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Neo-Nazi Network in German Army Exposed

By Peter Schwarz
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The arrest of a German army officer suspected of plotting the assassination of leftist politicians and high-ranking state officials has exposed the operations of neo-Nazi forces at the highest levels of the German military (Bundeswehr).

The information that has emerged thus far indicates that the suspected officer-terrorist was part of a broader network of fascists within the Bundeswehr, and that his activities were known to his superiors and covered up by them.

Most astonishing is the official reaction to these alarming revelations. They have prompted an outpouring of anger in the German media and from the establishment parties directed not at the existence of this network and evidence of its toleration by high-level state forces, but at mild criticisms of the military by Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen.

Given the historic crimes of German imperialism in the 20th century and the current revival of militarism in Germany, it is remarkable how little attention has been paid to these developments in the American and international press.

Lieutenant Franco A., 28, was arrested last week after coming to the attention of Austrian police when he sought to retrieve a weapon hidden at the airport in Vienna. It quickly emerged that the officer had been leading a double life. In addition to his activities in the Bundeswehr, Franco A, who does not speak a word of Arabic, had registered as a Syrian refugee and been recognized as such.

He apparently intended to carry out a terror attack under a false flag. A police search of his home uncovered a list of possible targets, which included, together with leftist politicians and activists, Justice Minister Heiko Maas and former German President Joachim Gauck.

Franco A. did not operate alone. The police have recovered shells and handguns from a 24-year-old accomplice, who was also arrested. The Defence Ministry has informed the parliamentary defence committee that the arrested officer may be part of an ultra-right network within the Bundeswehr.

The reaction of the military leadership suggests that this network is far more extensive and reaches much higher than has thus far been revealed. Defence Minister von der Leyen cancelled a planned trip to the US and invited 100 high-ranking military officers to Berlin on Thursday “to discuss the implications and consequences of the accumulated cases in the Bundeswehr.”

It is now clear that, for some time, Franco A.’s superiors were aware of his fascistic views and shielded him. As far back as 2014, his graduate thesis at the French military university Saint-Cyr was rejected on the grounds that it was not a scholarly work, but rather “a radical

nationalist, racist appeal," calling for "existing conditions to be adapted to the alleged natural law of racial purity." The responsible French general advised Franco A.'s German superiors to sack him, but the latter concluded that he was not a racist. They hushed up the case and promoted his military career.

The neo-Nazi views of the first lieutenant were an open secret in the French town of Illkirch, where he served in a Franco-German unit. Investigators from the Bundeswehr have found "indications of right-wing and racist ideas" in his room. In addition to a swastika carved on an assault rifle, they discovered pictures glorifying Hitler's army, the Wehrmacht.

Racist and authoritarian views and the glorification of violence are not only widespread in the Bundeswehr, they are actively encouraged by its leaders. The military intelligence service is currently investigating 275 extreme right-wing suspects. These investigations are exercises in damage control. Charges were dropped against one soldier who placed a photo of a machine gun on the Internet with the caption:

> "The fastest German asylum procedure: rejects up to 1,400 requests per minute."

The tradition of Hitler's Wehrmacht continues to be officially cultivated in the Bundeswehr. Many barracks bear the names of military officers who were implicated in the Nazis' genocidal racial and war policies.

The universities of the Bundeswehr in Munich and Hamburg have repeatedly generated headlines by promoting right-wing extremism. In Munich, there was a controversy in 2011 surrounding the student magazine *Campus* when three of its editors expressed their support for the Conservative Revolutionary movement, one of the leading ideological forbears of the Nazis.

In Hamburg, the book *Armee im Aufbruch* (*Army on the Move*) was published in 2014 with contributions from sixteen officers who studied at the Bundeswehr University there and had combat experience in Afghanistan. The book is full of language typical of Nazi literature glorifying war.

The officers consider themselves to be an elite, opposed to a "hedonistic and individualistic" society focused on "self-gratification, consumption, pacifism and egoism," a society that has no appreciation for the "striving for honour through great sacrifice," for a "patriotic attitude to the people (Volk) and Fatherland" and for "courage, loyalty and honour."

There was no protest against the book within the German political establishment. The right-wing, dictatorial standpoint it expressed is shared across the political spectrum.

When Defence Minister von der Leyen, a member of the ruling Christian Democratic Union, responded to the exposure of the Franco A. case by warning that

> "the German army has an attitude problem and it apparently has weak leadership at different levels," she provoked a storm of protest.

She may well lose her post, not because terror attacks on the former president and current

ministers and members of parliament were planned from within the ranks of the Bundeswehr, but because she spoke out too sharply against it!

The Social Democratic Party (SPD), the Greens and the Left Party are protesting the loudest against von der Leyen. SPD Chairman Martin Schulz accused the defence minister of lacking a sense of responsibility. SPD defence expert Rainer Arnold called on her to apologise to her troops. Former Deputy Juso (SPD Young Socialists) Chairman Lars Klingbeil accused von der Leyen of "stabbing hundreds of thousands of soldiers in the back."

The Green Party defence expert Tobias Lindner declared,

> "It is not the Bundeswehr's fault if it is increasingly attractive to right-wing extremists."

His colleague from the Left Party, Alexander Neu, proclaimed his opposition to placing all soldiers under general suspicion due to the case of Franco A.

These developments reveal the enormity of the swing to the right by the entire German ruling class and the advanced state of its campaign to again make Germany the hegemon of Europe and a world military as well as economic power. The deepening crisis of world capitalism and rising economic and geo-political tensions are tearing Europe apart and fracturing the Atlantic alliance, increasingly pitting Germany against the United States.

Under these conditions, German imperialism must seek to sanitize its criminal past and rewrite its history to rehabilitate fascism, as it transforms the Bundeswehr into a lethal force of professional killers, capable of waging war all over the world.

Claims that the German ruling class learned its lesson from the Holocaust and the crimes of the Nazis, and that the military had purged itself, are exposed as myths.

In a commentary on Tuesday, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* co-editor Berthold Kohler derided the "fantasy image" of the Bundeswehr "as a kind of missionary military that spreads the gospel of the German constitution so that the German spirit shall heal the world." He wrote:

> "Whoever sends soldiers into crises and wars must prepare themselves and the soldiers for the harshness and cruelty that awaits them." Because the Bundeswehr has to teach its recruits "to fight and kill … it must be able to go to the limits of what is permissible in terms of hardship in training its fighting units."

The spread of militarism into all spheres of society is an international phenomenon. In the US, Donald Trump, the most right-wing president in American history, has appointed generals to all the main security-related ministries, as American imperialism spearheads the drive to World War III. In France, heavily armed soldiers routinely patrol the streets since the imposition of a state of emergency a year and a half ago.

The general silence to date of the international media on the growth of fascistic forces within the German military is itself an expression of the turn by the ruling classes of the world toward war and dictatorship.

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