

# Was the 2016 terrorist attack on the Berlin Christmas market an “intelligence operation with deadly collateral damage?”

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28 December 2017

One year ago, Łukasz Urban, Sebastian Berlin, Klaus Jacob, Dorit Krebs, Angelika Klosters, Dalia Elyakim, Fabrizia Di Lorenzo, Christoph Herrlich, Nada Žižmár, Peter Völker, Anna Bagratuni and Georgiy Bagratuni died as victims of the terrorist attack on the Christmas market at Breitscheidplatz in Berlin.

Their killer was Anis Amri. “This disastrous crime will be solved—in every detail—and it will be punished,” said Chancellor Angela Merkel immediately after the attack.

In fact, the police and intelligence agencies that had been shadowing the Tunisian since he had entered Germany in the summer of 2015 are likely to have a vested interest in keeping such details in the dark. New documents obtained by *Welt am Sonntag* and also the *Berliner Zeitung* corroborate the suspicion that the authorities abandoned their surveillance of Amri a few months before the deadly attack because they knew he was planning just such an action.

Although the government claims to date that the foreign intelligence service (BND) and the domestic secret service (BfV) played no operative role in the Amri case, *Die Welt* has obtained a two-page secret service analysis from January 2016 regarding Amri. It is signed personally by BfV boss Hans-Georg Maaßen.

The *Berliner Zeitung* writes that Amri possibly “had already come to Germany as a suicide bomber of the terrorist militia Islamic State (IS)”. On 26 January 2016, the secret service established that he had been accompanied on his entry by Habib S. and Bilal Ben Ammar; the latter is “believed to belong to IS.”

In October 2015, in the context of an “Islamism test case”, the North Rhine-Westphalia State Criminal Police Office (LKA) had already written that the “obvious ideological connection to the so-called ‘Islamic State’” was “significantly increasing the danger” of terrorist attacks.

Since Amri’s smartphone was monitored 24/7, the authorities knew that on 14 December 2015 he had already downloaded detailed instructions on blending explosives,

and building bombs and hand grenades.

The would-be assassin was constantly involved in Islamist circles. With the help of a “probationary source”, the secret service could observe that he repeatedly visited the now closed Fussilet Mosque in Berlin and met there with known jihadists.

One of his most important contacts in North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) was Boban Simeonovic whose alias in Dortmund was Abdul Rahman. This person was again one of the closest confidantes of the Islamist Ahmad A., called Abu Walaa, who is currently on trial in Celle. The police informant “Murat” operated in his circle for the NRW LKA. The undercover informant “VP 01” had close contact with Amri, at least since November 2015. At least once, he personally drove Amri to Berlin.

In the Celle trial, the testimony of a witness who warned about Murat has emerged. “He said again and again that one should commit attacks in Germany, that one needs good men who are capable of doing so”, the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* quoted from the testimony. So Amri could have been encouraged in his terror plans by Murat, an undercover informant.

The *Die Welt* article and its authors Stefan Aust and Helmar Büchel put forward the hypothesis—held by Green politician Hans-Christian Ströbele to be the most plausible—of the “involvement of international secret services”, namely the American. “These may have seen Amri as bait that could lead them to those pulling the strings, the IS planners in Libya.”

By February 2, 2016 at the latest, Amri phoned two middle-ranking IS cadres in Libya and offered himself as a suicide bomber for an attack in Germany.

When Amri arrived in Berlin by bus on 18 February 2016, he was briefly arrested by local LKA officials, although the NRW LKA had specifically requested only observation be conducted and not an arrest, to keep the surveillance secret and to enable the gathering of further evidence against Amri

and his contacts. This supposed “glitch” was already dubious, and now it turns out that it was mainly about Amri’s mobile phone, which was seized when he was arrested.

The more than 12,000 pieces of data, including communication with Amri’s IS contacts in Libya, were forwarded by the BKA to the BfV. Whether the BND, and through it, foreign secret services, also received this data is unclear. The government refuses to provide answers, citing a threat to state security.

Then, with the help of the informant “Murat”, Amri’s new phone was “cloned” so that from then on his encrypted chat communication with IS cadres using the messenger services Telegram and WhatsApp could be followed in real time.

Although it is clear from intercepted calls and chat records that Amri was planning a suicide attack, he remained at large.

The *Die Welt* reporters support Ströbele’s thesis of a protective American hand. They point out that “in a German-controlled secret operation on 19 January 2017, US Air Force B2 stealth bombers attacked the very IS desert camp in Libya, where they suspected those behind Amri were located.” They raise the question of whether the attack on the Berlin Christmas market, rather than the result of “official sloppiness”, was an “intelligence operation with deadly collateral damage.”

Neither the Green, Ströbele, nor *Die Welt* reporters ask the obvious question: might the German police and intelligence services also have welcomed an attack for domestic political reasons?

Like the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 in the United States, Paris 2015 and Brussels 2016, the attack on Berlin’s Breitscheidplatz was systematically used to strengthen the state apparatus and tighten anti-refugee laws. And in all four cases, there were perpetrators at work who had long been known to and monitored by the security authorities.

The new documents prove that both the US and the German secret services and police authorities had an interest in Amri being able to move freely.

When he was afraid of being exposed and arrested because of a stabbing in the drug milieu of Berlin Neukölln, he tried to leave Germany via Switzerland in the direction of Italy and to settle in Tunisia or Libya.

“The investigators are alarmed when they realize that Amri wanted to leave Germany,” writes the *Berliner Zeitung*. Apparently, that would have been bad for the surveillance of Amri. Immediately, the LKA in Berlin organised the live surveillance of Amri’s smartphone, while he travelled by long-distance bus to Zurich. Each of his conversations was immediately translated by interpreters and

submitted to the investigators.

On July 30, 2016, Amri was arrested in Friedrichshafen, near the Swiss border, with drugs and fake papers. He was recorded as being an Islamist threat in the police computers, however, to the amazement of the duty judge, the public prosecutor’s office refused a detention request. “In order to hold Amri at least over the weekend, the judge in charge seized on an emergency solution, a temporary detention order, to secure deportation,” writes *Die Welt*. That could be imposed without a prosecutor.

Amri was irritated. According to the interrogation record, he said, “The deportation is 100 percent safe if I go now.” He wanted to leave Germany. But he was not allowed to. Instead, he was taken to the prison in Ravensbrück and was released from there just two days later. Whether Amri received a visit during these two days, and if so, by whom, is currently unknown. In any case, Amri did not flee abroad, but returned to Berlin.

Since his arrest in Friedrichshafen, Amri’s cloned mobile phone was confiscated, and the security authorities allegedly had no further knowledge from then on. In May 2016, the NRW LKA had already ended their surveillance of Amri, and on 21 September 2016 the Berlin LKA then did the same.

When, on November 2, 2016, the last time Amri was the subject of the “Common Counter-Terrorism Centre” (GTAZ), where representatives of more than 40 security agencies share knowledge and coordinate their actions, it was said that no “concrete danger” was discernible.

Even when Abu Walaa and his accomplices were arrested based on statements by the informant “Murat”, Amri remained at large. One month later, on December 19, 2016, he committed the fatal attack in Berlin.

Since the police did not initiate the search for the fugitive Amri until several hours later, he was able to run unmolested through the city with a pistol and flee across Western Europe. Shortly before Christmas he returned to Italy, from which he had started his trip to Germany in the summer of 2015—under the eyes of the Italian secret service, as *Die Welt* writes. He was finally shot dead by two policemen on the night of December 23, 2016 in Milan, by chance, as it is officially claimed.



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