

Are German authorities covering up for the death of Jaber al-Bakr?

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Jaber al-Bakr, the 22-year-old Syrian arrested Monday on suspicion of terrorist activity, was found dead in his cell on Wednesday evening. On Thursday, the prison management in Leipzig declared that the detainee used his prison clothing to hang himself from one of the cell's bars.

At a hastily convened press conference, Saxony's justice minister Sebastian Gemkow (Christian Democrats, CDU) rejected any suggestion that the authorities were responsible for the prisoner's death. It was disappointing and "should not have been allowed to happen," Gemkow said, but according to his information, everything had been done by authorities to avert suicide. On Wednesday, experts had not identified any immediate suicide risk.

Al-Bakr's public defender contradicted this and sharply criticised the authorities responsible. "I am incredibly shocked and speechless that something like this can happen," said lawyer Alexander Hübner in several interviews. He spoke of a "judicial scandal." The suicide risk posed by the accused was recognised by those responsible at the judicial facility and noted in the protocol.

The crisis situation facing his client was obvious, Hübner noted. "He had already destroyed lamps and manipulated an electric socket." The deputy head of the detention centre reassured him on Wednesday afternoon by telephone that al-Bakr, who was being kept in solitary confinement, would be "watched constantly." According to Hübner, the terrorist suspect had been on a hunger strike since his detention. He had eaten and drunk nothing since Sunday.

The circumstances surrounding Jaber al-Bakr's death raise a number of questions. Al-Bakr was not a normal prisoner, but rather a terrorist suspect accused of possessing highly explosive materials, maintaining ties with Islamic State and having planned horrific attacks on airports with a similar impact as the attacks in Paris and

Brussels in which over 150 were killed.

Despite this, no interview was conducted when he entered prison, allegedly because no interpreter could be found. He was not brought into a communal cell, as is the case with others showing a suicide risk, but detained in solitary confinement.

After a discussion with a "very experienced psychologist" the following day, the suicide risk was deemed to be low and observations were reduced to once every 30 minutes. Despite this, according to reports at the press conference, the officer on duty repeated the checks every 15 minutes, during one of which he found the dead man.

It remains entirely unclear how a prisoner, who no longer had possession of any dangerous objects, could hang himself in an almost empty cell in a matter of minutes without any possibility of reviving him. Many sources are contradictory and lack credibility. But they cannot be explained by mere incompetence on the part of the Leipzig judicial system, as politicians and the media are currently trying to do.

The much more important question that must be asked is: did the intelligence services have something to conceal at the highest levels? Did an interest exist within the security apparatus to prevent proceedings in court and a public statement by al-Bakr? Was his desire to commit suicide accepted as a price worth paying or even actively encouraged?

It is a fact that not only the death of al-Bakr, but also his ties to the intelligence services are very mysterious. According to his own account, the domestic intelligence agency had been watching him for a long time.

Al-Bakr was registered as a refugee in Munich in February 2015 and applied for asylum. In June 2015, he received asylum for a period limited to three years. The domestic intelligence and foreign intelligence agencies placed him under observation, reportedly because he

searched online for a recipe to make a pipe bomb.

But despite being under observation, he was able to cross borders without difficulty. He returned to Syria on numerous occasions and stayed for a time in Turkey.

It remains unexplained how he was able to procure the highly explosive materials under conditions of this surveillance. According to Saxony's Justice Minister Markus Ulbig (CDU), the same explosives "as in Paris and Brussels" were involved. The president of the state criminal agency in Saxony, Georg Michaelis, added that many things pointed to an IS connection.

On 8 October, the police tried to detain al-Bakr in Chemnitz as he left his home in the morning. The police called his name and fired a warning shot, but then allowed him to escape. The police subsequently began a high-profile public search, releasing photos and warnings that the man being sought was extremely dangerous and potentially armed.

The apartment under observation in Chemnitz was stormed by special forces units, and the explosives found were widely publicized in the media. On Sunday night, al-Bakr was arrested. He was unarmed. At Leipzig train station Al-Bakr had asked two fellow Syrians for a place to sleep. The pair took him home with them and then handed him over to the police after tying him up.

According to statements by intelligence agency head Hans-Georg Maaßen, an attack on a Berlin airport was in the advanced stages of preparation and could have been carried out in a matter of days. Interior Minister Thomas de Maizière (CDU) compared the case to the attacks in Paris and Brussels and stated that the 22-year-old Syrian had ties to IS, according to information from the domestic intelligence service.

In this context, it is worth noting that the attackers in Paris and Brussels were also known to the security authorities, could travel virtually unhindered and prepared their attacks under the noses of the intelligence agencies.



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