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How the German Army covers up for neo-Nazi terrorist networks

By Christoph Vandreier

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One week after the arrest of the right-wing First Lieutenant Franco A., evidence is mounting that the terror suspect was part of a substantial neo-Nazi network whose existence had been covered up by German authorities.

The 28-year-old was arrested last week after being caught by the Austrian police in February when he sought to pick up a gun from Vienna Airport, which he had previously hidden there. It was then established that he had registered as a Syrian refugee in Bavaria and had apparently planned terrorist attacks against politicians and left-wing activists using a false identity.

In the last few days, new details have come to light that leave no doubt as to his racist and fascist attitudes, and terrorist intentions. His right-wing extremist opinions had long been known to his superiors and were at least covered up, if not encouraged.

Franco A. had been transferred to the German staff group in Fontainebleau in France in September 2009, where he began studying social and political sciences at the Saint-Cyr French military academy. In December 2013, he delivered a master's thesis entitled "Political Change and Subversion Strategy." The work was so openly nationalist and right-wing that the French school commander, Antoine Windeck, marked it as "not successful" and told his German colleagues, "If he were a French participant in the course we would replace him."

Franco A.'s superiors then commissioned an independent historian to examine the work. This evaluation fell into the hands of the daily *Die Welt*, which cited the following overall assessment, "The text, in its method and content is demonstrably not an academic qualification work, but a radical nationalist, racist appeal, which the author seeks, with some effort, to underpin in a pseudo-scientific manner."

"In some parts, the text reads like an instruction manual for racist propaganda," it says. Franco A. utilizes "the well-known racist interpretation of genes" and "crude environmental determinism." In some places in his master's thesis, Franco A. also warned against an "intermixing of the races" or "intermarriage." The majority of society cannot have any interest in the spread of human rights, he says, describing their "infectious character." Only minorities, he said, were interested in human rights.

In the emancipation of women, Franco A. sees "a threat to the family and thus also a deliberate weakening of the people (Volk)," the expert records. In conclusion, the historian notes that the work is a call "to bring about a political change that adapts the given situation to the supposed natural law of racial purity."

This unambiguous opinion was completely rejected by the responsible military disciplinary attorney, a sort of army prosecutor, following a conversation with Franco A. "Because of the personality profile acquired, doubts about the necessary attitude towards the set of [social] values are not only not verifiable but can be excluded," wrote the attorney, and enthused about the "intellectual ability" of the student. For this reason, the preliminary disciplinary proceedings were "discontinued." Neither the military disciplinary attorney nor Franco A.'s superior reported the incident to the Military Intelligence Service (MAD). Franco A. was able to prepare a new master's thesis, passed the examination and continued his officer's career.

In view of the openly fascist content of the master's thesis, the behaviour of his superiors can only be understood as providing support and encouragement to radical right-wing positions. This is also underlined by the fact that Franco A. wrote to the same disciplinary attorney when he was arrested by the Austrian police in February.

"First Lieutenant A. wrote me an email in which he recalled our meeting at that time, in which I insisted that he should write to me if he was in trouble," the attorney said in a letter sent Friday to his superior, Lieutenant-General Martin Schelleis. In it, he summarizes email exchanges between himself and Franco A. and declares that the emails have been irretrievably deleted.

The fact that Franco A.'s superiors knew about his right-wing views is also evident from the Wehrmacht (Nazi-era German army) memorabilia and Nazi symbols that were found in his possession. In an open area of the barracks where Franco A. last served, the so-called bunker, there were large murals glorifying Hitler's Wehrmacht. Clearly, Franco A. did not have to hide his radical right-wing attitudes on the base.

On the contrary, it seems that he was regularly recruiting for his far-right terrorist group in his infantry battalion, which was stationed at Illkirch. According to media reports, the investigating public prosecutor's office now assumes Franco A. had a number of accomplices. *Die Zeit* reports

another first lieutenant, Maximilian T., from the battalion, who had drawn up a list of possible targets for terrorist attacks found in Franco A.'s possession.

The list includes high-ranking politicians, such as former German President Joachim Gauck, Justice Minister Heiko Maas, and Thuringia state Premier Bodo Ramelow, left-wing activists such as Philipp Ruch from the Centre for Political Beauty, but also institutions such as the Central Council of Jews in Germany.

According to *Die Welt*, a notebook found in Franco A.'s apartment revealed key points regarding concrete actions. Amongst others, there is a proposal to commit an attack in the guise of a refugee: "Group Antifa: asylum seeker throwing grenade, film it." The officer also mentions the 88-year-old Holocaust denier Ursula Haverbeck. "If Mrs. Haverbeck goes to prison, then liberation action," the notes read.

On Thursday, the Defence Ministry informed the Bundestag (federal parliament) that about 1,000 rounds of ammunition, including for pistols and rifles, had been found in the possession of a presumed accomplice of Franco A. This followed earlier reports of irregularities in the documentation of the dispensing of ammunition at the barracks. The *Süddeutsche Zeitung* newspaper, and broadcasters WDR and NDR also reported the statement of a soldier who knew of a group of soldiers who had stashed weapons and ammunition to fight on the "right" side in a civil war.

It is not the first time that fascist terrorist groups have emerged within the Bundeswehr (German army) and have been covered up by their superiors. Uwe Mundlos, who, together with other right-wing extremists, later formed the National Socialist Underground (NSU) and killed at least 10 people, had come to notice as a radical right-winger during his military service in the Bundeswehr.

During Mundlos' military service between 1994 and 1995, he was arrested by the police for possessing a Hitler portrait and illegal right-wing propaganda material, and was later sentenced by a civil court. However, a decision by his captain to order seven days' disciplinary detention was quashed by the South District Military Court of Appeals. Mundlos, in spite of his obviously right-wing views, was even promoted to corporal. Like Mundlos, it now appears that Franco A also enjoyed official protection.

It was not until later that it was revealed that attempts had been made during this time to recruit Mundlos as an operative for Military Intelligence. The recruitment attempt was followed by a long series of initiatives by various police authorities and secret service agencies to protect Mundlos and the NSU from prosecution, thus enabling their terrorism. According to different estimates, there were up to 150 members or sympathizers of the NSU. The fascist network which has now appeared at Franco A.'s barracks in Illkirch could be similar or even larger.