

Germany: Huge security operation exposed in wake of G8 summit

Marius Heuser
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The G8 summit in Heiligendamm in northern Germany, held June 6-8, has come and gone. It is only now that the meeting of world leaders at the Baltic Sea coast is over that a full picture is emerging more clearly of the massive security operation that accompanied it.

The large-scale police raids against summit protesters in May, the 12-kilometre security fence surrounding the location, and the largest mobilisation of German police (17,000) since the end of the Second World War made the headlines. However, there were other critical aspects of the security operation that received scant attention by the media. This includes the deployment of the army and air force against demonstrators, the detention for several hours of demonstrators in metal cages reminiscent of the US prison camp at Guantanamo Bay, and numerous attacks on the right to protest.

When one looks at the security operation as a whole, a picture emerges of a gigantic rehearsal for a civil war, an operation that was systematically prepared for over a year and a half, and whose methods and measures either tested or fully overstepped legal boundaries.

German Interior Minister Wolfgang Schäuble (Christian Democratic Union—CDU) has consistently campaigned to permit the deployment of the military inside Germany, but his efforts have been rebuffed so far by both parliament and the German Constitutional Court. However, he was finally able to test his proposals during the G8 summit.

Claiming it was merely a matter of providing “administrative assistance,” Tornado surveillance planes previously used in Afghanistan flew at 150 metres above the protesters’ camp taking photographs. This was probably also the rationale for the many armoured scout vehicles stationed around Heiligendamm. Some of the 1,100 army soldiers deployed were also used against demonstrators.

Given this massive security operation, the violent clashes between the police and demonstrators that occurred on June 2 in Rostock can be seen in a new light. Pictures of stone-throwers and exaggerated reports of police injuries served to justify the security measures and the brutal reaction of the police against peaceful demonstrators.

In a June 7 article (See “Anti-G8 demonstration violence in Rostock: questions and contradictions”), the WSWs questioned the degree to which undercover police agents played a role in the clashes. We referred to media reports stating that undercover agents had systematically infiltrated protest groups since the start of the year.

It has since become known that the police also infiltrated the so-called anarchist “black bloc” group. In one case that has come to light, demonstrators were able to unmask and identify one of these persons as a police officer. As a result, the Mecklenburg police admitted that some of its members were operating in plainclothes.

Security preparations for the G8 summit were initiated one and a half years ago by the Interior Ministry of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, when it established the Special Assembly Organisation (BAO), known as “Kavala,” to prepare and coordinate the largest police operation in the history of postwar Germany. Kavala is the name of a northern Greek city,

which, like Heiligendamm, is also known as the white city on the sea. By March 2007, Kavala had 367 police officers. During the G8 operation, they were accompanied by a further 570 administrative staff.

The methods used by Kavala against demonstrators are not those of a democratic state, but rather one under martial law. This found its most extreme expression in the construction of an internment camp, in which more than 1,000 people were held under oppressive conditions.

The reports, photos and video footage of this camp that found their way into the public domain are shocking. In sweltering conditions, demonstrators were held for hours on end in cages that were erected inside a large hall. Every drink of water, every visit to the toilet had to be requested and was registered in writing. The pictures were distressingly reminiscent of the US prison camp at Guantanamo.

According to estimates by the Republican Association of Lawyers (RAV), 95 percent of those held were arrested without a reason. Most of them were released immediately after finally appearing before a magistrate. According to their lawyers, those who were able to have their cases heard quickly only managed to do so because they wanted to escape the inhuman conditions.

The RAV issued the following description of the situation inside the camp: “Metal cages were built inside a large industrial hall on premises owned by Siemens, each one holding up to 20 people. The temporary cells were approximately 25 square metres in size and the interiors could be seen from all sides, including from above. Men and women were placed in adjacent cells, where they could see one another. Those detained had to sleep on the floor, on 1-centimetre-thick rubber mats. The hall was permanently lit at night and was under constant video surveillance. In addition, police regularly patrolled the cells from above. It was not possible for the detainees to have showers. They only received a piece of bread, a slice of meat and when requested, water. The police not only had to document every visit to the toilet, but every time a detainee had some water.”

Eyewitnesses provided further details of the inhuman treatment inside the cells. One inmate wrote on the *Indymedia* web site that he had to wait hours to see a doctor who used a non-sterile needle to prick his finger to determine his blood-sugar level. After the magistrate discharged him, he still had to remain another seven hours in custody. One woman reported being threatened; police took out their batons and amused themselves by pretending to beat her (see <http://de.indymedia.org/2007/06/183093.shtml>).

Another casualty of the massive police operation was the right to demonstrate. The clashes provoked in Rostock between protesters and police were used by the German Constitutional Court to justify banning a march to Heiligendamm, permission for which had been granted in October of last year. In their ruling, the judges explained that although the actions of the police had bordered on illegality, the high number of police injuries and the immense damage done to property meant the demonstration had to be banned.

However, without court approval, Kavala prevented other peaceful and approved demonstrations from taking place. On the Monday before the summit, police attempted to prevent a registered demonstration for immigrant rights from occurring. The Kavala public relations department later said that police had suspected 2,500 anarchists were among the protesters. This announcement was contradicted by the police officer in charge at the scene, who said that no crime had been committed by the demonstrators. Nevertheless, he received an order from above to prevent the protesters from marching. In the end, the officer was told to break up the march.

Another method used to torpedo democratic rights was the use of violence against peaceful demonstrators. During the conflict in Rostock on June 2, the police repeatedly moved rioters in the direction of protesters and used tear gas and water cannon against those who were not involved. Although the police apprehended hardly any of the perpetrators, many demonstrators reported arbitrary violence used against peaceful protesters.

A photo sent to the RAV, which later appeared in the media, documented the brutality of the police. It showed a demonstrator lying on the ground with a white T-shirt tightly wrapped around his head. Standing around him are heavily armed police. The anonymous eyewitness who took the photo reported that the victim was struck down by police and his head banged against the pavement several times. The police placed the T-shirt around his head and neck. The police engaged in an orgy of violence, the witness said.

On Thursday, June 7, a completely peaceful blockade of the western gate of the perimeter fence was dispersed with water cannons, tear gas and batons. Numerous victims reported receiving serious injuries, and two had to be carried from the scene. The injuries were not accidental but deliberately inflicted. A woman was blinded in one eye because the water cannons had not been aimed at the demonstrators' legs, but at their heads.

One protester wrote on the *Indymedia* web site that he had been assaulted during police questioning. The police had made serious threats to him, saying, "I would really love to smash your lights out, it would be worth the complaint," followed by, "If you do lodge a complaint, we'll strike you from the list, take you to a forest and no one will notice anything" (see: <http://de.indymedia.org/2007/06/183412.shtml>).

These reports are not just isolated cases. The RAV summarised: "Some of our clients' faces were still black and blue as a result of the beatings they had received while in custody. This caused magistrates to ask worried questions."

In addition, hundreds of people were banned from demonstrating altogether. For many, it was enough just to be wearing wear sunglasses or a scarf. Many of these bans were later viewed as disproportionate by the Constitutional Court. Many were banned for several days, and even from the entire city and surrounding area.

Arbitrary and brutal searches were also conducted. On the Tuesday before the demonstration in Rostock, police stopped and searched an entire bus filled with protesters. When the police could not find anything incriminating, all 42 passengers were taken into custody and treated as criminals. Among them were a one-and-a-half-year-old baby and her mother. All were finally released from the internment camp at midnight.

Medics, journalists and lawyers were systematically prevented from conducting their work, in some cases violently. The RAV reported that Dietmar Sasse, a lawyer on his way to see his clients in the internment camp, was stopped by police and his car searched. He was hit and dragged over the road for 100 metres. On the same day, another lawyer was violently separated from his client who had just been arrested. The freelance photographer Daniel Rosenthal was arrested without cause and was only later released after appearing before a magistrate.

In order to divert attention from the violent acts of the police, to deceive the public and to justify the massive security operation, the police and

media spread a web of disinformation.

Kavala, for example, released absurd figures about the violent clashes that occurred on June 2, claiming that 3,000 violent culprits had attacked police, injuring 433 of them, 30 seriously.

Later, it was revealed that only two police officers needed medical attention in hospital, the common standard for considering whether somebody has been seriously injured. Many police were injured after the wind blew their own tear gas back towards them.

The figure of 3,000 violent offenders also seems to be plucked out of the air. In the numerous video accounts of the demonstrators that have been posted on the Internet, only a small number of rioters can be seen, totalling perhaps just a few hundred. The 3,000 number seems to be based on the number of those in the so-called black bloc from which the rioters came, but who were under no circumstance all rioters. Many demonstrators in this group were only concerned about the treatment of illegal immigrants and sought to demonstrate peacefully. The organisers of the black bloc had made their position against violence clear during the demonstrations.

From the very beginning, the tactics of the police were based on confrontation. Eyewitnesses reported seeing "anarchists" who did not appear to fit the usual profile for such protesters and who later disappeared in the direction of the police lines. The police later confirmed that undercover agents were working among the demonstrators.

On Wednesday, during a blockade of a checkpoint, activists recognised a police officer from Bremen dressed in the black clothes of the black bloc and mixing among them. According to Henning Oben from the BlockG8 group, this officer, along with four others, had previously encouraged anarchists from the Czech Republic to perform violent acts. When the five men were confronted by protesters, four of them fled. The officer from Bremen was, however, detained and handed over to police, then mixing in with their ranks.

The spokesman for Kavala, Ulf Claassen, initially rejected all such accusations. He was quoted by *Spiegel Online*, saying, "The fact is that we are not missing any officers. They are not Kavala police officers." In his opinion, this sort of thing "does not belong in a democratic state. It would be unacceptable and unreasonable."

Demonstrators reacted by threatening to publish pictures of the officer if the police did not admit that he was in fact an undercover agent. In a press release on the Friday during the summit, the Mecklenburg police finally admitted that the man was in fact a police officer from Bremen who was active as an "undercover agent." The press release stated: "The operation of such civilian forces is part of the de-escalation strategy and serves exclusively to help identify violent demonstrators."

There is no reason to believe the police version rather than the eyewitness reports. The police only admitted that an officer from Bremen was working in the demonstrators' midst after the scale of the evidence proved incontrovertible. Claassen had earlier attempted to justify this avoidance of the truth. After the press release admitted the operation of undercover agents, he explained, "This is the new state of things. What I said yesterday, concerned yesterday. What I say today, concerns today."

During the week of the summit, the police systematically issued and spread false reports.

The strategy of the police could not have succeeded if not for the assistance provided by the media. After the street battles in Rostock, radio, television and the press were filled with horror stories about the events at Rostock harbour. They described "civil war conditions," in which demonstrators had fought the police with "untold brutality." The tabloid *Bild* newspaper even ran the headline "Do you want to cause deaths, you crazies?"

Even the liberal media like the *Frankfurter Rundschau* and the *Tageszeitung* uncritically repeated the police reports. Hardly a single commentator questioned the myth of the police's "de-escalation"

strategy. The media simply repeated nearly every police untruth. It was only after the end of the summit that critical comments started to appear.

The media campaign took a bizarre form regarding a speech given by the well-known anti-globalisation critic and winner of the Right Livelihood Award, Walden Bello. Bello said to demonstrators assembled at the end of the march: “Two years ago, they said we shouldn’t bring the war into the discussion. We should just concentrate on fighting poverty. But I say: We have to bring the war in here. For without peace there can be no fight against poverty.”

While Bello had said that the Iraq war should be made a theme of the demonstrators, the German Press Agency (DPA) went on to characterise him as a “spokesman of the militant scene,” putting the following words in his mouth: “We have to bring war into this demonstration. We can achieve nothing by peaceful means.”

This quote spread like wildfire throughout the media; *Spiegel-Online* even used it as the title for one of their articles. Other newspapers embellished their stories, using the false quotation to embellish their own fantasies. The *Schweizer Zeitung* wrote: “One of the 3,000 militants, according to police estimates, climbed onto the stage with the slogan: ‘We have to bring war into this demonstration.’”

Even though the speech was posted online as a video within minutes and Attac publicly repudiated the false quote, it took three days until the DPA corrected the article and apologised to demonstrators.



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