-wing extremists.

Retired Lieutenant-General Jochaim Wundrak claims hypocritically that he strongly condemns “what was done in Nazi Germany by the Nazis.” At the same time, he proclaims that the AfD is going to become a *Volkspartei* (people’s party) and that it must “set broad limits” in regard to the *völkisch* (ultra-nationalist) party wing around Björn Höcke. The statement by party leader Alexander Gauland that Hitler and the Nazis were “just so much bird shit in over a thousand years of successful German history,” Wundrak considered an “unfortunate choice” of words. A lot had been read into that, he said. He himself was proud of “the long-standing German culture and history.”

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