

# The Nazi past of Germany's post-war political elite

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Fifty years ago, the *Brown Book: War criminals and Nazis in the Federal Republic—in government, business, administration, the army, the judiciary and science* was published on July 2, 1965.

In its first edition, the *Brown Book* listed the SS ranks and former Nazi membership of 1,800 business leaders, politicians and senior officials of the Federal Republic of Germany. In the third edition in 1968, more than 2,300 individuals were listed—including 15 ministers and state secretaries, 100 generals and admirals of the Bundeswehr, 828 judges, state prosecutors and top judicial officers, 245 leading officials of the foreign office, and 297 senior police officers and employees of the intelligence service. The veracity of the data was supported with detailed statements and quotations from legal, military and Gestapo archives, often accompanied by copies of incriminating documents.

“The whole system is infested with Nazis,” said publisher Albert Norden at an international press conference at the time. The *Brown Book* sparked a deep political crisis and led to the resignations of numerous officials and government ministers.

It played an important role in the protest movement of the 1960s. Suddenly it became clear that there had never been a “zero hour”—that is, a new beginning for German society after the end of World War II, as announced by the government of Konrad Adenauer. Despite adoption of the Basic Law (German constitution) and the official denazification campaign, key positions in the state apparatus, the government and posts for its representatives abroad were occupied chiefly by former Nazis.

The *Brown Book* set the ball rolling. After 1965, many more former Nazi perpetrators were unmasked in the German civil service. One thinks of the Baden-Württemberg Minister President Hans Filbinger, who served as a naval judge until the final days of the war, delivering death sentences that were only revealed in 1978.

But the book dealing with the continuity of Nazi cliques in post-war West Germany is not only an historical document. It is also strikingly relevant today, because it alarmingly exposes the tradition that has generated current German foreign policy, the massive rearmament of the army and its involvement in NATO's war manoeuvres against Russia.

The *Brown Book* does not merely list names and professions; it brings to light the aggressive aims of German imperialism expressed in the quoted communiqués of particular Nazi functionaries and army officers during World War II. The tone of many of these statements bears a striking resemblance to that characterising today's calls for Germany's assumption of greater military responsibility in the world.

In the early stages of the attack on the Soviet Union, when the general staff still reckoned with a quick victory, further plans for

world domination were already being discussed. Special task forces in Ribbentrop's foreign office undertook a project to take over countries in Africa and Asia under the control of the colonial powers of England and France. At issue were the objectives of the “permanent exclusion of England from the Near East and the permanent securing of German control over the oil resources there,” according, for example, to a record compiled by the then-undersecretary of state Ernst Woermann, relating to the work of Fritz Grobba's special task force and dated November 6, 1941. Many of the participants in that task force were again employed in the German Federal Republic's diplomatic missions abroad after 1945.

Wilhelm Grewe, the Nazi law professor and “researcher of the East” at the Friedrich Wilhelm University (now Humboldt University), who published his views in numerous political journals, called for German hegemony, not only in Europe but also throughout the world. The *Brown Book* states that he wrote in the *International Journal of Political Science* (vol. 103): “The struggle is now only a question of whether we are entering into an “American century”, where governance of the world falls to the United States—or whether the new world order represented by the powers of the tripartite pact prevails.”

In 1940, Grewe also agitated through the *Journal for Politics* (German Journal of Research in Human Resource Management, ZfP, p. 233) for the “destruction of all Paris churches, palaces, theatres, hospitals, academies, conservatories, courthouses, halls, victory arches, colonnades, the stock exchange, the bank, the city hall and bridges as a consequence of realistic thinking.” In 1941, he celebrated in the same journal (p. 749) the invasion of the Soviet Union as the beginning of a “world-historical mission.” After 1945, Grewe headed the legal department and then the political affairs department of the foreign office in Bonn, after which he became West German ambassador in the US and later a NATO representative in Paris.

The *Brown Book* was edited by Albert Norden, Humboldt University professor of modern history from 1953 to 1955 and leader of investigations into war and Nazi crimes for the politburo of the former Stalinist Socialist Unity Party of East Germany (SED). Son of a rabbi and a long-standing member of the German Communist Party (KPD), Norden had contributed to the *Brown Book* in relation to the Reichstag (Nazi parliament) fire and Hitler's terror regime as early as 1933. He collaborated with East Berlin attorney Friedrich Karl Kaul, who also made a name for himself as a lawyer in numerous anti-Nazi proceedings in West Germany—such as the Frankfurt Auschwitz trial, which coincided with the publication of the *Brown Book*, as well as the Dora court case in Essen and the Treblinka proceedings in Düsseldorf. A large part of the research for the *Brown Book* was carried out by Norbert Podewin, who was a history student at

Humboldt University from 1961 and who died last year. In 2002, Podewin published the extended 1968 edition of the *Brown Book*.

Following the founding of the Federal Republic, the Adenauer government terminated the denazification process in 1948 on the grounds that it was necessary to draw a line under the Nazi past. Amnesty laws in 1949 and 1954 made possible the pardoning of tens of thousands of Nazi criminals. During the drafting of these laws, former staff members of the Hitler Reich's (Nazi "empire") Ministry of Justice, like Werner Best and various war and special court judges, were involved. In addition, the federal parliament legislated the so-called Regulation 131, which granted the right of public sector employment to anyone claiming during denazification proceedings to have been merely a Nazi fellow traveller.

Media and political circles reacted hysterically to the *Brown Book's* publication. Kurt Georg Kiesinger, who rose to chancellor at the head of the grand coalition in 1966 and had himself been unmasked in the *Brown Book* as a leading Nazi, denounced it as "a work of communist propaganda" and saw to it that the second edition was impounded in the course of a spectacular police operation at the Frankfurt Book Fair in 1967. Kiesinger, a confidante of both Ribbentrop and Goebbels, had been in charge of foreign propaganda in the occupied territories until 1945. The revelation of his Nazi past played a major role in the protest movement challenging the Emergency Laws of the grand coalition.

The information provided by the *Brown Book* was later proven to be almost 100 percent correct. Although the facts it presented were officially denied in the West German media, numerous officials resigned from their posts, including Attorney General Wolfgang Fraenkel, whom the *Brown Book* proved to have been responsible for 50 death sentences delivered by the Nazi court in Leipzig, and minister for displaced persons Hans Krüger, whose bloodstained reputation as a Nazi judge in Chojnice, Poland was exposed.

The latter's predecessor, former Gauleiter (regional Nazi Party leader) of East Prussia, Theodor Oberländer, who had also been Reich director of the Association of the German East and later an intelligence officer in the West German army, was dismissed from his post in 1960, having been proven guilty of war crimes by the Stalinist East German government. Oberländer had also set up the "Nightingale" militia battalion, consisting of Ukrainian fascists who massacred of thousands of Ukrainian civilians in Lviv and other cities in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

The head of Adenauer's federal chancellery, Hans Globke, resigned in 1963 before publication of the *Brown Book*, having been accused by the East German authorities of involvement in the drafting of the Nuremberg race laws. In 1969, former federal president Heinrich Lübke, who had claimed since 1945 to have been a resistance fighter, also finally resigned from office. The *Brown Book* had uncovered his past as a concentration camp architect and construction manager in the Peenemünde army research centre, as well as a Gestapo confidante.

The *Brown Book* continues to be a veritable mine of information and serves as a crucial source for historical research. The chapter of the *Brown Book* concerning "Ribbentrop's diplomats in the Bonn government's foreign service", was thus incorporated into the 2010 investigation titled "The Office and the Past", which an historical commission emanating from the foreign office itself had appointed. The details covered in this chapter, which were substantially confirmed in 2010, revealed that no fewer than 520 Nazi diplomats were working for the West German Republic in 1965, including over 30 in top positions, and that former Gestapo members were

scandalously in charge of the department of eastern affairs.

Particularly politically explosive are the entries concerning fathers of today's politicians and senior military officers—for example, Lothar Domröse, father of current Bundeswehr (German military forces) General Hans-Lothar Domröse, who now directs the NATO manoeuvres in Eastern Europe on the borders of Russia and agitates for war preparedness and military rearmament. His father, whom the *Brown Book* exposed as an aide-de-camp to General Blumentritt (Hitler's army commander-in-chief) prior to 1945, attempted to help war criminal Hermann Hoth evade conviction by swearing to a false affidavit at the Nuremberg trials in 1948. This did not prevent the federal government from appointing him head of the defence ministry press office in 1966.

Another such case is that of Ulrich de Maizière, father of current Interior Minister Thomas de Maizière, who persistently calls for comprehensive upgrading of the police force and secret services. The *Brown Book* states: "De Maizière enjoyed the special confidence of Hitler and the fascist Wehrmacht (German army) leadership. He was called to serve in the Führerbunker (Hitler's Berlin air-raid shelter) in February 1945. There, as a lieutenant colonel and staff officer of the general staff's operations department, he regularly reported to Hitler on the deteriorating situation and arranged for the effective administration of Hitler's, Bormann's and Goebbels' beleaguered 'command post'."

After 1945, de Maizière's father was on the staff of the so-called "Office Blank", the covert predecessor of the federal defence ministry that was eventually inaugurated in 1955. It was from Office Blank that the rebirth and rearming of a German army were initially driven. Ulrich de Maizière strove to secure the involvement of infamous Hitler generals such as Adolf Heusinger and Hans Speidel in the project.

Fifty years after publication of the *Brown Book*, the upper ranks of today's military and members of the political establishment are still dominated by a caste whose ancestors were deeply involved in the worst crimes known to humanity. These forces are intent on following in the footsteps of their forebears.



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