

German secret service interferes in negotiations over new government

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Germany's intelligence agency and representatives of the German army have interfered in the negotiations over the formation of the next federal government. They insist on increased military expenditure, a confrontational course towards Russia and ruthless measures against refugees.

On Tuesday, the President of the Federal Intelligence Service (BND) Bruno Kahl gave a "keynote speech" at the Hanns Seidel Foundation in Munich. The foundation is affiliated to the Christian Social Union (CSU). In his speech Kahl warned in drastic terms of Russia's "geo-political ambitions" and expressed doubts regarding Western Europe's ability to adequately respond.

Kahl accused Russia of trying to "weaken the EU and push back the US, and in particular drive a wedge between the two." The modernisation of Russian forces is "amazing" and "disturbing", he said. Instead of being a "partner for European security", the country is "more of a potential danger". "Russia as a world political player is back and will remain an uncomfortable neighbour," Kahl declared.

The intelligence chief doubted whether NATO and the West were sufficiently strong militarily "to counterbalance and deter these potential threats," and "whether their own defence and armament capabilities were sufficient."

Kahl also warned against China's foreign policy. "The time of modesty is apparently over, as is the time of exercising consideration. China claims it will rank as a major foreign power by the year 2050," he said. As an example of Chinese ambitions he cited a Chinese base in the Horn of Africa and the naval maneuvers carried out by China and Russia this summer in the Baltic Sea.

Kahl called the growing number of refugees an additional security risk. "Well over a billion people" would have a "rational reason" to leave their homeland. The number of migrants due to environmental problems will increase dramatically and reach hundreds of millions. The population of Africa has almost doubled since 1990 and it is questionable whether the campaign to combat the root causes of mass migration could "keep up with this dynamic at all."

"Migratory pressure on Europe will increase. The question is whether European governments can maintain or create new control potential to influence this development," he concluded.

The very fact that Kahl gave such a speech is extraordinary. Normally, the BND advises the federal government internally and does not intervene in public debates. The fact that the head of the BND went public a few days before the conclusion of exploratory talks on a "Jamaica" coalition (from the three parties' colours—black, yellow and green, those of the Jamaican flag) composed of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), Christian Social Union (CSU), Free Democratic Party and the Greens—and did so at a forum of the CSU, can only be considered as direct interference in the formation of a government.

Prior to Kahl, the chairman of the German Armed Forces Association André Wüstner had already made public demands for more military spending.

"I have so far followed the exploratory talks with horror, because defence policy and thus our Bundeswehr are apparently being ground down as a bargaining chip between other issues," he told the German Press Agency. Security policy is being neglected not only by the Greens and the FDP, but also by the Union, he insisted. "Jamaica is playing with the future of the Bundeswehr."

The blatant intervention by representatives of the intelligence services and the military in ongoing coalition negotiations must be taken as a warning. Based on the devastating role played by the German army (Reichswehr) and secret services in the downfall of the Weimar Republic and the rise of Hitler, post-WWII Germany adhered to a strict principle of subordinating both the army and the intelligence services to civilian control—at least on paper. Not any longer.

The BND chief did not restrict his appeal to demands for increased military armament and more resources for the secret service. He also sought to influence future foreign policy. He speaks for those representatives of the German ruling class and security apparatus who, despite the current

conflicts with Donald Trump, want to maintain close cooperation with the US and are skeptical about proposals to establish an independent European army, put forward by the French President Emmanuel Macron with the support in Germany of the SPD, the FDP, the Greens and sections of the CDU.

In his speech, the head of the BND emphasized that it was highly advantageous for Germany to have a power like the US on its side, and not on an opposing side. The United States was the only state that had troops in the three major geo-strategic fronts of world affairs—Europe, the Persian Gulf, and East Asia. “They have 10 aircraft carriers, which they can summon in a short time to international conflict zones.”

The 34,000 American soldiers still stationed in the Federal Republic showed “how close security policy between Berlin and Washington remains,” Kahl said. And it was only alongside the US that “Europe would be able in the next few years to form a credible counterweight to Russia on the eastern flank of Europe.”

Kahl’s speech received backing from leading media outlets. The *Süddeutsche Zeitung* went to press on Wednesday with the headline: “BND: Russia is ‘potential danger’.” The author of the lead article, Stefan Kornelius, reported at length on the BND leader’s speech and justified Kahl’s interference in the political process in a separate commentary under the title, “Is he allowed to do that?”

Kahl’s warning to Russia and his call to politicians to pay more attention to security is “an unusual role for a secret service chief,” writes Kornelius. But the BND boss was “no agitator,” he was “not craving recognition”. Rather, “the leading players in Germany’s security institutions” have noticed that “the seriousness and depth appropriate for Germany’s significance is missing in the discussion about protection and threats.”

Kornelius is one of those leading journalists who are closely involved in think tanks linking together the foreign policy and military establishment of Germany, Europe and the United States and whose aim is to influence public opinion accordingly. In 2014 Kornelius played a leading role in justifying the Washington and Berlin-sponsored coup in Ukraine. According to Wikipedia, he is currently a member of the Atlantic-Bridge, the German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP) and the advisory council of the Federal Academy for Security Policy (BAKS).

For its part the BND has both close historic and current ties with the US intelligence services. The espionage department “Foreign Armies East” of Hitler’s Wehrmacht led by Reinhard Gehlen, was taken over directly by the US after the war. This eventually became the BND, which was led by Gehlen until 1968, and remains closely linked to its

American counterparts. Edward Snowden’s revelations showed that the BND and the American NSA work closely together to spy on millions of ordinary citizens.

Kahl paid tribute to this collaboration in his Munich speech. “As President of the Federal Intelligence Service, may I say that cooperation with the US intelligence services is indispensable to our effectiveness,” he said.

Kahl was a surprise appointment as head of the BND in April 2016. He is a close confidant of former economics minister Wolfgang Schäuble (CDU), with whom he has worked closely since 1995. The *Tagesspiegel* reported that Kahl’s predecessor Gerhard Schindler, who only reached retirement age a year and a half later, had been replaced prematurely to prevent “politically motivated negotiations over the occupation of one of the most sensitive posts in Germany’s security architecture” after September’s federal election. Circles in and around the BND feared that a candidate of the Green party could possibly take over the leadership of the secret service.

Kahl has already made clear that the BND intends to intervene increasingly in political affairs. This month, the first 400 employees moved into the new BND headquarters in the center of Berlin. Another 4,000 will follow next year, while 1,200 will remain in the BND’s old headquarters in Pullach near Munich. The new building complex on a 10-hectare site on Berlin’s Chausseestrasse has cost a billion euros. It has 5,000 rooms and an elaborate, anti-surveillance technology.

Commenting on the move Kahl noted that it was a great advantage to be closer to the centre of political life. “We wanted to leave the dark walls and dark forest in Pullach and be more in the forefront.” The BND had no reason to hide—“apart from the operations we carry out”. He called for high levels of investment in security and increased training for young agents. A special study program “Master of Intelligence” is to be created. The restructuring, according to Kahl, will do the service a “great deal of good.”



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