

Scope of right-wing terrorist network in Germany comes into focus

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Five days after the largest raid in the history of post-World War II Germany, it is becoming increasingly clear how extensive the right-wing terrorist network is against which it was directed.

On December 7, some 3,000 special police force officers searched 150 properties across Germany. Since then, 25 people have been held in pre-trial detention, and 29 others are under investigation. The federal prosecutor accuses them of being members or supporters of a terrorist organization. But they are only the tip of the iceberg.

The right-wing terrorist network, which draws on the milieu of *Reichsbürger*, QAnon supporters, so-called “lateral thinkers” (*Querdenken*) and coronavirus deniers, is estimated to number in the tens of thousands. It includes members of the Alternative for Germany (AfD) and other far-right parties and reaches deep into the state security apparatus and social elites.

The Office for the Protection of the Constitution (as Germany’s domestic secret service is called) numbers the supporters of the monarchist and anti-democratic *Reichsbürger* at 23,000 alone, 2,000 more than a year ago. It considers 10 percent to be prepared to use violence.

Reichsbürger (literally, Citizens of the Reich) dispute the legitimacy of the post-war Federal Republic of Germany and believe that the German Reich (Empire), founded in 1871, continues to exist. Acts of violence repeatedly come from their ranks, 239 being registered in the last year alone. In the spring, for example, a *Reichsbürger* supporter in Baden-Württemberg deliberately ran over a police officer during a traffic check. Another fired an automatic rifle at approaching officers who wanted to confiscate the illegal weapon. Nevertheless, the judiciary and police handle *Reichsbürger*, who also have numerous supporters in the state security apparatus, with kid gloves.

Last week’s raid was apparently carried out because the Interior Ministry and the chief federal prosecutor’s office feared imminent attacks against state institutions, which would also have endangered the lives of high-ranking government officials and politicians.

Those arrested are said to have planned to invade the Bundestag along the lines of the American coup plotters of January 6, 2021, capture members of parliament and

government, trigger riots across the country and then carry out a coup.

Chief federal prosecutor Peter Frank said the group was pursuing the goal of eliminating democracy in Germany “by using violence and military means.” Federal Interior Minister Nancy Faeser (Social Democratic Party, SPD) said the investigations provided “a glimpse into an abyss of terrorist threats from the *Reichsbürger* milieu.”

In the meantime, numerous details have been released to the public about those arrested, whose names the chief prosecutor only disclosed in the form of initials. Many of them have been known for their right-wing extremist views and activities for years or decades. A striking number were or are members of the military or the state security apparatus. In any case, it soon became clear that the authorities were by no means as surprised about the “abyss of terrorist threats” as Interior Minister Faeser now claims.

In the mid-1990s, the 69-year-old **Rüdiger von Pescatore**, who is said to have led the “military arm” of the group, was the commander of a paratrooper battalion of the 25th Airborne Brigade, a predecessor of the KSK special forces unit. He left the Bundeswehr (Armed Forces) in 1999 because he had taken weapons from old East German stocks, and was sentenced to two years’ probation. Of the 165 pistols and rifles that disappeared at the time, only 11 have ever turned up again.

The 54-year-old **Peter Wörner** is a trained elite soldier in the KSK. On Instagram, there are also photos showing him with American special forces in the US. He was a member of the same battalion as Pescatore in the 1990s. He is part of the “prepper” scene and has recently worked as a survivalist trainer. In April this year, officers found firearms, ammunition, magazines and other weapons in his home.

Wörner is also said to have had contact with the group that planned to kidnap Health Minister Karl Lauterbach and then organize a coup. This group blew apart in the summer, with the media reporting about it.

Maximilian Eder, 63, was a colonel in the Bundeswehr and led an armoured infantry battalion in Kosovo in 1999. Before retiring in the autumn of 2016, he served for a time in the KSK. With the onset of the pandemic, he became a leading figure in protests against anti-COVID measures.

During the flood disaster in the Ahr Valley, the retired colonel showed up in uniform, set up a “command centre” and authorised deployment orders. His “chief of staff” was Peter Wörner. Eder eventually had to pay a €3,500 fine for the unauthorized wearing of a uniform. Shortly before his arrest, in a video, Eder called for a coup before Christmas.

Andreas Meyer, 58, an active KSK soldier, is also among the accused. The staff sergeant was deployed several times as a logistician in Afghanistan and has published a book about his experience. He is said to have smuggled members of the group into barracks using his military ID.

Several police officers are also among the accused. **Chief Inspector Ivonne G.** works as a criminal investigator in the Minden-Lübbecke district police department in North Rhine-Westphalia, according to information from news weekly *Der Spiegel*. She is said to have attracted attention in the past as a coronavirus denier. A state security officer from Lower Saxony, who is also accused, is said to have been on sick leave for some time. **Michael Fritsch**, a chief detective in Lower Saxony, has already been removed from his position. He is a *Reichsbürger* and was the lead candidate of the *Querdenken* party dieBasis for the 2021 federal election.

During the raids, police found a substantial arsenal of weapons: nine-millimetre pistols, swords, knives, stun guns, combat helmets, night-vision equipment and the service weapons of a female and male police officer who are among the suspects. In addition, the group is said to possess a dozen Iridium satellite phones at a cost of €1,500 each, which work even if the cell phone network breaks down.

Heinrich XIII Prince Reuss, who is considered the ringleader of the group, has long been known for his anti-Semitic statements and his support of *Reichsbürger* ideology. At a digital fair in Zurich, Switzerland, for example, he agitated against the power of “Jewish big capitalists” and declared that the Federal Republic was not a sovereign state but was dominated by the Allies to this day. The speech was published on YouTube.

His strange name comes from the fact that in the noble family of Reuss, all male descendants are called Heinrich. To avoid confusion, they are numbered with Roman numerals—starting anew with each century.

The family has distanced itself from Heinrich XIII, calling him a “bitter old man” who subscribes to “conspiracy-theory misconceptions.” But his role is no accident. Old aristocrats who—as Reuss did for 30 years—litigate for the return of expropriated Juncker property and dream of the restoration of the German Reich and old Prussian glory are to be found in abundance in the right-wing extremist milieu.

Long before Beatrix von Storch, born Duchess of Oldenburg, became a member of the AfD, she campaigned for the restitution of the large aristocratic estates expropriated after the war.

An example of the arrested group’s close ties to the AfD is

Berlin judge **Birgit Malsack-Winkemann**, who represented the far-right party in the Bundestag for four years. Her judicial appointment was confirmed by the Berlin Administrative Court as recently as October, even though the police had long been investigating her for forming a terrorist organization and her contacts with the AfD’s ultra-nationalist “Flügel” (“wing”) grouping, her racist statements against refugees and her participation in a *Querdenken* demonstration in Berlin were well known.

However, Malsack-Winkemann is only one link between the terrorist cell and the AfD. Among the accused are at least two others who are or were active at regional level in the AfD.

In addition, **Alexander Q.**, who runs a QAnon channel on Telegram with 130,000 subscribers, is said to be among the supporters of the terrorist cell. During the Ahr Valley flood disaster, he spread the lie that the flood waters had washed up the corpses of 600 children who had been locked up and killed in order to extract a rejuvenating metabolic product from them.

One can only understand the emergence of the terrorist cell against the backdrop of years of the downplaying and promotion of far-right groups by the secret service and other state authorities.

In 2003, proceedings to ban the far-right German National Party (NPD) failed because the Supreme Court judges concluded that there were so many security agency employees in the party’s leadership that the NPD was “in substance, an operation of the state.”

When president of the Office for the Protection of the Constitution, Hans-Georg Maassen, advised and promoted the AfD at least two dozen state informants were part of the support network of the neo-Nazi National Socialist Union (NSU), without the state allegedly knowing of their existence. The connections between the NSU, the secret service and the murder of Kassel District President Walter Lübcke remain murky to this day.

With the return of German militarism and the Ukraine war, the crimes of the Nazis and their collaborators are being systematically trivialized. The establishment parties have integrated the far-right AfD into parliamentary work and adopted its policies—letting the virus rip in the pandemic, refugee-baiting and implementing a massive military build-up.

In this climate, right-wing terrorist groups, such as the one that has now been exposed, can develop. The arrest of two dozen right-wing extremists will not change this. Only an independent, socialist offensive of the working class can stop the fascist danger.



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