

German military's special forces unit has ties to far-right Reichsbürger terrorist network

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On December 7, in one of the largest police raids in the history of the Federal Republic of Germany, some 3,000 officers stormed about 150 locations in 11 federal states and arrested 25 people, who continue to be held in pretrial detention. Another 29 people are under investigation. The state prosecutor has accused them of being members or supporters of a terrorist organisation, and the searches are ongoing.

On the day of the raid, the federal prosecutor released a statement saying those arrested belonged to an organisation “that aimed to overturn the existing state order in Germany and replace it with its own form of government.”

Prince Reuss Heinrich XIII was charged by the federal prosecutor as the ringleader. Prince Reuss is a Frankfurt real estate agent and descendant of a Thuringian noble family who ruled the Vogtland region for 700 years, while another leading suspect is the former paratrooper commander Rüdiger von Pescatore, who led the terrorist organisation’s “military arm.”

Among the detainees are also the Berlin judge and former member of parliament of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) Birgit Malsack-Winkemann, as well as former elite soldiers, including the former special forces (KSK) Colonel Maximilian E. The locations searched included the barracks of the KSK in Calw, Baden-Württemberg, which was previously identified as a centre of the right-wing terrorist Hannibal network.

The 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. 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.

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 have endangered the lives of high-ranking government officials and politicians.

The investigation thus far into the terrorist network within the Reichsbürger milieu has uncovered a strikingly large number of members of the KSK.

In addition to the above-mentioned Rüdiger von Pescatore, those figures already known by name include Maximilian Eder, who led an armored grenadier battalion in Kosovo in 1999 and later served in the KSK; Peter Wörner, a trained KSK elite soldier who now

works as a survival coach; and Andreas Meyer, who is still active in the KSK as a staff sergeant.

Not all of the 54 people under investigation by the public prosecutor’s office are known, so there could well be further KSK members among them.

The strong presence of elite soldiers among the terror suspects makes clear that the plans for a putsch were not simply the fantasies of a few crazy individuals, as is often claimed. It is now also known that during the first raids, the police secured some 90 weapons and a six-figure sum of cash, and discovered a reference to gold bars worth €6 million allegedly stored in a Swiss safe.

In addition, the investigators found lists of possible enemy targets. According to the news magazine *Der Spiegel*, they discovered at the arrested Marco v. H.’s residence a handwritten list of 10 politicians from Baden-Württemberg, several doctors and a judicial official. In addition to the names, the addresses of the politicians’ electoral district offices and the doctors’ practices were noted.

The high number of suspected military personnel is significant for another reason. It shows how closely the growth of fascist terrorist networks and the right-wing extremist milieu on which they are based is connected with the revival of German militarism and the associated rehabilitation of Nazi ideology and the crimes of the Wehrmacht.

The emergence of the KSK was directly associated with the transformation of the German army (Bundeswehr) from a territorial defence army into an international intervention force. It was founded in the mid-1990s, after the Federal Constitutional Court gave the green light for out-of-area military operations beyond NATO’s borders. It also followed the declaration by Federal President Roman Herzog that the “end of free-riding” had been reached, and Germany had to assume political and military responsibility in the world in correspondence with its increased weight due to reunification.

The KSK is trained for special operations behind enemy lines, including targeted killing. It operates in the strictest secrecy. No data on casualties and losses suffered by the unit is published, even after operations have been completed. It was used during the Yugoslav war in Bosnia and Kosovo, in commando operations in several African countries and especially in the war in Afghanistan.

There, the KSK worked with US Special Forces in the hunt for Taliban members. It is said to have killed more people than the rest of the Bundeswehr combined. The Bundeswehr only responded to

inquiries by stating that as a matter of principle it does not count dead enemies. When Colonel Georg Klein ordered an air raid in Kunduz that claimed 142 predominantly civilian lives, the KSK was involved. Klein was later promoted and the role of the KSK was concealed.

The elite unit, which comprises only a little more than 1,000 men, is surrounded by the stench of fascism. Its almost 30-year history is accompanied by right-wing extremist incidents, which have repeatedly been covered up and trivialised.

In 2005, Reinhard Günzel, who had commanded the KSK until 2003, together with Ulrich Wegener, the founder of the federal police special operations unit GSG 9, published a book at a far-right publishing house placing the KSK in the tradition of the Wehrmacht's Brandenburg Division. The Brandenburg Division operated behind enemy lines in the war of extermination against the Soviet Union.

Günzel was dismissed in 2003 because he expressed his solidarity with anti-Semitic statements by former Christian Democratic Union member of the federal parliament Martin Hohmann. Today, Hohmann is a member of the far-right Alternative for Germany.

In 2008, Daniel K., a KSK captain, threatened Lieutenant Colonel Jürgen Rose, a member of the critical soldiers' association Darmstädter Signal. He described Rose as an "enemy within" whom one must "smash."

K. received a referral and was promoted. Rose had to retire prematurely and pay €3,000 in penance because he had warned of right-wing tendencies in the KSK. K. was only removed from service in 2019 after he outed himself on Facebook as a Reichsbürger (citizen of the Reich).

In 2017, KSK soldiers celebrated the retirement of KSK Lieutenant Colonel Pascal D. with far-right rock music and Nazi salutes. They competed in long throws with pig heads, and the winner's prize was a prostitute.

In 2020, the 45-year-old KSK instructor Philipp Sch. was arrested after the police found explosives, an arsenal of weapons and ammunition and Nazi literature in a raid on his private property.

The Hannibal network shows most clearly the extent of the far-right threat posed by the KSK. After the arrest in April 2017 of the military officer Franco A., who had posed as a refugee, it gradually became known that a non-commissioned officer of the elite unit named André S. had built up an extensive right-wing extremist network under the pseudonym Hannibal, with groups throughout Germany, Austria and Switzerland.

The Hannibal network included commando soldiers, elite police officers, agents for the intelligence agencies, judges and other state officials. They made extremely violent plans. They had access to military and security resources and planned to use them to eliminate political opponents.

Members of the Hannibal group "Nordkreuz" stole tens of thousands of ammunition rounds from authorities and planned to kidnap political opponents with Bundeswehr transporters and murder them at specified locations. They kept enemy lists, and order lists for caustic lime and hundreds of body bags.

Although journalistic investigations revealed numerous details

about the far-right conspiracy and the Federal Prosecutor's Office conducted investigations, André S. was never prosecuted. After eight years of service in the KSK, most recently as an instructor and security officer in the Calw barracks, he was transferred but not released from the Bundeswehr. There has not even been a disciplinary case mounted against him. The Frankfurt Higher Regional Court rejected putting him on trial due to a lack of "sufficient suspicion of terrorism."

One reason is that André S. worked as an informant for the military intelligence service MAD. This reveals the same pattern as in the National Socialist Underground (NSU) case. Numerous informants and employees of the secret services who promoted far-right forces with state funds were active in the immediate proximity of the far-right NSU trio that murdered 10 people. The files in the case are still under lock and key. Parliamentary committees of inquiry were denied access to them.

The obvious conclusion is that there is a connection between the Hannibal group and the Reichsbürger Network, which the Federal Public Prosecutor is now investigating. However, the investigation will either be stonewalled or limited to alleged "individual perpetrators" as in previous cases—the NSU trial, the attack on Cologne's Mayor Henriette Reker, the murder of Kassel's regional President Walter Lübcke and the terrorist attacks in Halle and Hanau.

The far-right structures extend deep into the state apparatus and are closely linked to the return of militarism. In the Baltic States and Ukraine, the Bundeswehr cooperates with armies that worship Nazi collaborators during the Second World War as heroes. Historians such as Jörg Baberowski and Timothy Snyder, who trivialize the crimes of the Nazis, are promoted.

The ruling elite needs the far right to suppress the growing opposition to militarism and its devastating social consequences. Having been forced to move against the Reichsbürger Network, the ruling class will use the exposure of the fascist coup plot as justification to strengthen the state and take action against left-wing opponents.

Only one week after the raid against the Reichsbürger, the Public Prosecutor's Office in Neuruppin ordered nationwide house searches of "last generation" activists. The Prosecutor's Office is investigating the environmental group for "the initial suspicion of formation or support of a criminal association, disruption of public enterprises, trespassing and coercion." The pretext for the legal attack is a protest against the refinery PCK Schwedt, in which members of the group are said to have turned off the emergency valves of the pipeline that carries oil from Rostock to Schwedt.



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