

# Germany military welcomes new defence minister

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The appointment of the new defence minister, Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg (Christian Social Union, CSU), unleashed a storm of enthusiasm in the German officer corps, according to *SpiegelOnline*.

On the evening that he took the oath of office, Guttenberg gave a short speech to employees at the Ministry of Defence in the historical surroundings of Berlin's "Bendlerblock," where the officers who had plotted to assassinate Hitler were executed. He stressed that, in his opinion, the ministry was a "key department." His remarks received extended applause, according to press reports.

Guttenberg was welcomed by the assembled military as one of their own. His noble title and his aristocratic family's 800-year-old tradition played a not insignificant role in their response.

There is hardly another country in the world in which the influence of the aristocratic caste in the army—as well as in other areas of society—has remained as strong as in Germany. Even in the assembly of the post-World War II Bundeswehr (federal armed forces) in the second half of the 1950s, figures such as Wolf Stefan Traugott Count von Baudissin and Johann Adolf Count von Kielmansegg played a central role. Both had been leading officers in Hitler's Wehrmacht, only coming into conflict with the Nazi leadership in the final days of the war.

Together with Ulrich de Maizière, who as part of Field Marshal Wilhelm Ritter von Leeb's staff led the Wehrmacht on the Western front, they organized the reconstruction of the German army in the 1950s. De Maizière comes from a French Huguenot family and is the father of the new interior minister, Thomas de Maizière, who previously headed Angela Merkel's chancellery.

The aristocratic elite has played a devastating role in German history. It dominated both the officer corps of the Reichswehr (Imperial Army) and the Wehrmacht. In the Weimar Republic, the Reichswehr formed a state within the state, having rejected the democratic foundations of the constitution and being implicated in numerous coup attempts. In Hitler's Wehrmacht, it was the aristocratic generals who organized the war of extermination and conquest.

The field marshals of the Nazi period were nearly all of noble

birth. The list was headed by Werner von Blomberg. Then followed Walther von Brauchitsch, Günther von Kluge, Ritter von Leeb, Fedor von Bock, Erwin von Witzleben, Walter von Reichenau, Gerd von Rundstedt, Georg von Küchler, Erich von Manstein, Ewald von Kleist, Maximilian von Weichs, Wolfram Baron von Richthofen, Robert Ritter von Greim and Eduard Baron von Böhm-Ermolli. Aside from Hermann Göring, only a few non-aristocrats are on the list of field marshals. Included among them are Erwin Rommel, Albert Kesselring, Wilhelm Keitel and Friedrich Paulus.

Then, like today, the aristocratic families comprised a firmly established social caste with traditional rites and a pronounced snobbish outlook. Marriages and business are conducted exclusively among social equals.

Count von Baudissin was married to Burgrave and Countess zu Dohna-Schlodien. His partner in the construction of the Bundeswehr, Count von Kielmansegg, married Mechthild von Dincklage in 1934. Her son, Peter Matthias Alexander Count von Kielmansegg, emeritus professor in Mannheim, is married to Freiin von Kauder, Countess Walpurgis von Schweinitz und Krain.

Karl-Theodor—we will dispense with his eight other first names—Baron von und zu Guttenberg is part of this aristocratic caste and maintains its elitist habits. He lives in Burg (castle) Guttenberg near Kulmbach in Franken, which has been the family headquarters since 1482. Since February 2000, he has been married to Stephanie Countess von Bismarck-Schönhausen, who is directly descended from Otto von Bismarck, the iron chancellor.

His mother is Christiane Henkell von Ribbentrop. She is the daughter of Jakob Count and Noble Lord von und zu Eltz (Faust von Stromberg), and Ladislaja Freiin Mayr von Melnhof. Her second marriage in 1985 was to Adolf von Ribbentrop, the son of Joachim von Ribbentrop, Hitler's foreign minister, who was executed in 1946 as a war criminal, who is thus the stepfather of the new defence minister.

His maternal grandfather, Jakob Count Eltz, was a German noble and a member of the Sovereign Order of the Maltese Cross in Rome, where he served as a permanent envoy with the rank of ambassador. The primary residence of the Eltz family dynasty, from 1745 until their expulsion in 1944, was Schloss

Eltz in Croatia. Very early on in the breakup of the former Yugoslavia, Eltz was an advocate of Croatian independence. Jakob Count Eltz maintained close relations with Croatia's President Franjo Tudjman, who in 1991 appointed him "representative of the Republic of Croatia, situated in Bonn." From 1992 to 2000, Jakob Count Eltz was a deputy in the Croatian parliament. He was also a recipient of the Medal of the Golden Fleece, a knightly order established in 1430, an honour respected and much sought after among the European aristocracy.

## Guttenberg and the war in Afghanistan

At 37, Guttenberg is the youngest individual to ever serve as German defence minister. His political rise has been extremely rapid. One year ago, he was appointed secretary-general of the CSU; three months later he succeeded Michael Glos (CSU) at the Economic Affairs Ministry. Just six months after that he took over the Ministry of Defence. Although many commentators were surprised by this political move, it had been in preparation for a long time.

"For all who know the ambitious Guttenberg it was clear: This man uses the office of secretary-general as a springboard," wrote *Wirtschaftswoche* in the spring, stressing, "Foreign policy is his hobby." But the Foreign Ministry lay beyond the reach of a CSU politician, as it has been traditionally claimed by the Free Democratic Party (FDP). "Only the office of the defence minister remains," the business paper wrote in February. Which would be a good fit, *Wirtschaftswoche* continued, "If for anything, from autumn 2008 von Guttenberg was known for his consistent justification of the German Armed Forces mission in Afghanistan."

Before taking his ministerial post, for several years Guttenberg led the CSU executive committee's Special Committee on Foreign Policy. As spokesman of the Working Group on Foreign and Security Policy (ASP), he wrote a memorandum in July 2007 on the "German commitment in Afghanistan." In it he called for the creation of the post of "Afghanistan coordinator," who would take on the important task of presenting "outwardly and in its entirety" Germany's commitment in the Hindu Kush. Achieving the "aims and interlinked civilian-military strategy of the government" would require countering German public opinion, which is highly critical of the war. The "Afghanistan coordinator could, supported by a small staff, be housed directly in the chancellor's office," Guttenberg's memorandum argued.

Whether this represents the first steps in the establishment of a ministry of propaganda is not immediately clear. But Guttenberg left no doubt that it was necessary to counter the widespread antiwar sentiments of the general public. In view of

the "strained security situation," the deployment of German forces was exposed to fierce criticism again and again, he complained. Public debate frequently "differentiated between military security and civilian reconstruction in a manner that was not objective." That was inadmissible, because "without security, the civilian reconstruction of Afghanistan cannot be tackled," he wrote.

Guttenberg stressed, "There is no alternative to the German commitment in Afghanistan." The achievements of "our soldiers and development aide workers are considerable and admirable." He justified the establishment of a special department for Afghanistan in the chancellery with these concluding words, "This measure could contribute crucially to optimizing Germany's overall deployment in Afghanistan and to heightening acceptance of our [military] commitment within the population."

Since then, the situation in Afghanistan has deteriorated dramatically. Resistance to the occupying armies, including the Bundeswehr, has clearly increased. Propaganda about humanitarian operations is disproved almost daily by reports of intensified attacks on the population. The massacre in Kunduz was symptomatic of this. Often, newly built roads and social facilities are destroyed again by the actions of the NATO forces, including those of Germany.

The false nature of the propaganda about building "democratic structures" is becoming increasingly clear, not just to the population in Afghanistan but also among the soldiers. NATO troops are propping up a regime in Kabul that is corrupt to the marrow.

Under these conditions, Defence Minister zu Guttenberg has gone on the offensive. Just a few days after taking office, he stressed that it is indeed war that is being waged in Afghanistan. Under these conditions, he said, it would be wrong to use "euphemisms" regarding the Bundeswehr's mission. In a discussion with *Bild Zeitung*, he explained that it is a combat mission. Although international law was clear that wars could only take place between states, he did not believe that a soldier could relate to such "necessary legal, academic or semantic sensitivities."

The arrogance of this aristocratic offspring could hardly be expressed more clearly than in the manner with which he brushes aside an illegal war as a question of "semantic sensitivity."



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