

Germany's Chancellor Merkel announces drastic increase in state powers

Ulrich Rippert
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At an extraordinary press conference on Thursday, German Chancellor Angela Merkel announced a nine-point plan beefing up internal security. It will include more money and more personnel for the security authorities; closer collaboration with European and international secret services; joint exercises of the police and Bundeswehr (Armed Forces); the introduction of a national entry and exit register as well as the expedited deportation of asylum seekers.

Merkel interrupted her summer holiday in order to hold the press conference and used the media-fomented hysteria following recent attacks in Germany to announce a law-and-order programme. Although the police investigation is still underway, Merkel spoke of “Islamic terrorism”, and described the attacks in Würzburg and Ansbach as a “breach of civilised taboos”. Those pulling the strings, she threatened, would feel the “full force of the law”.

In one breath, Merkel spoke of the attacks in Würzburg and Ansbach, about the “terrible terrorist attacks” in Nice in France, of the attack in Orlando, USA and the murder of a French priest. The aim of the terrorists was to “destroy our way of life”, she said. They were sowing hatred and fear between cultures, and were sowing hatred and fear between religions, the Chancellor said.

Merkel has so far been cautious in using the term “war on terror”. But now, she said Germany was fighting on the side of France and its other allies against terrorism. This was a “fight or war on terror”. Germany was making an important contribution with the Bundeswehr's Tornado jets.

Merkel repeated her statement, “We can do it!” from last year, which at that time was seen as part of the so-called welcoming culture towards refugees. But at Thursday's press conference it sounded quite different.

Merkel established a direct link between the attacks and the refugee issue, and thus contributed to the agitation against refugees.

She found it “shocking, distressing and depressing” that the attacks in Würzburg and Ansbach had been committed by refugees “who sought protection in Germany or pretended to seek shelter”. The perpetrators “derided the country that has accepted them”.

Merkel's political intentions can be seen by the fact that she equates the latest attacks in Würzburg und Ansbach with the heinous attack in Nice on July 14—when a 31-year-old drove a lorry into a crowd celebrating Bastille day, killing 84 people from 21 countries and injuring more than 300, some seriously—and the attack on a gay club in Orlando on June 12 in which 49 people were killed and 53 injured. She is stoking up the fear of terrorism and whipping up xenophobic sentiments in order to implement the long-planned expansion of the powers of the security authorities, a stronger secret service and the deployment of the Bundeswehr domestically.

While no doubt brutal, the attacks in Würzburg and Ansbach had a different dimension than those in France and the US. In the German attacks, there were terrible injuries, but the only people to lose their lives were the perpetrators.

In Würzburg, a 17-year-old refugee from Afghanistan attacked a group of travellers with an axe and a knife in a regional train, injuring four people. Shortly afterwards he was shot by SWAT officers. In Ansbach, an apparently mentally ill 27-year-old man, who had fled Syria to Germany last year, carried out a suicide attack. At the entrance to a music festival, he detonated an explosive device, killing himself and injuring 15 people, four seriously.

Merkel referred to these attacks as “breaching a civilizational taboo” and linked them directly with the attacks in France and the US in order to justify stepping up domestic security and the deployment of the Bundeswehr within Germany.

It is noteworthy that she only mentioned in passing the recent most serious act of violence in Germany, the shooting spree by an 18-year-old in Munich last Friday. A young man killed nine people, mainly youngsters, and injured 27 others, 10 of them seriously, in a McDonald’s restaurant and a busy shopping centre in the Bavarian capital; then he shot himself.

With reference to this, Merkel remarked only that murderous violence can happen to anyone and that is precisely why it is so terrible. The Munich killing spree does not fit into the propaganda war against Islamist terror. Initially, the media had speculated about a terrorist and Islamic background to the attack in Munich, but it soon became clear that the attack was the action of a right-wing radical individual who took his example from Anders Breivik, the far-right assailant responsible for the attacks in Oslo and Utoya.

It is now known that the German-Iranian youth was an admirer of Adolf Hitler. Citing those close to the investigation, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* reported that the youth regarded it as a happy coincidence that he shared his birthday with “the Führer”. His xenophobic utterances and expressions of sympathy for the far-right Alternative for Germany (AFD) had not gone unnoticed.

Merkel did not speak of a “breach of civilizational taboos” in this regard. She said not a word about the fact that the extreme right-wing and fascistic orientation of this young man cannot be understood separate from social developments, the constant fanning of anti-foreigner sentiments and the witch-hunting of Muslims. Instead, Merkel praised the behaviour of the Bavarian police and the security agencies. In reality, the Munich killing spree was utilised to carry out a massive police operation.

This trivialisation and concealing of right-wing terror has a tradition in Germany. For example, in 1980 at the Oktoberfest terror attack in Munich, 12 people died and more than 200 were injured, some seriously. Despite much evidence pointing to the fact that a right-wing network was behind the attack, the investigators quickly decided on the narrative of a lone assassin.

And between 2000-2007, the so-called National Socialist Underground (NSU), in the periphery of which the intelligence services and police had stationed two dozen undercover agents, murdered nine immigrants and a policewoman. Where state activities ended and right-wing terrorism began could not be clarified in several parliamentary committees or the NSU trial in Munich. Again and again, files were destroyed, witnesses died under mysterious circumstances and the domestic intelligence agents were not authorized to provide witness testimony.

Now, a security apparatus that is riddled with links to the far right will be further expanded and strengthened.

On the morning before Merkel’s government statement, the Bavarian state administration, which was holding a cabinet meeting at Tegernsee, announced its own “extensive security package”. It includes more posts and improved technical resources for the police, more staff at the prosecutor’s offices and courts and an expansion of video surveillance in public places and roads, at railway stations and on trains.

In addition, the retention of internet data would be expanded. As well as telephone companies, those providing email services and social media will also be required to store traffic data. Moreover, the 10-week time limit for storing data will be “significantly” increased. Penalties for resisting police officers will be raised from six months up to five years’ imprisonment.

When asked about the Bavarian security package, Merkel told the press conference: “In these matters, we have much common ground.”



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