Initial suspect freed in Berlin terror attack

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21 December 2016

Nearly two days after Monday's a brutal attack on a Berlin Christmas market by a large truck, the circumstances and motivation remain unclear. The first man arrested by police has been released after forensic evidence cleared him of any connection to the attack, in which 12 people were killed and 48 injured, 18 of them severely.

This is an abominable crime that only serves to strengthen right-wing political forces. Although the circumstances of the crime are still unclear, the tragedy was immediately used by political leaders and the media to attack the German chancellor's refugee policy from the right and justify a massive state build-up.

The interior minister of the state of Saarland, Klaus Bouillon (CDU), announced a massive upgrade of police forces, including equipping them with machine guns. On Tuesday, he told Saarland radio, "We have to declare that we are in a state of war, although some people who only want to see the good side of things cannot see this."

On Tuesday, his Bavarian colleague Joachim Herrmann (CSU) criticised the refugee policy of the federal government. "We must now deal with the question of the risks we face from this large number of refugees," Herrmann declared on Bavarian Radio.

Later, Bavarian Prime Minister Horst Seehofer (CSU) announced a special meeting of his cabinet Wednesday to discuss "possible consequences and proposals for federal policy." We owe it to the relatives of the victims "that we rethink and re-adjust our entire immigration and security policy," he argued.

The chair of the far-right Alternative for Germany in North Rhine-Westphalia, Marcus Pretzell, demanded that the state "hit back" and declared on Twitter: "Merkel is responsible for the deaths!" The federal president of the party, Frauke Petry, declared: "The milieu in which such acts can flourish has been negligently and systematically imported over the past year and a half."

The attack was also used internationally to promote a far-right-wing agenda. The leader of the right-wing UK Independence Party, Nigel Farage, described the attack as "Merkel's legacy."

The US President-elect, Donald Trump, went further and suggested that "Islamic terrorists" were behind the crime. The "civilised world" must now rethink its position, he added on Twitter.

Immediately after the attack, it was stated that the incident was in all probability a terrorist attack resembling the terrorist act in Nice, in southern France, which also involved a large truck. That attack on the French national holiday last July killed 86 people.

Shortly after the attack Monday, police in Berlin announced that the suspected perpetrator had been apprehended. He was identified as Navid B. a 23-year-old asylum seeker from Pakistan, who had been arrested allegedly running away from the crime scene. He had entered Germany at the end of last year and was known to the police for minor offences.

Later on Tuesday, police announced that Navid B. had been freed. Police acknowledged that there were no DNA traces of the suspect found in the truck. In addition, the smudge marks usually created after a shooting were missing. Initially, it was assumed that the suspect had shot the Polish truck driver whose corpse was found in the cab.

General Prosecutor Peter Frank, who heads the investigation, admitted there was a suspect, but "we must entertain the notion that he is not the culprit," but he continued to speak of a "terrorist" attack based on its similarity to the attack in Nice. According to Frank, the details of the attack in Berlin also suggested an Islamic background. When asked, however, he confirmed that there had been no claim of responsibility, as was the case with other attacks.

On Tuesday evening, more than 24 hours after the

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incident, news agencies reported that Amaq, the so-called news agency of the Islamic State (IS), announced that one of its “soldiers” had committed the attack in Berlin. The statement does not contain any insider information or information on the perpetrator, which according to experts, suggests that the attack was not coordinated by the IS leadership in Iraq and Syria.

Even if it turns out that this is a “terrorist attack with an Islamic background”—which is by no means certain at present—then it was not an “incomprehensible act”, as Chancellor Angela Merkel declared in her brief speech. A terrorist attack would be anything but “incomprehensible”, bearing in mind the aggressive militarist policy of the imperialist powers, which increasingly involves the German government.

For 25 years, NATO states, with the US at the head, have been waging unceasing war against largely defenceless populations in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria and Yemen. Before that, imperialist interventions were carried out in Somalia, Bosnia, Serbia and a number of other countries. Millions have fallen victim to these imperialist wars and tens of thousands forced to flee every day.

Such war crimes have created the basis for the recruitment of fanatics intent on revenge. At the same time, Islamic terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda and its predecessors, IS, were built up, financed and equipped by the US and its regional allies, such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey, before they became independent and turned against their erstwhile imperialist protectors. There remain to this day links between Western intelligence services and Islamic militia. In Syria, they are part of the alliance of Western-backed rebels.

Yesterday, the deputies of the French parliament stood for a minute’s silence for the victims of the Berlin attack. The president of the National Assembly, Claude Bartolone, took the opportunity to recall the terrorist attacks carried out in Brussels, Paris and Nice, and to praise the Hollande government, which he described as “intransigent in the fight against terror”.

But how has the French government responded to the terror attacks? By severely restricting democratic rights in the form of a never-ending state of emergency and by stepping up its policy of war. The German government has also been pressing ahead with the expansion of military operations following its announcement that the time of military restraint has passed. It is precisely this neo-colonial war policy that increases the terror threat.

Notwithstanding the crocodile tears and condolences of President Gauck, the chancellor and her ministers, those ultimately responsible for the terrible attack on the Christmas market sit in the seats of government power where military policy is decided.

It is by no means ruled out that a non-Islamic attacker may be responsible for the Berlin deaths.

Last summer an 18-year-old student shot nine people at the Munich Olympic shopping centre and severely injured four others. The immediate reaction was to claim it was a terrorist attack with an Islamic background. An anti-immigrant hysteria was whipped up, and a state of siege was imposed on the Bavarian state capital involving a large-scale civil war exercise. Later, it turned out that the crazed attack was carried by a teenager who had been radicalised in right-wing circles.

While the background to the attack on the Berlin Christmas market remains obscure, what is clear that the criminal act will be used to further the internal rearmament and strengthening of the intelligence services and security apparatus.

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