

# The Zweibrücken scandal: Right-wing extremism in the armed forces and the return of German militarism

Florian Hasek, Johannes Stern  
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The latest right-wing extremism scandal at the 26th Paratrooper Regiment in Zweibrücken is not a “shocking isolated case,” as Defence Minister Boris Pistorius and the Bundeswehr (armed forces) leadership assert. It is the expression of deeply rooted developments that have run through the Bundeswehr for years—or rather from the beginning. Today, this has reached a new quality under conditions of massive rearmament, open war preparation against Russia and the return of German militarism.

The regiment in Zweibrücken is being investigated for a host of serious accusations. They range from right-wing extremist and antisemitic statements, Hitler salutes (Sieg Heil) and symbols glorifying Nazism, to sexualised violence and threats of rape against female soldiers, as well as violence-prone rituals, dangerous tests of courage and massive alcohol and drug consumption in a service context. In total, there are 55 accused and more than 200 alleged individual offences, and around 260 interrogations were carried out. In 16 cases, the Zweibrücken public prosecutor’s office is investigating criminally relevant offences, applications for 19 dismissal proceedings were made, and several soldiers have already been removed from military service.

The media report on right-wing extremist and openly antisemitic cliques within the regiment, on “Nazi parties,” Nazi uniforms and costumes in the barracks, on “Judensau” (Jewish pig) insults and antisemitic slurs. It is particularly serious considering that these conditions did not occur occasionally but were known and tolerated for years. Even the Bundeswehr admits that right-wing extremist and antisemitic statements, sexualised assaults and a culture of violence, as well as alcohol and drug abuse, were part of the troop culture over a long period. The change of command in autumn 2025, which took place without any public announcement, hardens the suspicion that the army leadership was more concerned with damage limitation than shining a light on things.

The official reaction follows a familiar script. Pistorius claims to be “shocked” and promises “complete clarification” and “harsh consequences.” Army Inspector Christian Freuding, the highest-ranking officer, speaks about indications of right-wing extremism involving a single enlisted rank. But this portrayal contradicts the facts and serves to deliberately trivialise a structural problem that is deeply rooted in the military apparatus.

This pattern is well known. When the right-wing extremist Bundeswehr officer Franco A. was arrested in 2017, politicians and the military leadership likewise reacted with feigned indignation. At that time, it became known that Franco A. had registered himself as a Syrian refugee in order to plan attacks and blame them on migrants. At the same time, extensive neo-Nazi networks within the Bundeswehr came to light. The consequences were limited through committees of inquiry, symbolic reforms and lip service. The structures remained intact.

This was followed by scandals surrounding the Special Forces Command (KSK), right-wing extremist chat groups, weapons and ammunition theft, as well as repeated revelations about the role of the Military Counter-Intelligence Service (MAD), which ignored tips, delayed investigations, or deliberately limited them. Even officially announced “dissolutions” and “restructurings” of the KSK proved to be deceptive manoeuvres. The scandal of Zweibrücken is part of this ongoing right-wing conspiracy.

Right-wing extremism in the Bundeswehr is not an “industrial accident” (Betriebsunfall), but stands in direct connection with the return of German militarism. With the so-called “new era” in security and foreign policy, the largest rearmament programme since the end of the Second World War, the Bundeswehr is being systematically prepared for major wars. In its language, its depictions of the enemy and its strategic objectives, the open preparation for war against Russia links back directly to the policy of German imperialism in the 20th century.

Parallel to this, the military traditions of the Wehrmacht, Hitler's army, are being rehabilitated. For example, in July 2024 the Bundeswehr issued "Supplementary Instructions on the Guidelines for the Understanding and Cultivation of the Traditions of the Bundeswehr." The document explicitly names leading generals and officers of the Nazi Wehrmacht as "establishing traditions" and "identification-creating" for the Bundeswehr. This consciously establishes an ideological climate in which extreme militarism and nationalism, historical revisionism and fascism thrive.

This is also embodied personally in the current military leadership. Freuding himself stands as an example of the Bundeswehr's aggressive orientation to war. He acts openly as a hardline backer of rearmament and war preparations against Russia and, as the former head of the Ukraine Situation Centre in the Ministry of Defence, maintains close contacts with the Ukrainian army, including units and networks in which openly right-wing extremist and fascist forces play a central role. Ironically, on May 9 last year—the anniversary of the victory of the Red Army over Hitler's Germany—he allowed himself to be photographed demonstratively shaking hands with the Ukrainian neo-Nazi commander Oleg Romanov. Romanov commands the fascist "Paskuda" unit within the Ukrainian armed forces.

That such connections and appearances are not only tolerated but politically rewarded shows how far the ideological shift to the right has already progressed. Cooperation with forces that venerate Nazi collaborators and cultivate fascist symbolism is common practice and is cynically held up as part of the "community of Western values."

At the same time, the militarisation of society is being driven forward at home. The reintroduction of conscription is an expression of this. What is sold as "social responsibility" or "defence capability" is in reality aimed at mobilising a new generation for deployment in war, and breaking resistance to militarism. The experiences from Zweibrücken show what this means concretely: young people are to be pressed into service in an army in which right-wing extremist networks, a culture of violence and sexual assaults are not a fringe phenomenon but rather a structural component.

Precisely for this reason, the growing resistance to conscription is of enormous importance. It indicates that young people are not prepared to be sacrificed for the imperialist interests of the ruling class. But this resistance needs a clear perspective and leadership. In their statement, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), the youth organisation of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP), and the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI)

explain that the current school strike must be directed not only against compulsory military service but against the entire policy of rearmament, war preparations and the authoritarian shift to the right.

The IYSSE emphasises that the dispute over conscription and militarisation could and must become the starting point for a broader movement. The return of German militarism goes hand in hand with social cuts, domestic repression and the strengthening of fascist forces, and is ultimately directed against the entire working class. The fight against conscription, rearmament and war is therefore a class question and requires the mobilisation of workers, youth and students against the policy of the government, the Bundeswehr leadership and the entire ruling elite. The IYSSE writes:

The strikes and protests by students are very important, but we must not stop there. The school strike movement must be the starting point for igniting a strike movement throughout the entire working class, directed against war and capitalism. Such a movement must be based on the following principles:

- It must be international and counter growing nationalism with the international unity of the working class.
- It must be independent of all capitalist parties and trade unions and rely on the immense power of the working class.
- It must be socialist and directed against the root cause of war: capitalism.

The Zweibrücken scandal is a warning signal. It shows where developments lead when right-wing extremism is trivialised, militarism rehabilitated and a pro-war policy driven forward. An army in which antisemitic agitation, Nazi symbolism, sexualised violence and military cultures of violence are the order of the day is not a democratic army of defence but a new Wehrmacht. Whoever wants to fight this development must do so on the clear international and socialist foundations of the IYSSE and SGP.



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