

Neo-Nazi terror and the German intelligence forces

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For 13 years three neo-Nazis from the East German town of Jena waged a bloody campaign of racist murders of foreigners. Previously, police and German intelligence agencies said they had no idea about the whereabouts of the right-wing terrorists, who had gone underground. At the start of last week, however, more and more details began to emerge about the group and its ties to the German state.

The group called itself the “National Socialist Underground” (NSU) and described itself as a “network of friends based on the principle of deeds, not words.” The group allegedly carried out the cold-blooded murder of at least ten people between 2000 and 2006. Many of their victims were executed, including one Greek and eight Turkish small business and café owners. Another victim was a 21-year-old policewoman, Michele Kiesewetter.

The three neo-Nazis were apparently also responsible for the bombing of a busy commercial street in a majority-Turkish area of Cologne in the summer of 2004. Police are investigating whether they committed more murders and bombings, possibly with the help of accomplices.

The group was discovered after two men fled by bicycle during a bank robbery in the Thuringian town of Eisenach November 4. The two were revealed to be in a mobile home.

When police arrived, they found the dead bodies of Uwe Böhnhardt and Uwe Mundlos, aged 34 and 38, in the burned-out motor home. Both had been shot in the head. In the mobile home, police found the gun of the policewoman shot in 2007, pump-action guns, a submachine gun, a revolver, a pistol and a grenade.

Meanwhile some 200 kilometres away in Zwickau, Saxony, the third member of the group, Beate Zschäpe, set fire to the apartment in which the three had lived.

Shortly afterwards, police said they found a damaged DVD in the rubble of the house. In the video the gang reportedly admits to the ten unsolved murders and several other attacks, and announces plans to carry out further crimes. Copies of the DVD were sent to several media outlets and Islamic cultural centers to spread a climate of fear.

In September 2000, in Nuremberg, the Turkish florist S. Enver was the first victim. Over the next six years, the gang struck again in Nuremberg, Hamburg, Munich, Rostock, Dortmund and Kassel.

All the victims were shot with the same weapon, found in the rubble of the house in Zwickau. Though all the victims were of Turkish and Greek origin, investigators consistently excluded the possibility of neo-Nazi involvement, inferring instead that the murders were the work of “organized criminal elements” and a “Turkish mafia.” Even at the beginning of this year, *Der Spiegel* declared there was evidence that the culprits “could be an alliance of Turkish nationalists, thugs and

intelligence agents.”

The 2004 bombing in Cologne’s Keupstraße, widely known as the center of Turkish business activity in the city, injured 22 people, some seriously. Just one day after the attack, both the police and the social-democratic (SPD) Interior Minister at that time, Otto Schily, claimed that there was no indication of a racist or terrorist motive for the attack. Instead, there was renewed speculation about a conflict in the “criminal milieu.”

According to North Rhine-Westphalian Interior Minister Ralf Jäger (SPD), ongoing investigations are focusing on whether the group was responsible for bomb attacks in 2004 at a commuter train station near a language school for immigrants in Düsseldorf, at a Turkish grocery store in Cologne in 2001, and in 1999 in Saarbrücken.

The two men, Mundlos and Böhnhardt are dead—the investigating authorities immediately declared they had committed suicide, without releasing any details—but on Tuesday of last week, Beate Zschäpe turned herself into the police. Since then she has refused to make any statement and has asked to be recognised as a crown witness. Such recognition would make her liable to a reduced sentence if she cooperates with investigating authorities. A Federal Court judge has issued an arrest warrant against the 36-year-old on the urgent suspicion of membership in a terrorist organization.

Another man was arrested near Hanover on Monday. Holger G. is accused of being in contact with members of the “Nazi underground” since the late 1990s.

Having downplayed the group’s significance for decades, the Thuringian state administration now refers to a large “right-wing network,” which supported the trio “until the last minute.” But no information was released on this “right-wing network.” However, it is clear that the Thuringian intelligence forces (LFV) had close links to a whole group of far-right radicals.

The three neo-Nazis Mundlos, Böhnhardt and Zschäpe all came from Jena, as did Holger G. All four were active in neo-fascist politics in the mid-1990s, in a small right-wing cell in eastern Thuringia known as the “Jena camaraderie,” with only six members. The fifth member was André Kapke, who was prosecuted for a number of offences and is now a leading member of the group “Jena National Resistance.” The sixth member was Ralf Wohlleben, who joined the neo-Nazi NPD in 1998 and was briefly its deputy chairman in Thuringia.

According to the spokesman for the federal prosecutor’s office, Holger G. allegedly gave Mundlos, Böhnhardt, and Zschäpe his driver’s license in 2007 and his passport about four months later. He is also said to have rented motor homes on several occasions for the three neo-Nazis. One of the vehicles was allegedly used in the murder

of the policewoman. According to the spokesman for the federal prosecutor, Holger G. may have been directly involved in the murders.

The six members of the “Jena camaraderie” were also founding members of the “Thuringian homeland security” (THS) group. Already in the mid-1990s Zschäpe, Mundlos and Bönhardt had built fake bombs and had come to the attention of the authorities. In 1997 they were detained and questioned along with a dozen other THS members. They were then released.

The trio went underground a year later, after investigators found five pipe bombs and 1.4 kg of TNT in Zschäpe’s garage. According to investigators, the trio simply vanished—although they were under surveillance from Thuringia’s state intelligence agency (LFV).

The claim that the trio could just disappear without trace is beyond belief. From the start, the Thuringian LFV established close relations with local neo-Nazis and the THS. Even before the trio went underground, there were clear indications that a right-wing terrorist group had been formed in Thuringia. In its 1995 annual report, the LFV refers to heated debates in far-right circles as to whether a terrorist network should be established or not. According to Thuringia’s interior ministry, weapons and explosives were found in right-wing circles in Thuringia on at least seven separate occasions between 1995 and 2000.

The chief organizer of neo-Nazi forces and the THS was Tino Brandt. Born in 1975, he was one of the most active neo-Nazis in Thuringia in the 1990s and later the local NPD’s vice-chairman. In May 2001 he was identified as an employee of the state intelligence agency, which he declared he had first worked for in 1994. According to *Der Spiegel*, Brandt was in contact with Mundlos, Bönhardt and Zschäpe while they were in hiding.

Many other neo-Nazis and leading NPD members worked and still work for German intelligence agencies. (See “Germany: Massive state infiltration of far-right party”)

Even police in Thuringia concede that the trio from Jena could have been employed by intelligence forces to infiltrate neo-Nazi circles. A memo of the local office for criminal investigation raises the possibility that Beate Zschäpe was an undercover agent for the German secret services.

According to information from Central German Radio–Thuringia, Beate Zschäpe has lived in Zwickau since May 2001 under a false name. Although she was sought at the time by the Thuringia intelligence agency—which had issued an international arrest warrant and distributed mug shots of her and her two companions—she continued living undisturbed on the authorities’ doorstep. In 2008 she was joined by the other two neo-Nazis.

Other neo-Nazis have also apparently been given protection by the authorities. *Spiegel Online* reports that the police raided several suspicious subjects involved in extreme right activities in Jena in January 1998. Thuringian Interior Minister Jörg Geibert (CDU) admitted last week that one of the suspects investigated at that time had been allowed to go free, though he had previously been sentenced to a prison term for criminal offences.

Focus magazine reported that an LFV agent may have repeatedly warned the trio of impending police actions. The current head of Thuringia’s LFV, Thomas Sippel, acknowledged that his predecessor, Helmut Röwer, may have directed his own network of informants in the 1990s. Röwer, a right-winger who described fascists and anti-fascists as “Siamese twins,” was suspended in 2000 after he apparently used public money to pay an unknown source.

The close links between the state authorities and the far right are

well documented, especially in Thuringia. Bernhard Vogel (CDU), premier of Rhineland-Palatinate from 1976 to 1988 and premier of Thuringia from 1992 to 2003, cultivated close relations between the local CDU and far-right circles. Extreme-right student clubs in Germany still advertise their activities with a quote from Vogel from 1995: “Wherever a student fraternity is prohibited, a lack of freedom reigns.” Vogel himself was a member of the rightist Armenian student fraternity.

Vogel’s successor Dieter Althaus, a teacher from Thuringia, made no secret of his rightist convictions. In 2008 he planned to appoint Peter Krause as the state’s minister of culture. Krause refused the job after it emerged that he wrote for the far-right magazine *Junge Freiheit* and other extreme-right publications. Both Vogel and Althaus came to Krause’s defence.

In the fall of 2005 Althaus invited Professor Siegfried Scherer, a creationist, to the Thuringian State Chancellery. He wanted to use Scherer’s book, which maintains that the evolution of humanity strictly followed the teaching of the Bible, as a textbook for biology teachers. He hoped the book would “reach a much broader audience.”

Other leading CDU members in Thuringia defend views echoing those of the far right. The Thuringian commissioner for immigration Eckehard Peters—whom Bernhard Vogel consistently defended—deplored proposals to introduce dual citizenship in 1999 for adapting to the “irrational folkish sentiments of immigrants.”

The right-wing League of Displaced People in Thuringia was always able to count on the patronage of the Thuringian Minister of Social Affairs. The League’s state chairman Paul Latussek sought to revive the nationalist demand for a revision of the Oder-Neisse border between Germany and Poland, published articles in right-wing magazines and denied the Holocaust. Nonetheless, the Thuringian Federation continued to fund the League with hundreds of thousands of euros from the state treasury.

Althaus’s successor, incumbent Prime Minister Christine Lieberknecht (CDU), was on the executive of the “Association for Germans Abroad” (VDA) in the mid-1990s. After the Second World War the VDA was designated a “Nazi organization” by the Allies and banned from public activity. In the 1970s it became active again with Rudolf Aschenauer, a denier of Auschwitz, playing a leading role. The VDA became a rallying point for nationalists and the ultra-right but continued to receive millions in subsidies from the German treasury.



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