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German army and intelligence service complicit in US drone killings

By Johannes Stern

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The Germany army (Bundeswehr) and Federal Intelligence Service (BND) were much more involved in America's illegal drone war in Afghanistan than previously known. This is the conclusion arising from a December 1 report in the *Bild* newspaper, based on "numerous secret documents" compiled by the Bundeswehr and the BND.

The documents reveal that Major General Markus Kneip, who led the German contingent of ISAF troops in Afghanistan from 2011 to 2013, personally selected "individual targets" for the US military program of "targeted killings". For its part, the BND was aware that this "information could be used to kill or torture Taliban leaders".

According to the *Bild*, the documents prove the existence of a so-called "Target Support Cell" operating as part of the German regional command in Mazar-e-Sharif, under the direction of a German lieutenant colonel. Its mission: "To gather information for nominating potential individual targets." Furthermore, German soldiers were tasked with creating so-called "target files ... to be presented to the commander for approval."

The newspaper also cites the classified secret minutes of a meeting which took place in May 2011 involving Kneip. The interview protocol documents the discussion in NATO and ISAF

circles about the “nominations” for targeted killings. At the meeting, Kneip declared that the “arrest or neutralization” of an insurgent named Kari Hafiz was a “priority”.

Other documents make clear that the BND also provided information to carry out targeted killings. On 26 August 2011, the BND sent a report on Taliban leader Kari Yusuf to allied NATO countries. The report contained both Yusuf’s telephone numbers and the number he had been allocated on the US’ “death list”.

The BND was aware that its data could be used by the US or UK to carry out “targeted killing, or capture and torture” of suspects. In one paragraph, the report requested that the “submitted data” not be used “as a basis or justification for unreasonable measures (i.e. torture as stipulated by article 1 of the United Nations Convention against Torture) ...”. Other passages, however, state that a targeted killing is allowed under certain conditions, i.e.: “the use of lethal force is only permissible if and when an attack is taking place or is imminent.”

The revelations by the *Bild* newspaper are highly explosive. They show that the German ruling class is involved at the highest level in the illegal war and torture practices conducted by the United States. Kneip is currently head of the department “Strategy and Deployment” at the Ministry of Defence and is one of the closest associates of Defense Minister Ursula von der Leyen (CDU). He is regarded as a candidate for the post of Inspector General of the Bundeswehr.

According to the *Bild*, the Ministry of Defence and the BND have failed to respond to questions from the newspaper “about their operations”. This is not surprising. If the government took seriously international law and its own statements then it would be obliged to prosecute those responsible.

In January 2014, a parliamentary report stated that it was “undisputed” that Germany could not tolerate “illegal military operations” carried out “by foreign countries from German territory”. If the US military illegally executes a terrorist suspect by drone, “remote from an armed conflict”, this could “represent participation in a crime according to international law” should the government be cognizant and not object to it.

It is now clear that, far from merely “declining to object”, the military forces at the disposal of the German government—the army and the BND—were complicit in precisely such “illegal acts”.

It remains unclear why the *Bild* newspaper—a rabid supporter of German imperialism—has brought the secret documents to light. The newspaper writes that it had long refrained from revealing the contents of the “explosive documents” in order “not to unnecessarily endanger soldiers’ lives”. The official end of the German combat role in Afghanistan, however, meant that it was “now possible to document the historically transformed role of the Bundeswehr and BND in the targeted hunt for terrorists”.