# The crimes of the far-right NSU terror group and the German state cover-up

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Between 2000 and 2007, the neo-Nazi terrorist group "National Socialist Underground" (NSU) murdered at least 10 people: Enver ?im?ek, Abdurrahim Özüdo?ru, Süleyman Ta?köprü, Habil K?l?ç, Mehmet Turgut, ?smail Ya?ar, Theodoros Boulgarides, Mehmet Kuba??k, Halit Yozgat and Michèle Kiesewetter. With the exception of the police officer Kiesewetter, the victims were all men of immigrant background, murdered at the small businesses where they worked.

In addition, the terrorist group carried out three bombings, including the nail bomb attack on Keupstraße in Cologne in 2004, which left 22 people injured, some seriously, and 15 robberies. The group's core members were Uwe Mundlos, Uwe Böhnhardt and Beate Zschäpe. All three fled their home town of Jena and went underground in January 1998.

Fifteen years have passed since the NSU terrorist group exposed itself through a video confession. When the murders committed by the neo-Nazi terrorist group became public, political leaders promised a full investigation and punishment. According to the Chancellor at that time, Angela Merkel: "We will do everything to solve the murders, uncover the accomplices and masterminds, and bring all of the perpetrators to justice." None of that has happened.

The story of the NSU is not simply the story of three neo-Nazis and their barbaric acts. It is the story of a state that covered up for these murderers, financed them, protected them from prosecution for over 13 years—and which, in the 15 years since their self-exposure up to the present day, has done everything in its power to cover up the truth.

### Investigations targeted the victims

The first murder, in September 2000, claimed the life of florist Enver ?im?ek in Nuremberg. Between then and April 2006, the perpetrators struck in Nuremberg, Hamburg, Munich, Rostock, Dortmund and Kassel. All nine male victims were shot with the same weapon, a ?eská 83 pistol, which was later recovered from the debris of the terrorists' burned-out apartment in Zwickau.

Crucial to the story is how the investigative authorities responded to this series of murders. Although all the victims were of Turkish, Kurdish or Greek origin, investigators ruled out neo-Nazi involvement from the outset in every case. Instead, they speculated the motive was likely "organized crime" involving an alleged "Turkish mafia."

The entire German media landscape then supported the narrative that a criminal migrant milieu was responsible for the crimes, which it racially and derogatorily referred to as "kebab murders."

As late as early 2011, just a few months before the group revealed its own identity, *Der Spiegel* stated that the perpetrators could be an "alliance of Turkish nationalists, thugs, and intelligence agents." The victims' relatives themselves were suspected and criminalized for years.

Following the attack on Keupstraße in Cologne, the police and then-SPD Interior Minister Otto Schily claimed just one day later that there was no evidence of a racist or terrorist motive. Once again, speculation centered on the "criminal underworld," and the immigrant community living on Keupstraße and in the Cologne-Mülheim district was placed under general suspicion of having committed the terrorist act.

These "investigations" were not mistakes. They were the deliberate cover-up of a neo-Nazi murder spree by a state whose domestic intelligence agency, the Office for the Protection of the Constitution, (BfV) was—and remains—deeply entangled in the far-right scene.

### The state as midwife of the NSU

The three terrorists—Mundlos, Böhnhardt and Zschäpe—came from the "Jenaer Kameradschaft," a small neo-Nazi cell in the eastern state of Thuringia. This cell was part of the "Thuringian Home Guard" (THS), and the THS was largely the creation of an informant for the Thuringian Office for the Protection of the Constitution (LfV): Tino Brandt. Brandt built up the organization with funds from the intelligence service and was demonstrably still in contact with Mundlos, Böhnhardt and Zschäpe even after they had gone underground.

When the trio "disappeared" into hiding in 1998 following the discovery of five pipe bombs and 1.4 kilograms of TNT in Zschäpe's garage, they were under surveillance by the Thuringian LfV. The claim that the three vanished without a trace is simply implausible. A memo from the Thuringian State Criminal Police Office even explicitly mentions that Beate Zschäpe may have been an informant for the intelligence service.

In total, around 40 undercover agents and informants were in contact with the NSU network. Andreas Temme, an employee of the Hessian LfV, was proven to have been present at the scene of Halit Yozgat's murder in Kassel in 2006—and absurdly claimed not to have noticed anything as the young man was executed by two shots to the head inside the Intercafé. Temme's superiors covered for him.

In its final report, the Thuringia State Parliamentary Inquiry Committee concluded that the search for the terrorists had been so amateurish that it suggested "suspicion of deliberate sabotage." After they went into hiding in 1998, there were so many inconsistencies in the manhunt "that it no longer seems justifiable to the committee to speak here only of 'unfortunate circumstances,' 'mishaps,' or 'mistakes,'" the report states.

### The cover-up after the NSU revealed itself

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On November 4, 2011, Mundlos and Böhnhardt were found dead in a burned-out mobile home following a bank robbery in Eisenach. The pair were alleged to have committed suicide. However, details of what took place were never made public, and the police's actions at the crime scene apparently destroyed so much evidence that it made the subsequent reconstruction of the events difficult. According to the official version, Zschäpe set fire to their shared apartment in Zwickau (and here, too, there are unresolved questions) and later turned herself in to the police.

This was not followed by a full investigation but rather by a systematic destruction of evidence. The intelligence services deliberately destroyed files related to the NSU—a former official with the code name "Lothar Lingen" admitted that he had intentionally destroyed files to conceal their contents. Five intelligence chiefs resigned in the wake of the scandal, and several witnesses died suddenly at a young age and under suspicious circumstances, while the investigation was still ongoing.

The trial in Munich (2013–2018) was designed from the outset to obscure the state's role. The Federal Prosecutor's Office stated early on that the NSU had consisted of only three people—thereby ruling out any investigation into state agencies. When asked by the Bundestag's investigative committee whether informants from the BfV might have been involved in NSU crimes, Federal Prosecutor Herbert Diemer stated that he had "no information" on the matter. He claimed that at no point had the intelligence agency attempted to influence the investigation.

Yet the prosecution demonstrably suppressed evidence. Attorney Stephan Kuhn, who represented a victim of the Keupstraße bombing, reported that the Federal Prosecutor's Office had structured the investigation in such a way that it could decide for itself which findings would be presented to the court and which would not. Twenty firearms were found in the Zwickau apartment—the origin of 17 of them was never clarified. This is clear evidence of additional supporters who were never investigated.

The verdict—life imprisonment for Zschäpe, long prison terms for a few accomplices—confirmed the official narrative: three perpetrators, a closed case. In reality, however, the NSU was part of a far-right network that extended into the police, the Bundeswehr and the intelligence services. Various cases in the years that followed provided further indications of how deeply right-wing extremism is embedded in the state apparatus.

There is, for example, the case of Bundeswehr officer Franco A., who registered as a Syrian refugee and planned attacks on politicians, thereby highlighting the network of far-right structures within the military. In another case it came to light that a far-right network in the Frankfurt police had provided the private addresses of lawyers, journalists, artists and politicians for use in threatening letters.

Foremost among those symbolizing the entanglement of far-right extremism and intelligence agencies is former head of the BfV Hans-Georg Maaßen. Maaßen headed the federal agency from 2012 to 2018, overseeing the cover-up of the state's involvement in the NSU murders. For years, Maaßen personally advised leading politicians from the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) on how to evade state sanctions and surveillance. And under his leadership, the Socialist Equality Party (SGP) was listed for the first time in the BfV's report as "left-wing extremist." Maaßen was not dismissed until he began to display his far-right views more and more openly.

**Lessons from the NSU affair**

For young people and the working class in Germany and internationally, the NSU affair remains of enduring significance. This horrific chapter in the recent history of the Federal Republic of Germany contains lessons that remain relevant even 15 years later: Right-wing extremism and fascism are not "marginal phenomena" of society as a whole but rather products of the capitalist state itself. The notion that the state protects society from right-wing extremism is an illusion. Not only did the BfV fail to combat the NSU, it actually built up, financed and covered for its network.

The trial against Zschäpe and four other defendants was a continuation of the cover-up which completely failed to throw any fresh new light on the background to the NSU murder spree. An anti-fascism that relies on the bourgeois state and its institutions—and, for example, demands that they ban the AfD—is doomed to failure. Anyone who wants to fight fascism must fight the structures that give rise to it.

The cover-up serves the interests of the ruling class. The NSU case was not left unsolved due to incompetence but because a genuine investigation would have brought to light the involvement of the police, the BfV, the Bundeswehr and bourgeois parties—from the CDU to the SPD and the Greens, all the way to the Left Party.

Even though the investigative committees made some critical remarks about the murder spree and the investigations, their goal was not to uncover the truth but rather to restore trust in the state. In this spirit, the Left Party also worked closely with the bourgeois parties and the security agencies on the investigative committee to protect the state from the scandal. Bourgeois democracy cannot and will not solve these crimes because it is itself implicated in them.

The victims of the NSU were workers and small business owners—migrants whom the state itself had suspected for years. The racist smear campaign against "foreigners" and the criminalization of migrants are driven by the bourgeois parties and the state itself. For them, racism is a means of dividing and disorienting the working class.

The NSU scandal has shown that the capitalist state does not combat right-wing extremism but rather creates, promotes and protects it. The lesson is that the working class and the youth must build their own organizations to fight fascism—independent of the state, the police and the bourgeois parties, and across national borders.

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