

Massive neo-Nazi penetration of German military and police

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In a lengthy July 3 article, the *New York Times* extensively documented a right-wing extremist conspiracy involving sections of the German military, intelligence agencies and police to carry out a violent uprising on “Day X.” The article, based on a year-long investigation, documents wide-ranging far-right networks within the military and police, the infiltration of the elite special forces unit (KSK) by fascists and the growing influence of right-wing extremist political forces like the Alternative for Germany (AfD).

Headlined “As neo-Nazis seed military ranks, Germany confronts an enemy within,” the article details how shadowy networks for planning attacks and storing weapons have been tolerated and even supported by army commanders for years. One former KSK commander, Gen. Reinhard Günzel, published a book in which he likened the KSK to the Waffen-SS, the Nazi stormtroopers notorious for carrying out numerous mass executions of Jews during the Holocaust.

In a raid on the house of just one KSK soldier in May, investigators found “two kilograms of PETN plastic explosives, a detonator, a fuse, an AK-47, a silencer, two knives, a crossbow and thousands of rounds of ammunition,” according to the *Times*. Another former KSK member nicknamed Hannibal ran a chat group in which the plotting of terrorist attacks were discussed. Several members of the group are under investigation, and one has been placed on trial. Interviewed by the *Times*, “Hannibal” described his group as being about “war gaming” against “gangs, Islamists and antifa,” who are “the enemy troops on our ground.”

The *Times*’ piece appeared just days after Defence Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer was forced to announce the restructuring of the KSK, including the disbanding of one of its companies, due to its emergence as a hotbed for right-wing extremists. This extraordinary event, which illustrates how the German state apparatus and security forces are increasingly dominated by neo-Nazis 75 years after the collapse of Hitlerite fascism, forced the *Times* and a host of newspapers internationally to report on a reality they have largely sought to ignore for years.

Recalling political conditions during the Weimar Republic following World War I, the *Times*’ article paints a picture of a nominally democratic state confronting far-right conspiracies on all sides, above all from within. Right-wing extremist networks are “hoarding weapons, maintaining safe houses, and in some cases keeping lists of political enemies” to execute, the *Times* noted. Within the KSK alone, 48,000 rounds of munition and 62 kilograms of explosives have gone missing.

The *Times* article pointed to the comments of Brenton Tarrant, the far-right terrorist who gunned down dozens of Muslim worshippers in a mass shooting at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, to the effect that “hundreds of thousands” of soldiers in Europe’s militaries hold fascist and right-wing nationalist views. It continued, “Germany’s military counterintelligence agency is now investigating more than 600 soldiers for far-right extremism, out of 184,000 in the military. Some 20 of them are in the KSK, a proportion that is five times higher than in other units.

“But the German authorities are concerned that the problem may be far larger and that other security institutions have been infiltrated as well. Over the past 13 months, far-right terrorists have assassinated a politician, attacked a synagogue and shot dead nine immigrants and German descendants of immigrants.”

The true extent of the far-right infiltration remains unclear, the *Times* continued, because sections of the intelligence agencies are dominated by right-wing extremists as well. It referred to a tip-off given to KSK soldiers by a military counter-intelligence agent about a raid in May, before quoting Stephan Kramer, president of the domestic intelligence agency in the state of Thuringia, as saying, “What we are dealing with is an enemy within.”

The author of the article, Katrin Bennfold, observed that “military and intelligence officials” and “avowed far-right members” told her about “nationwide networks of current and former soldiers and police officers with ties to the far-right.” Some media outlets describe it as a “shadow army,” recalling the campaign of assassinations, coup plots and conspiracies conducted by far-right forces within the military during the Weimar Republic with the aim of overturning bourgeois democracy.

“In many cases, soldiers have used the networks to prepare for when they predict Germany’s democratic order will collapse,” continued the *Times*, in perhaps its most startling revelation. “They call it Day X. Officials worry it is really a pretext for inciting terrorist acts, or worse, a putsch.”

For many *Times*’ readers, the news that Germany, held up by ruling circles as one of Europe’s leading democracies following the defeat of Nazism in 1945, faces the imminent threat of a military coup by the far-right will have come as a surprise. However, the reality is that the same objective contradictions of capitalism that led the German bourgeoisie to back the installation of Hitler as Chancellor in January 1933 behind the backs of a hostile working class are propelling its descendants towards the cultivation of the far-right and outright fascist forces. On the one hand, German imperialism is confronted by the necessity of advancing more ruthlessly its predatory economic and geostrategic interests around the world under conditions of accelerating tensions between the major powers. On the other, it faces deep-seated opposition among working people to its policies of austerity and war.

The German Trotskyists of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SGP) and the *World Socialist Web Site* warned from the outset that the attempt to develop a more aggressive foreign policy to assert German imperialist interests on the world stage was intimately bound up with the rehabilitation of right-wing extremist views and the promotion of pro-Nazi forces. The SGP declared in a September 2014 resolution adopted at a special conference against war, “The propaganda of the post-war era—that Germany had learnt from the terrible crimes of the Nazis, had ‘arrived at the West,’ had embraced a peaceful foreign policy, and had developed into a stable democracy—is exposed as lies. German imperialism is once again showing its real colours as it emerged historically, with all of its

aggressiveness at home and abroad.”

This resolution was adopted in opposition to the statements of German President Joachim Gauck, Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, and Defence Minister Ursula Von der Leyen, who all proclaimed at the 2014 Munich Security Conference that the era of German military restraint was over. Germany was too large to comment on world politics from the “sidelines,” argued Steinmeier, before going on to call for a more decisive and substantial intervention by the armed forces in foreign military operations.

The same month Gauck, Steinmeier and Von der Leyen delivered their remarks, Jörg Baberowski, a professor of Eastern European history at Berlin’s Humboldt University, told *Der Spiegel* magazine, “Hitler was not a psychopath, he was not vicious. He did not want to talk about the extermination of the Jews at his table.”

Not a single voice from academia or the political establishment was raised against this gross falsification of history by Baberowski, who also proclaimed his support for Ernst Nolte, the most well-known pro-Nazi historian in post-war Germany. On the contrary, Baberowski and his co-thinkers were defended and supported by Humboldt University’s management, which declared “attacks in the media” on him to be “unacceptable.” This support extended beyond Germany, with Princeton University awarding Baberowski a research grant of \$300,000 for his work on dictatorship, which the professor studies as a legitimate and even popular “alternative political order” to democratic forms of rule. When Baberowski travelled to Princeton in the spring of 2019 to attend a closed-door conference, he was accompanied by his research assistant Fabian Thunemann, who was identified as a leading participant in a neo-Nazi demonstration in the German city of Hannover in 1998. (See: Why did Princeton University provide funding for the German right-wing extremist Jörg Baberowski?)

While Baberowski’s far-right rewriting of history enjoyed sympathetic backing from the media and academia, the SGP and its student organization were subjected to a vicious media campaign. In 2018, the SGP was placed on a watch list by the Secret Service for being “left-wing extremist.” In its justification of the move, the intelligence agency, which was headed at the time by the AfD sympathiser Hans-Georg Maassen, argued that “the struggle for a democratic, egalitarian, socialist society” and “agitation against alleged ‘imperialism’ and ‘militarism’” are anti-constitutional, i.e., illegal.

The reason for this ruthless response was that the SGP’s opposition to Baberowski, the trivialisation of the Nazis’ crimes, and the revival of German militarism cut across the ruling elite’s conspiracy to shift politics sharply to the right. The neo-fascist AfD has been systematically built up since its founding in 2013. After it secured 12.6 percent of the vote in the 2017 federal election and became the first fascist party since 1945 to be represented in the federal Parliament, Steinmeier, who was by then German president, met with the AfD’s leaders and urged other parties to dismantle the “walls of irreconcilability” around the AfD and strive for “German patriotism.” Several months later, the Christian Democrats and Social Democrats concluded the formation of a new grand coalition government, which had the effect of making the AfD the official opposition party in Parliament.

The AfD has since been able to dictate large parts of the grand coalition’s policy, particularly in the areas of immigration and refugees. All of the parliamentary parties ensured that positions were left open at the head of important parliamentary committees for the far-right party to fill.

In February, the liberal Free Democrats and Christian Democrats took this cooperation with the AfD to its next logical step in the state of Thuringia, where they relied on the votes of the neo-fascists to elect the FDP’s Thomas Kemmerich as the state’s Minister President. Widespread popular outrage over the first Minister President in a post-war German

state to be elected with the votes of a fascist party forced Kemmerich to resign soon afterwards. (See: Sound the alarm! Political conspiracy and the resurgence of fascism in Germany)

It is within this reactionary right-wing political climate that the activities of fascist terrorists and coup plotters in and around the military, police and intelligence agencies have flourished.

The fact that the *Times* now feels compelled to report so explicitly on the danger of right-wing extremist networks speaks to the deepening crisis of bourgeois rule under conditions of world capitalist breakdown that are unprecedented since the 1930s. Faced with glaring levels of social inequality, a resurgence of inter-imperialist rivalries and the erosion of democratic forms of rule, ruling elites everywhere are turning to authoritarian and right-wing extremist forces to defend their interests against the working class at home and their national competitors abroad. As Trotsky wrote in 1929, analysing the growing trend towards dictatorship in Europe and the strengthening of fascist forces, “The excessively high tension of the international struggle and the class struggle results in the short circuit of the dictatorship, blowing out the fuses of democracy one after the other.”

While the infiltration of the German military and state apparatus by fascist forces with the backing of the political establishment is the most graphic example of this process, no less dangerous developments are under way in other leading capitalist countries.

In neighbouring France, President Emmanuel Macron has lauded the legacy of Nazi collaborator Philippe Pétain as a national hero and ordered a brutal military-style crackdown on Yellow Vest protesters, resulting in fatalities and the maiming of hundreds.

In the United States, Trump continues to cultivate a base of support among far-right and fascist layers, as shown most recently by his retweeting of a video showing one of his supporters shouting “white power.” Confronted by mass, multi-racial protests against police brutality in early June, the US president responded by initiating a military coup with the aim of creating an authoritarian regime under his personal command.

Far-right and fascistic forces are also being promoted in Canada, including to intimidate and disperse working class struggles. Just a day prior to the publication of the *Times*’ exposé of the far-right in Germany, an army reservist motivated by right-wing extremist views launched a failed assassination attempt against Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

There could be nothing more criminally light-minded than to underestimate the threat from the fascist far-right. But unlike the 1920s and 1930s, the far-right in Germany and elsewhere does not yet enjoy a mass following. In fact, the AfD and its backers are widely despised among the broad masses of the population, who have not forgotten the barbaric crimes perpetrated by the Nazis throughout Europe, above all the Holocaust. The far-right’s apparent strength comes exclusively from the fact that it has powerful allies within the ruling elite and its state apparatus.

To prevent the far-right conspiracies of the ruling elites in Germany and other countries from succeeding, the widespread working class hatred towards right-wing extremism must be transformed into a conscious political movement against the revival of fascism and militarism, and the rotten capitalist profit system in which this process is rooted. Above all, this requires the building of the International Committee of the Fourth International as the revolutionary leadership of the international working class.





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