

The Asgaard security firm: Neo-Nazi networks in German army and police

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News magazine *Der Spiegel* and public broadcaster ARD's "Kontraste" television programme reported earlier this month on a wide-ranging right-wing extremist network associated with the Asgaard security firm, which reportedly has close ties to Germany's military, police and state apparatus.

Asgaard advertises among and employs former and active police officers and soldiers, who were described by Kontraste as highly specialised men. The firm is hired, for example, to guard the diplomatic offices of an Arabian power in Iraq, with rumours indicating that the power in question is Saudi Arabia. Asgaard's headquarters in Iraq was located in 2017 inside the Green Zone, the strictly guarded area of central Baghdad where the government and international representatives are located, and from where the imperialist forces active in the country are commanded.

A breeding ground for Wehrmacht traditions and fascist ideology

A video recently published from the same year shows the fascist Wehrmacht traditions on which the firm and its employees base themselves. Whiteboards, operational plans and several rooms are covered in old German script. A military flag of the German Reich hangs prominently in a waiting room above some seats. In the hallway of the base, the Wehrmacht slogan "Don't complain, fight!" is shown in old German script alongside a picture of a Wehrmacht soldier.

During their operations as bodyguards in Iraq, the mercenaries wore the German flag on the breasts and arms of their uniform. In 2017, Dirk Gaßmann, the head of the firm, employed 25 men who had previously served as German soldiers in Iraq. Most of them were paratroopers, but there were also some mountain troopers and grenadiers, "but all of them are alpha animals," as he boasted in an interview with the right-wing *Bild* daily in 2017.

Gaßmann is a former paratrooper in the German army and has, according to "Kontraste," close contacts in Germany's national security apparatus. Gaßmann and his colleagues make no effort to conceal their far-right, fascist outlook. A photo taken at a party held by the firm shows Gaßmann posing with the bust of a Wehrmacht soldier. Laughing, he points with his finger to a swastika within an Iron Cross, which is on the plinth of the bust.

On social media, Gaßmann agitates against Muslims and propagates the traditions of the Wehrmacht. He sought to recruit people for his firm by remarking in a discussion on Wehrmacht songs that had been banned, "Bobby, you are still allowed to sing in Baghdad. No problem." This shows that he deliberately seeks to hire people from the right-wing extremist milieu.

Asgaard's headquarters is located in Hamm in the state of North Rhine-

Westphalia. Torsten W., who is alleged to have supported the terrorist cell Group S, worked in the Hamm transport police commission. His right-wing extremist views were reportedly well known among his colleagues at the police station.

The firm's Hamm headquarters appears to have played a central role in the right-wing extremist network around Dirk Gaßmann. A meeting between former and active police officers and soldiers took place there in July 2020. Their social media posts make clear their association with right-wing extremist circles.

A former Asgaard employee, who was in Iraq with the firm and is friends with Gaßmann on Facebook, shared a white clenched fist. "White lives matter," was written around the neo-Nazi symbol. Maps showing Germany's borders during the Third Reich and under the Kaiser were also posted.

"I am German, if I wrote now what I think, I would be behind bars tomorrow," stated one meme, while another comment complained that the "pure white race" only makes up a few percent of the global population. Bilal Zaher, a former employee and business partner of Gaßmann's, told "Kontraste" that employees at the Baghdad base were referred to as "token n---rs."

Photojournalist Daniel Etter, who accompanied an Asgaard unit for three weeks in Iraq during an operation in 2014, described how they regularly used Völkisch and extremely racist remarks. "The issue of German blood, actually Germany's past, was repeatedly raised in various forms," he said. The racist ideology formed the basis of collaboration at Asgaard.

Close ties with the police and state apparatus

Likely one of the central figures in the meeting at Asgaard's premises in July 2020 was the 41-year-old Thomas S., a police officer from Frankfurt. At the time, he led an investigations team within the Frankfurt police. According to "Kontraste" research, he was a long-serving employee of the security firm and belonged to the leadership circle around Gaßmann. Photos show him heavily armed and wearing an Asgaard uniform in Iraq.

According to Bilal Zaher, Thomas S. was repeatedly appointed commando leader during operations. The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ) also reported that he was involved in training and evaluating colleagues. Until recently, the firm advertised its services on its website with a picture of S. under the heading "Asgaard academy—a qualification for professionals."

Then in August, both S.'s private living quarters and Asgaard's headquarters were searched. The Frankfurt public prosecutor had initiated an investigation due to suspected bribery and the violation of secret police protocols. According to the public prosecutor, S. had undertaken "an

unreported and therefore unauthorised side-job for a private security firm in North Rhine-Westphalia allegedly influenced by right-wing extremism, including in foreign countries."

The statement from the public prosecutor continued that S. "carried out unlawful accessing of information from police databanks in order to use the information he obtained to personally enrich himself in his side job."

In Frankfurt during 2018, the personal details of the lawyer Seda Basay-Yildiz, who had represented victims of the National Socialist Underground (NSU) terrorist group, among others, were accessed from the 1st Police Precinct. Several days later, she received a letter containing threats that was signed "NSU 2.0." As the FAZ recently reported, a total of 105 threatening letters have come to light, with 88 bearing the signature "NSU 2.0."

The Frankfurt public prosecutor has been investigating these threats for over two years. According to the FAZ, sources in the state security apparatus said the number of threats has risen dramatically recently, but not a single perpetrator has yet been identified. The public prosecutor and the Hesse state Interior Ministry have denied any connection between the Thomas S. case and NSU 2.0, as well as the suggestion that S. holds right-wing extremist views.

A further participant in the July 2020 meeting at Asgaard's premises was Matthias D., a 40-year-old army soldier from Neubrandenburg, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania. According to Kontraste, he maintains close ties to right-wing extremist circles, and has been under surveillance by the military intelligence service (MAD) since 2018 as a right-wing extremist suspect. As a result, Matthias D., who is also a former kickboxing world champion, allegedly threatened to kill MAD employees.

Two weeks ago, on September 14, around 70 officers from the Rostock public prosecutor's office searched D.'s apartment and storage facilities, and confiscated several electrical appliances and documents on the basis that he was preparing to carry out an act of violence endangering the state.

Such plans, which aim at launching a fascist assault on "Day X" by carrying out the mass murder of political opponents, are deeply rooted in the organs of the state. This applies especially to Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania. This was where leading members of the Nordkreuz (Northern Cross) group were organised in the reservist association Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, and where Philipp Sch., a soldier in the German special forces regiment (KSK), was able to amass an arms dump with thousands of rounds of ammunition, 2 kilograms of plastic explosives, and a wide array of Nazi memorabilia.

Two police officers were suspended from duty in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania on September 18 after their houses were searched. They are accused of sharing right-wing extremist views online, according to a *Der Spiegel* report on September 19. The searches were linked to the investigation into the Nordkreuz terrorist group. Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania's interior minister, the Christian Democrat Lorenz Kaffier, denied any link with the right-wing extremist chat groups in the police in North-Rhine Westphalia.

After eight special forces officers with the state criminal police (LKA) were suspended in the course of investigations into the Nordkreuz group in late 2019, Kaffier ordered the LKA's director, Ingolf Mager, and the head of the police department, Frank Niehörster, to be transferred into his department instead of removing them from service. The pair had "performed excellent work" and are "renowned experts in their field," said the interior minister at the time. They would "continue to be important advisers" to him.

Prior to that, Kaffier appointed an independent commission of experts led by Heinz Fromm, a former official with the domestic intelligence agency, whose secret report claimed the SEK units had shown perfect conduct. The report appears aimed at concealing the extent of the conspiracy. Fromm is notorious for destroying files related to the NSU during his time at the intelligence agency.

Focus reported on September 17 that Thomas Haldenwang, the head of the federal domestic intelligence agency, employed a bodyguard who is a member of the right-wing paramilitary Uniter group. A government official stated that it is possible that personal information and secret files made their way into the hands of Uniter as a result. The Uniter club, which presented itself as a support organisation for elite soldiers, police officers, and private security guards, is suspected of having been a right-wing centre of the "Hannibal network," which planned a fascist uprising on "Day X," established weapons dumps, and planned to exterminate political opponents.

Kaffier was the patron on several occasions of a competition for elite soldiers, which was featured in a report on ZDF television entitled "Attack from Within." It characterised the competition as the transfer point for the Hannibal network's munitions procurement. Within this framework, trainers from GSG-9, USk, SEK and other European special forces met at a private shooting range in Güstrow every year. Photos of the celebration of the winners show Kaffier socialising with the elite troops.

The operator of the private shooting range, Frank T., was given a contract from Kaffier's Interior Ministry and was apparently a member of Nordkreuz. ZDF reported that close ties existed between the operator of the private shooting range and Marco G., the leading figure in the Nordkreuz group. The broadcast cited an "activity protocol for Nordkreuz," which Frank T. sent to Marco G. It states, "The better the communication, the easier it will be to gather on 'Day X.' But until then, the job of each of us is to avoid causing attention as much as possible."

The former Asgaard employee Bilal Zaher confirmed to "Kontraste" that Gaßmann regularly spoke about Day X, when he would kill politicians he doesn't like. A further former employee at Asgaard wanted to remain anonymous because he fears for his life. "I believe Dirk G. is unpredictable and dangerous. He spoke regularly of a Day X, he told the public broadcaster magazine.

Zaher also said that the Iraqi headquarters of the firm was known internally as the "Wolf's Lair," Hitler's bunker on the Eastern Front. The same praise of the Wehrmacht's traditions is shown on Gaßmann's Facebook page, where he praises the Wehrmacht commander Kurt Student as inspiring.

Student was a senior commander of the paratroopers during the Third Reich and was responsible for numerous war crimes. For example, in 1941, he ordered acts of retribution against the local population in Greece due to their resistance to Nazi occupation. Student also planned the deployment of German paratroopers to liberate Italian fascist leader Benito Mussolini after he was removed from power and arrested in 1943. "As a former paratrooper with its family traditions, Gen. Student is for me privately a model soldier," Gaßmann told *Der Spiegel*.

He was merely saying openly what leading representatives of the ruling class think. In the Franz-Josef-Strauß barracks in Munich, a street was dedicated to "lieutenant general Student" until 1998. Student died at the age of 88 in 1978. In 2017, *Der Spiegel* published an interview with the military historian Sünke Neitzel, which glorified the Wehrmacht and trivialised the Nazi regime's crimes. One can "act in an exemplary manner even for a regime in total war...such as by leading people or being a successful soldier," he said. In the same year, Alternative for Germany leader Alexander Gauland demanded that a line be drawn under Germany's Nazi past, and the recognition of the "positive achievements of German soldiers in two World Wars."

One year later, the grand coalition adopted a traditions regulation that permitted the glorification of individual Wehrmacht personnel, and downplayed the criminal character of the regime. The "voluntary military service for homeland defence," which is scheduled to launch next April, permits neo-Nazis to receive military training while being paid by the state.

Fascist traditions and organisations are being deliberately promoted to revive German militarism, prepare for new wars, and suppress the strong opposition to this. The struggle against these dangerous developments requires the independent mobilisation of the working class on a socialist programme.



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