Trial of army officer Franco A. sheds light on fascist network in German state apparatus

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Last Thursday, the trial of Franco A., a right-wing extremist soldier in the Bundeswehr (Armed Forces), began at the Higher Regional Court (OLG) in Frankfurt. The Federal Prosecutor's Office accuses him of preparing a "serious crime endangering the state." Using a fake refugee identity, he is alleged to have planned terrorist attacks on politicians and public institutions to "change political conditions in the Federal Republic of Germany in line with his right-wing extremist ideas," according to a spokeswoman for the federal prosecutor's office.

In the courtroom, the defendant admitted to applying for asylum under a false name but remained silent on the charge of planning attacks. The presiding judge then declared that the necessary large-scale taking of evidence would require a "very long main hearing."

The trial once again throws light on the widespread right-wing terrorist networks in the German state apparatus—as well as on the way in which these networks are covered up and played down by politicians, the judiciary, the intelligence services and parts of the media. Since his initial arrest in 2017 triggered frantic reactions in the Ministry of Defence and the intelligence services, details have come to light that paint a clear picture.

Officer Franco A. was part of a network of elite soldiers, special police officers and state officials whose leading figures remain at large despite having committed serious weapons offenses. Members of the network made far-reaching preparations for an armed coup on a "Day X" and, in the course of this, planned the detention and murder of politicians, civil rights activists and refugee aid workers.

Franco A. himself, together with two accomplices, allegedly stole more than 1,000 rounds of ammunition as well as 51 Bundeswehr grenades and stored them privately along with extensive lists of "enemies." In 2015, he developed a cover identity as a Syrian refugee and successfully applied for asylum in Bavaria. According to the indictment, his "firmly-held völkisch-nationalist" views are documented, among other things, by several hours of seized voice recordings.

The death lists contain the names and addresses of Vice Bundestag (federal parliament) President Claudia Roth (Green Party), ex-Federal President Joachim Gauck, then-Justice Minister and now Foreign Minister Heiko Maas (Social Democratic Party, SPD) and Anetta Kahane, president of the anti-racist Amadeo Antonio Foundation.

According to the investigating Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA), the attack plans against Kahane were the most advanced. Among other things, investigators found photos of the foundation's underground parking garage and location sketches of its premises on Franco A.'s person, as well as plans for a weapons transfer in the capital and a suspected escape route that was to lead from Berlin via his barracks in Illkirch to the refugee shelter in Bavaria.

Despite this clear circumstantial evidence, Franco A.'s defence lawyers argued aggressively at the beginning of the trial. Without commenting on the seized military equipment and the extensive evidence, one of the lawyers claimed in the press that Franco A. had been the "victim of a smear campaign" launched "by parts of the tabloid media." In reality, "parts of the tabloid media"—including newspaper *Bild* and broadcaster RT Deutsch—had provided Franco A. with the opportunity for extensive interviews in advance.

In the trial, the defence subsequently read out a statement that spoke of a media "character assassination" and accused the opposing side of exerting "political influence on investigations" and taking "distance from the law." The tenor of their statement was that what was "dangerous to the state" was not the Bundeswehr soldier "disguised as a refugee," armed with ammunition and kill lists, but "parts of the government" that "make common cause with gangs of people smugglers."

Franco A.'s own brazen claim that he was "not a right-wing extremist" stands in complete contradiction to the facts. Investigators have seized not only relevant literature from him (including Hitler's "Mein Kampf"), but also Wehrmacht (Hitler's army) memorabilia and statements such as "Hitler is above everything" and "My religion is my Germanness." In fact, everything indicates that Franco A. is a fascist conspirator who has long been sponsored by leading authorities in the Bundeswehr.

In 2014, Franco A. wrote a Master's thesis that was compared by several journalists to the pamphlets of far-right terrorists Anders Breivik, Brenton Tarrant and the murderers of Halle and Hanau. In his opus, he calls immigration national

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"autogenocide" and invokes a Jewish plot to destroy Europe, ranging from the prophet Isaiah to investor George Soros.

After Franco A.'s French examiners failed him in the face of such fascistic narratives, his superiors in the Bundeswehr stepped in and certified that he had become a "victim of his own intellectual ability." There was "no evidence" for an extreme right-wing attitude on Franco A.'s part, it was said. "Doubts about the required attitude toward the social order of values" were "not only not provable, but can be ruled out," they said.

Franco A. was able to produce a second thesis and rise to the rank of first lieutenant in the Bundeswehr. Investigations into any disciplinary offenses were dropped, and it was left at a warning, which, contrary to internal regulations, was not entered in his personnel file.

As astonishing as the Franco A. case is, it is only one part of a much broader fascist conspiracy within the German state apparatus.

In 2015—barely a year after writing his thesis—Franco A. was recruited at an arms fair by André S., alias "Hannibal," for his "prepper" network, which, according to witness testimony and seized chat logs, is said to have had "safe houses" in Germany, Austria and Switzerland and was preparing for civil war on "Day X."

Members of the northern Hannibal group "Nordkreuz" had stolen tens of thousands of rounds of ammunition from government stockpiles—including military ammunition from police special forces throughout Germany—and planned to kidnap political opponents in Bundeswehr transports and assassinate them at specified locations. For this purpose, they kept enemy lists and orders for caustic lime and hundreds of body bags.

As reported by the newspaper *taz*, Franco A. quickly advanced to become a driving member of the "South" group of this network. When an e-mail with the greeting "Germany awake! Heil, Segen und Sieg" (Hail, blessings and victory) was met with discomfort by one member, Franco A. replied: "Moralising, such as you engage in here, is always a new reason for oppressive and unfree exchange. Our group should remain free of that."

In February 2017, Franco A. was finally arrested by the Austrian authorities in Vienna while trying to smuggle a firearm into Germany. Nine months later, the Federal Court of Justice lifted the arrest warrant against him because they saw "no urgent suspicion" regarding the preparation of terrorist attacks.

The Higher Regional Court in Frankfurt even declared that there was a lack of "sufficient suspicion" for the preparation of a serious act of violence endangering the state, although the court explicitly upheld the accusation that Franco A. had procured the two pistols, the two rifles and 51 explosive devices and kept them.

Franco A. immediately used his newfound freedom to prepare his rehabilitation—for example, by providing reporters from the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* with part of the files via his lawyers, who then wrote a sympathetic three-part story about him.

Back in July 2017, the Federal Supreme Court had lifted the arrest warrant against Franco A.'s accomplice Maximilian T., even though he had an identical list of enemies and had regularly provided Franco A. with an alibi in the Bundeswehr when he attended an appointment with the refugee authorities. Like his comrade and friend Franco A., Maximilian T. had also repeatedly come to light as a right-wing extremist in the Illkirch Ranger Battalion.

After the investigations against Maximilian T. began in 2017, Bundestag deputy Jan Nolte of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) hired the officer as a personal assistant. Through his new superior, who is a member and secretary of the Defence Committee, Maximilian T. not only gained access to military secrets of the Bundeswehr, but also to information and documents dealing with his case. In October 2018, the case was dropped and the Bundestag administration issued Maximilian T. a parliamentary pass, although the Secret Service and the Military Counter-Intelligence Service (MAD) continued to classify him as a right-wing extremist.

The current trial of Franco A. is part of a whole series of court cases against far-right figures which have ended with the defendants being set free. For example, Nordkreuz leader Marco G., whose prison sentence was suspended; André S., who got off with a fine; and an elite soldier from Saxony associated with Nordkreuz, who had stashed ammunition on his property and received a two-year suspended sentence for it in March of this year.

Although the judiciary has detailed information about the extent of the conspiracy, which is also in the public domain, the Federal Prosecutor's Office has consistently refrained from conducting investigations into the "formation of a terrorist organization." At the same time, the Bundeswehr, police and intelligence services—within whose ranks these networks operate unimpeded—are being given far-reaching new powers and massively strengthened to be ready for coming class struggles in Germany and Europe.

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