

Right-wing networks in the German state exposed

By Peter Schwarz
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Heike Kleffner, Matthias Meisner (editors), Extreme Sicherheit: Rechtsextreme in Polizei, Verfassungsschutz, Bundeswehr und Justiz, (Extreme Security: Right-wing extremists in the police, secret service, Armed Forces and justice system), published by Herder, Freiburg, 2019

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The editors of *Extreme Sicherheit* write that the book, published in German in February of this year, presents “for the first time in book form, a comprehensive analysis of right-wing networks inside the state apparatus in Germany.” The book consists of 30 individual articles written by some three dozen investigative journalists. It brings together a wealth of material about violent neo-Nazi groups and right-wing extremist networks in the police, the legal system, the Bundeswehr (Army) and the secret service, as well as their connections and interactions.

Whoever wants to understand how it is possible that some 75 years after the fall of the Third Reich a neo-Nazi could attack a synagogue in Halle, and why Germany once again has a serious problem with Nazis and purveyors of anti-Semitism, should read this book. Most of the contributions are based on previous research, reports of parliamentary committees of inquiry, statements in court proceedings, and similar material—reporting things that are already known. Nevertheless, the book is worth reading because in the course of 300 pages it brings together different pieces of information that until now have been reported only in separate places.

It paints a convincing picture that leads to one conclusion: It is impossible to attribute the right-wing networks in the state apparatus and their connections to the militant neo-Nazi scene simply to “isolated cases” or “anomalies.” Rather, the state security apparatus is itself a breeding ground for right-wing extremism. The Office for the Protection of the Constitution (Verfassungsschutz), as the secret service is called, the Bundeswehr and parts of the police and legal system are not just “blind in the right eye,” they deliberately provide cover for, promote, organise and finance right-wing extremist networks and shield them from public gaze.

This process has intensified with the rise of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD). This book proves that the right-wing extremist party—which, as no other, agitates against foreigners, glorifies Hitler’s Wehrmacht (Army) and downplays the crimes of the Nazis—is anchored in the state apparatus. Fifteen percent of its Bundestag (federal parliament) representatives and 10 percent of its state parliamentary deputies have a military background extending beyond basic military service. Eight percent are former police officers or have been given leave to serve in parliament. In all other parties this proportion is only half to a quarter as high.

But at this point, the book abruptly ends. The authors seem determined to close their eyes to the abyss they themselves have uncovered. Not one of them asks about or seeks to examine the deeper social causes of growing right-wing extremism. Although there are similar developments in almost all countries, and the historical parallels with National Socialism (Nazism) are obvious, they do not look beyond the national horizons or

gaze back into history to draw political conclusions. Instead, the book contains moral appeals and proposals to combat right-wing extremism within the state apparatus through awareness-raising, education and other homeopathic remedies.

In the eyes of the editors and authors, the task of the secret service, the Bundeswehr and the police is to protect democracy. They write in the preface that the book concerns “the institutions, and their officials, whose central tasks are to protect the democratic constitutional state and the people who live here.”

They continue: “We ask, how many concerns must we have about who protects the democratic order—and where it suddenly seems vulnerable.” This view of the state as the grantor of democratic rights—as opposed to the Enlightenment concept, articulated in the American Declaration of Independence, of “unalienable rights” that reside with the people—is deeply rooted in the traditions of the German authoritarian state (Obrigkeitsstaats). It is more in line with a military dictatorship than a democracy and it blinds the authors to the right-wing development that is taking place not only inside the state apparatus, but within the entire ruling class.

Germany’s return to militarism and great power politics initiated in 2014 by the grand coalition of Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) and Social Democrats (SPD), the government’s adoption of the AfD’s vicious refugee policy, and its imposition of increasingly harsh police laws have strengthened and encouraged right-wing extremists in the state and in society. This shift to the right is supported by all the establishment parties. The ruling class is reacting to growing social tensions. As in the 1930s, it relies on a strong state and fascism to suppress the mounting opposition of the working class and the youth to social inequality and capitalism.

No homeopathic remedies can help against this. It requires the mobilisation of a broad movement on the basis of an anti-capitalist, socialist programme. The secret service and the Bundeswehr must be dissolved.

Although the book’s authors evade these questions, they nevertheless provide vivid material that makes clear how closely the radical right-wing networks in the state apparatus are intertwined with both terrorist Nazi groups and the highest levels of establishment politics.

From the neo-Nazi National Socialist Underground to the Lübcke murder

This is clearly shown in the complex web that ranges from the National Socialist Underground (NSU) terrorist cells to the murderer of Kassel’s regional president, Walter Lübcke. Several articles in the book deal with various aspects of this web. They paint a picture of a broad network that extends from the neo-Nazi scene and the state secret services of Thuringia and Hesse up to the highest government offices, and whose lines intersect surprisingly again and again.

The origins of this network go back to the beginning of the 1990s,

when, following German reunification, the secret service and the state criminal offices (LKA) were established in the federal states that had constituted the former East Germany. For this task, “experts” from West Germany were for the most part employed. Their most important qualification was vehement anti-communism.

In Thuringia, Helmut Roewer, who had begun his career in the secret service, headed the state secret service. Uwe Kranz, a senior police officer from Rhineland-Palatinate, headed the LKA. Both are today “welcome speakers and authors among right-wing populists and conspiracy theorists,” writes the editor of public broadcaster MDR, Axel Hemmerling, one of the contributors to *Extreme Security*. “Their biographies are typical of a generation of high-ranking representatives from the police and intelligence services in the old Federal Republic [West Germany] who openly profess to right-wing extremist positions.”

Roewer played a key role in building up the neo-Nazi scene from which the NSU emerged. Its leaders were used as “sources” by the secret service. They were generously financed, their role was downplayed to the public and they were protected from investigation by the police.

The best known of these sources, or Confidential Informants (CIs), is Tino Brandt, the head of Thuringia Homeland Security (THS), a tightly organised neo-Nazi organisation from which the core of the NSU (Uwe Böhnhardt, Uwe Mundlos and Beate Zschäpe) emerged. Brandt received a total of 200,000 D-marks tax-free from the secret service for his duties as a nark.

Hemmerling writes: “The secret service also pays for his travel costs and equipment—cell phones, computers, fax machines, modems. Brandt networked nationwide and built up Thuringia Homeland Security with the support of the secret service.” Roewer also sought to protect his “source.” The author notes: “All 30 preliminary investigations against Brandt were stopped.”

Brandt was not Roewer’s only “top source.” Thomas Dienel, a former leader of the neo-Nazi German National Party (NPD), who had served several prison terms, met 93 times with the secret service, cashing in 30,000 D-Marks for his services. Another top source was inside the right-wing, militant neo-Nazi network Blood and Honour.

Roewer did not limit himself to financing leading neo-Nazis. He also became active in his own right. Under the code name Stephan Seeberg, using nominal capital of 50,000 D-Marks (taken from the taxpayer), he founded the publisher Heron. “A ‘think tank’ came about,” says Hemmerling, “which is fed mainly by right-wing conservative, historical revisionist and anti-Semitic texts and ways of thinking.”

When the NSU trio of Böhnhardt, Mundlos and Zschäpe went underground in 1998 after a bomb workshop was discovered in Jena, they were supported by Roewer. “His top source, Brandt, even keeps phone contact with those who had gone to ground,” writes Hemmerling. “The state secret service is kept in the picture, even about armaments and the direction of escape. None of this is revealed to the police.” Via Brandt, the secret service provided the three with 2,000 D-Marks so that they could buy false passports.

The Thuringia state secret service also knew about the first bank robberies by the NSU trio but did not pass on the information. The first Thuringia NSU state committee of investigation, which dealt with these incidents, concluded that it was no longer justifiable to “speak only of ‘unfortunate circumstances,’ ‘mishaps’ or ‘mistakes.’” Rather, the “suspicion of deliberate sabotage or the deliberate hindrance of finding the fugitives” was closer to the mark.

Roewer was able to hold office until 2000, thanks to the support of Social Democratic Party Interior Minister Richard Dewes. Dewes’s successor, Christian Köckert (Christian Democratic Union—CDU), then ensured that Roewer could take early retirement at age 50. Since then, the state-paid pensioner has appeared as a right-wing orator and publicist, writing for the far-right *Compact* magazine and *Junge Freiheit* and

publishing books under the auspices of the extreme right-wing Ares publishing house in Graz.

Roewer was not alone. His deputy at the head of the Thuringia secret service, Peter Jörg Nocken, was responsible for the recruitment of “sources” and had close contact with them. Nocken is suspected of having warned the Thuringia Blood and Honour boss Marcel D., who maintained contact with the NSU supporters circle, about a police raid in the autumn of 2000.

Nocken’s role is also important because he maintained close links with the secret service in Hesse, from where he originally came. He had already caused a scandal there. In the case of the still unexplained murder in 1989 of the head of Deutsche Bank, Alfred Herrhausen, he is suspected of having provided a false lead to a supposed third generation of the Red Army Faction.

Not only the intelligence services, but also the neo-Nazi scenes in Thuringia and Hesse and the corresponding “sources” are closely intertwined. For example, a few days before their ninth murder, which they committed in Kassel, NSU members Böhnhardt and Mundlos participated in the birthday party of a leading neo-Nazi in the northern Hesse city at which the man who later murdered Lübke, Stephan Ernst, was probably present.

On April 6, 2006, when Halit Yozgat was killed in his Kassel Internet café by two shots to the head, Andreas Temme, an officer of the Hesse secret service, was present in person. The reason for this has never been satisfactorily clarified. Temme claims he was there completely by accident and did not notice anything, while his superior, the then-Hesse interior minister and today’s state premier, Volker Bouffier, ensured that files that could provide information were kept secret for decades.

In the book, based on investigations by the Hesse NSU Committee of Inquiry, historian Jens Eumann of the *Freie Presse Chemnitz* reports on the close links between Temme, Bouffier and Nocken. They operated via an unofficial “CDU working party” in the Hesse secret service, at whose meetings all three participated. Thus, Temme and Bouffier met on September 12, 2000—three days after the first NSU murder and six years before the Kassel murder—in person in this circle.

Nordkreuz, Hannibal and Franco A

The second comprehensive conspiracy in the state apparatus, with which several of the book’s contributions deal, involves elite units of the Bundeswehr and the police. This became the subject of headlines in April 2017, when Bundeswehr officer Franco A. was arrested because he had registered as a refugee under a false identity and apparently planned to carry out right-wing extremist attacks.

Franco A., who despite ongoing investigations is still free, was a first lieutenant in the 291 Jägerbataillon of the German-French Brigade when his activities were uncovered. He had already come to notice during his military studies for his right-wing extremist positions, which were covered up by his superiors and did not damage his military career.

By now, it is clear that Franco A. is just one link in an extensive network that has hoarded vast arsenals and created kill lists of left-wing opponents. For a long time, the existence of this network was downplayed, its members referred to as so-called “preppers” (survivalists) and their identities concealed by those in the highest places.

The central figure in this network is André S., born in 1985 in Halle, an elite soldier of the top-secret Special Forces Squad (KSK) of the Bundeswehr. In chat groups in which he participated under the name “Hannibal,” and through the Uniter association founded by him, André S. led a right-wing network that extends throughout Germany and into Austria and Switzerland. The Uniter association, which camouflages itself as a relief organisation for members of elite units of the Bundeswehr, the police and private security services, performs paramilitary exercises and has “its own defence squad.” Hannibal also maintains close contact with

the Military Counter-Intelligence Service (MAD).

Franco A. was in contact with Hannibal and met him several times in person. From Uniter there are direct links to the terrorist network of the NSU. For example, Ringo M., who founded Uniter together with Hannibal, was an employee of the Baden-Württemberg state secret service. The chapter in *Extreme Security* titled “Hannibal’s network” states that even before Franco A. “joined the secret service in 2015, he was a member of the very police unit in Böblingen where policewoman Michèle Kiesewetter served, who was shot by the right-wing terrorist NSU in April 2007 in Heilbronn under circumstances not yet completely clarified.”

Two other members of this small police unit, including Kiesewetter’s immediate superior, were former members of the Ku Klux Klan. This German offshoot of the American KKK also included the secret service source “Corelli,” who was active in the immediate environs of the NSU and who died unexpectedly in 2014 at the age of 40, allegedly due to undiagnosed diabetes.

The real motives for the murder of Kiesewetter have still not been established. Files were kept under wraps and people tipped off about police searches. Hannibal’s accommodation in the Bundeswehr Calw barracks was also “clean” when the federal prosecutor’s office had it searched in September 2017.

The most well-known part of the network around Hannibal is the Nordkreuz group, which the attorney general has been investigating since August 2017. But there are also other groups in other parts of the country about which little is known. The attorney general took over the case after it had been systematically downplayed and covered up by the Mecklenburg-Pomerania state Interior Ministry under Lorenz Caffier (CDU).

The Nordkreuz group has approximately 30 suspected members, including former elite soldiers and members of the Special Forces Unit (SEK) of the State Police and Criminal Investigation Department. They were preparing for a so-called “Day X,” which might “come about, for example, following a further intake of a larger number of refugees in Germany,” as *Tagesspiegel* correspondent Robert Kiesel writes in the book.

The investigators found “so-called enemy lists on which there are about 25,000 names” in the possession of the main suspects. They were to be “picked up” on Day X, interned and murdered in selected Bundeswehr barracks. According to the secret service, the defendants “pushed their plans forward with enormous intensity.” For example, in June 2019, the media reported “an order list prepared by alleged Nordkreuz members, which included 200 body bags and quicklime.”

Although the investigations have been running for two years, it was not until June 2019 that a weapons cache was unearthed linked to one of the main suspects, former SEK member Marko G. The search revealed “more than 10,000 rounds of ammunition,” apparently stolen by three other SEK officials since 2012, as well as “an ‘Uzi’ type machine gun and a silencer.”

The main suspects in the Nordkreuz investigation are “not only well connected with each other, their contacts reach into parliament and the interior committee at the Schwerin Castle,” seat of the state legislature. For example, two participants, “Horst S. and Jörg S.” were “for many years members of the Mecklenburg-Pomerania Regional Security and Support Company (RSU), which had been commissioned in 2013.”

Horst S. was even a company commander. The RSU is meant to support the Bundeswehr in case of an emergency and has access to weapons. Horst S. and Jörg S. also had connections “to the Thule seminar, a far-right association founded in Kassel.”

As soldiers, the two were stationed in the same barracks as Nikolaus Kramer, the parliamentary group leader of the AfD in the Schwerin state parliament. After the investigation began, Kramer made a show of

solidarity with Nordkreuz by appointing one of the main suspects, AfD member Haik J., as deputy chairman of the AfD state committee for “Internal Security, Justice and Data Protection.”

At a birthday party, another suspect, Rostock lawyer Jan-Hendrik H., organised, “according to witness testimony, a shooting competition behind his house and provided a challenge cup for the winner bearing the name of the Rostock NSU murder victim Mehmet Turgut.”

The book dispels the myth that the Bundeswehr would act against extreme right-wing tendencies within its ranks. After the unmasking of Franco A., then-Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen announced with great fanfare that she was putting an end to the preservation of Wehrmacht traditions and Nazi symbols in the Bundeswehr. But that was only for public consumption. Several contributions in the book describe the continuing right-wing atmosphere in the Bundeswehr.

“I have experienced how comrades are forcibly transferred because they have displayed right-wing views and that did not go down well in the unit,” Caroline Walter, editor of the ARD magazine *Panorama*, quotes an officer as saying. Those who raise reports internally are more likely to be pilloried than those reported on.

The criteria of the Military Counter-Intelligence Service to classify a soldier as an extremist are set “so high that often not even neo-Nazis shouting out ‘Sieg Heil’ would be included.” Although at a 2017 farewell party for a company commander of the KSK elite unit, right-wing extremist music was played and the Hitler salute given, MAD responded to a Bundestag request in 2019 that it had found no “recognised extremists” in the KSK since 2012.

Wehrmacht units that were involved in war crimes continue to be honoured by the Bundeswehr. “A reaction usually comes only when a scandal becomes public,” writes Walter. “The cult around the Wehrmacht, the invoking of a supposed fighter type from this time persists in some units of the Bundeswehr,” she adds. In addition to several other examples, she cites the Luftwaffe (Air Force) 74 Squadron in Neuburg, Bavaria, which still honours its former namesake Werner Mölders, although the unit was renamed in 2005 because Mölders was deeply involved in the crimes of the Nazi regime.

Further cases

In addition to the cases cited above, the book documents numerous other cases of far-right networks in the state apparatus.

Three contributions deal with networks in the police forces of Hesse, Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria. For example, Frankfurt lawyer Seda Basay-Yildiz, who defended NSU victims, received death threats against herself and her two-year-old daughter that were signed “NSU 2.0.” Investigations revealed that her address had been retrieved from a Frankfurt police computer and that there was a chat group that included several police officers where right-wing extremist and anti-Semitic posts were exchanged. Basay-Yildiz has written a preface to the book.

The book also includes three contributions concerning right-wing extremist judges and prosecutors. Among other things, they deal with Martin Zschächner, a prosecutor in Gera, Thuringia, who was nicknamed “Jura-Nazi” as a law student and who prosecuted an artist group for forming a criminal organisation because it had protested against Thuringian AfD leader Bernd Höcke.

The same contribution looks at Dresden judge Jens Maier, who belongs to the *völkische* (extreme nationalist) wing of the AfD and sits for the party in the Bundestag. Among other things, Maier defended the Norwegian assassin Andres Breivik on the grounds that he had “become a mass murderer out of desperation.”

One essay is dedicated to the Freiburg prosecutor Thomas Seitz, who describes refugees as “invaders” and “Migrassoren” (a derogatory term for migrants), and calls Barack Obama a “quota n****r.” Seitz is now a member of parliament. He is one of 46 civil servants sitting in federal and

state parliaments for the AfD—and one of the few against whom there are current proceedings to revoke his civil servant status.

Another chapter deals with the “grey areas” between the state and right-wing extremist networks. It discusses numerous cases involving collaboration between state security agencies and neo-Nazis against left-wingers.

Finally, the book looks at the former president of the secret service Hans-Georg Maassen, whose public defence of the AfD and a far-right demonstration in Chemnitz opened many eyes to the fact that the secret service, called the Office for the Protection of the Constitution (Verfassungsschutz), protects not the constitution, but the Nazis.

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