Right-wing extremist network behind fascist synagogue attack in Germany

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The day after the right-wing terrorist attack on a synagogue in Halle, Germany this week was dominated by hypocritical statements of shock and sympathy from government circles.

Chancellor Angela Merkel (Christian Democrats, CDU) told the IG Metall trade union congress in Nürnberg that she was “shocked” and “affected” by the attack. Merkel added that she is mourning with the families and friends of those murdered. In confronting hate and anti-Semitism, the state must make full use of all its resourcesm the Chancellor stated. “There is no tolerance for it.”

German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier (Social Democrats, SPD), declared it a “day of shame and disgrace” as he laid a wreath at the site of the attack that killed two people. Anyone displaying even a slight degree of acceptance of right-wing extremism bears a share of the guilt with the perpetrator, he said.

Interior Minister Horst Seehofer, of all people, even repeated the words of a party colleague, describing some Alternative for Germany (AfD) officials as “ideological inciters” of the terrorist attack.

Similar statements were mouthed in June after Kassel District President Walter Lübcke (CDU) was murdered in cold blood by a fascist gunman. At the time, decisive action against the far-right was also announced, but what followed was the exact opposite. While the wide-ranging network of right-wing extremist terrorists in the police, army and intelligence agencies was left untouched, it was those who oppose them who were targeted for persecution.

The reality is that the “ideological inciters” of the right-wing terrorist attack hold top positions within the state and security apparatus, the intelligence agencies, the military and the federal government. They have not only embraced the AfD’s slogan of “foreigners out!” on refugee policy; Seehofer himself dismissed the rampage of fascist thugs targeting foreigners and Jewish institutions in Chemnitz in the summer of 2018, declaring that if he were not a government minister, he would have joined the right-wing demonstrations.

According to initial investigations, the fascist gunman in the Halle attack had close ties to a right-wing extremist network with intimate connections to the state apparatus. The initial claim that the attack was the work of a single gunman has been contradicted by a growing number of facts.

It is now clear that Stephane Balliet, a 27-year-old German citizen from Saxony-Anhalt, opened fire on the synagogue Wednesday, where over 50 people had gathered to celebrate Yom Kippur, intending to carry out a bloodbath.

He repeatedly sought to use explosives to secure entry to the building, and apparently planned to murder as many participants as possible. After failing to break through the door, he shot a passer-by and another man in a nearby kebab shop. Shortly afterwards, he injured two further people as he fled from the police. He was then arrested and handed over to the federal prosecutor’s office on Thursday.

Balliet wore military fatigues and was in possession of several high-powered firearms. Four kilograms of explosives were found in his car. He communicated with his supporters through a camera on his helmet. He livestreamed footage of the attack on the synagogue and kebab shop, and his killing of the passer-by, on the video platform Twitch.

A die-hard anti-Semite and neo-Nazi, Balliet began his video with a denial of the Holocaust, and continued, “The origin of all problems is the Jews.” Balliet referred to himself as part of an online SS group, declaring, “Nobody expects the internet SS.”

During the attack, Balliet played the music of right-wing extremist Alec Minassian, who carried out an attack in Toronto, Canada in April 2018 by driving his vehicle into pedestrians. He killed 10 people and injured an additional 16. Prior to the attack, Minassian served for two months in the Canadian Armed Forces, and completed his recruitment training a few months prior to the attack. His ideological mentor, in turn, was the mass murderer Elliot Rodger, who shot and killed six people in California in 2014 and injured 14 more.

Balliet published a number of documents online prior to his attack. He described an 11-page document as his

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“manifesto.” In it, he describes his weapons, including how he constructed them from building materials, and where he obtained the explosives. He also formulated goals, which he described as “achievements.” Among his potential achievements were using multiple weapons to kill several Jews, burning down a synagogue and a mosque, killing a communist, and beheading people with a sword or killing them with a nail bomb.

Although the gunman was visibly expounding his fascist views on right-wing extremist forums, and these forums are populated by covert state intelligence agents, investigators have claimed that Balliet was not known to the authorities.

The same arguments were employed following the terrorist attack on the Christmas market at Breitscheidplatz in Berlin. In December 2017, an attacker drove a lorry into the market, killing 12 people and injuring another 55. At the time, the authorities declared that Anis Amri had not been considered an “acute threat.” It later emerged that several intelligence agency offices were aware of his plans for an attack, and that Amri was even driven to Berlin by an informant.

A similar picture emerged with regard to the murder of Lübcke earlier this year. Initially, it was claimed that the right-wing terrorist Stephane Ernst acted independently and alone. It later became clear that he is part of a wide-ranging right-wing extremist terrorist network that also includes a number of intelligence agents.

Further troubling questions have also been raised by the synagogue attack in Halle, including why there was no on-site police protection at the time of the attack and why the police were so slow to act in response to the shooter. The chairman of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, Josef Schuster, declared this to be “grave negligence.” The head of the Jewish community in Halle, Max Privorozki, accused the police of responding too slowly. “They arrived too late,” he said in a video. The police took at least 10 minutes to arrive after they were called and informed that an armed attack on the synagogue was in progress.

The claim by the police that there was no need for special protection for the Yom Kippur celebration because there were no warnings of possible disturbances is not credible. Just a day prior to the attack, police raids were launched against right-wing extremists in Bavaria, Saxony, Baden-Württemberg, and even Saxony-Anhalt. They were targeted against the authors of 23 threatening letters warning of attacks on refugee centres, mosques, left-wing party offices, and media outlets.

The question must be posed, were the preparations for an attack on the synagogue in Halle known to the security agencies? Was the attack considered a price worth paying? The influence of far-right groups among police officers and intelligence agents is well known.

This has been on display on several occasions in Saxony-Anhalt, and in Halle in particular. There is much to suggest that the synagogue attack did not coincidentally take place in the city, and that it was aimed at encouraging the development of a fascist movement.

Halle was the location earlier this year of a trial against several members of the neo-Nazi group “Aryans.” This fascist gang of thugs launched an attack on the sidelines of the May Day demonstration in the city in 2017 with their cars, throwing stones at participants and attacking them violently. The attack also caused severe injuries among a group of hikers who were not part of the demonstration.

The *Süddeutsche Zeitung* reported at the time, “This trial shows how often and how extensively the judiciary trivialises and ignores right-wing violence, especially in the states in eastern Germany. The state prosecutor responsible for the case in Halle considers it to be ‘ordinary daily business’. She explained this in a statement: ‘The level of aggressiveness by the defendant does not go beyond what is unfortunately now common behaviour in connection with political events.’”

During the trial, investigators discovered a chat on the phone of one of the defendants in which she twice asked a police officer to obtain data from an internal police database. According to the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, the police officer then sent information to the convicted right-wing extremist.

“Right-wing extremism in Halle has its own home,” reported *Deutsche Welle*, referring to a communal living project run by the Identitarian movement in the heart of the city. This is where right-wing ideologues, members of student leagues and neo-Nazis meet with young hipsters, wrote the magazine, adding, “Their goal: racism and Islamophobia should be brought into the heart of society.”

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