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A Disturbing New Dimension of Far-Right Terror The Brown Army Faction

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Germany has been shocked by a series of revelations relating to a trio of neo-Nazis who appear to have carried out a crime wave lasting for over a decade. They are suspected of murdering nine immigrants and a policewoman as well as a series of bank robberies. The evidence points to a new kind of right-wing terrorism unlike anything Germany has seen.

Frühlingsstrasse in the Weissenborn neighborhood of the eastern German city of Zwickau is a street lined with renovated old houses, manicured front gardens and sidewalks that look swept clean. It would be an idyllic residential neighborhood, if it weren't for the house at number 26.

The windows are smashed, a section of the front wall has collapsed onto the lawn, and there is a gaping black hole on the right side of the second floor. An incendiary bomb [exploded at this house](#) a little over a week ago. But the real nature of the bomb that exploded there was not clear until [last Friday](#). As it turned out, the reverberations from the explosion rocked not just the nearby houses on Frühlingsstrasse, [but the whole of Germany](#).

Beate Zschäpe, who was renting an apartment in the building, left the house shortly before flames burst from the windows at 3:05 p.m. on Nov. 4. She dropped off her cats with a neighbor, and then she did what has been doing time and again for almost 14 years: She disappeared.

Three hours earlier, a fire had also been set in a parked camper in Eisenach, a city 180 kilometers (110 miles) away. The two men inside, Uwe Mundlos and Uwe Böhnhardt, had just robbed a bank. They had ended up in Eisenach after being on the run for 14 years. The two men shot themselves before a police patrol could reach the burning vehicle.

Shocking Discoveries

It didn't take investigators long to see the connection between the two incidents. Then they began digging through the wreckage in Frühlingsstrasse, looking for clues. The deeper they dug, the more astonished and shocked they were by what they uncovered.

At first, it seemed that they had just hit upon a gang of bank robbers that had blown up their hideout.

They dug deeper.

Were the two men and one woman a neo-Nazi trio that had built pipe bombs in the eastern state of Thuringia in the late 1990s and had gone into hiding in the Zwickau area?

The investigators dug even deeper.

Was the trio a group of cold-blooded murderers who had gunned down police officer Michèle Kiesewetter in the southwestern city of Heilbronn four years ago? The investigators found [Kiesewetter's service weapon](#), a Heckler & Koch P 200, and that of her severely injured fellow police officer in the burned-out camper, while the presumed murder weapon was found in the rubble in Zwickau. But that wasn't the end of the story.

Were they members of a right-wing extremist terrorist organization that had randomly shot and killed nine men throughout Germany since 2000, eight of them of Turkish origin and one from Greece? That was the point at which the investigation had arrived by the end of last week, when police [found a weapon](#) in the pile of rubble that had become synonymous with what was probably Germany's longest, most brutal and most mysterious series of murders. The weapon was a Ceska, model 83, 7.65 caliber Browning.

The Pink Panther's Terror Tour

Although the authorities had not yet completed their analysis of the pistol when SPIEGEL went to press, they are almost completely convinced that it's the same Ceska that was used to commit the so-called "doner killings," named after two of the victims, who sold doner kebabs, between 2000 and 2006. Next to the weapon lying in the fire-blackened rubble in Zwickau, police found four DVDs that had already been placed into envelopes. A 15-minute film by a group calling

itself the "National Socialist Underground" (NSU) had been burned onto the disks. In the film, which SPIEGEL has viewed, the authors call themselves a "national network of comrades whose principle is to value action above words. As long as fundamental changes do not occur in politics, press and in freedom of opinion, the activities will continue."

Using a macabre cartoon style, the authors take the Pink Panther cartoon character on a "tour of Germany," making stops at the sites of the nine doner murders. They film the sign on the door of flower shop owner Enver S., the first victim, and show his body and a photo that the neo-Nazis apparently took at the scene of the crime, with the heading "Original." The film, scored with the music from the Pink Panther cartoon series, is a chilling mix of infantile and fascist esthetics.

In another bizarre image, the police appeals for public assistance are derided, under the heading: "Today: Doner Skewer Campaign." The cynical post-mortem is accompanied by a press review including newspaper articles about the killings and the photos of several Turks who were shot to death.

In the video, the neo-Nazis also claim responsibility for a 2004 bombing in Cologne, in which 22 people were injured, almost all of them ethnic Turks. The video shows the presumed bomb before detonation, a suitcase on a bicycle filled with shiny nails, and a gas cylinder. The film ends with photos of the police murder in Heilbronn and the presumed police weapon.

The agitprop videos, addressed to several media outlets and Islamic cultural centers, were apparently intended to ignite the next stage, a propaganda campaign, after 13 years of silent terror. The neo-Nazis apparently felt strong enough now to take on all of society.

On the Wrong Track

The Ceska and the DVDs are the key elements in a case that is unprecedented in the history of postwar Germany: a series of murders apparently committed by neo-Nazi killers, presumably stemming from a white-hot rage against foreigners, and yet committed with such ice-cold precision that it took investigators an entire decade to finally track down the group.

In fact, until recently the authorities were on the wrong track, believing that the doner killings were committed by the Turkish mafia and were related to a protection racket, or that the killers could be traced to nationalist splinter groups in Turkey or elsewhere, but certainly not to right-wing extremist groups. Indeed, the authorities were convinced that they had the latter under control, which is now proving to have been a miscalculation.

This error of judgment is all the more glaring because there were apparently also co-conspirators. As the state government in Thuringia confirms, one of the men was using the name "Holger G." The real Holger G., who had apparently earlier told authorities that he was merely doing the trio

a favor, was arrested on Sunday. He is suspected of providing the group's members with identification documents. Members of the state government in Thuringia already speculate that they are dealing with a larger "right-wing extremist network," which supported the trio "up until the last minute." How else could the fugitives have obtained so many weapons and passports?

There are some indications that the trio from Thuringia was merely the hard core of a terrorist cell of the sort that has until now only been the stuff of audacious conspiracy theories. Were they a miniature underground army, a sort of Brown Army Faction like the far-left Red Army Faction which terrorized Germany in the 1970s, consisting of two men and one woman, equipped with 19 weapons and the ability that all terrorists share, namely to deactivate their conscience?

Echoes of the RAF

The fact that neo-Nazis are becoming militant and committing attacks isn't a new phenomenon. The best-known case is that of Munich Oktoberfest killer Gundolf Köhler, who set off a bomb at the Wiesn festival site in Munich on Sept. 26, 1980, killing himself and 12 other people. Köhler was a member of Wehrsportgruppe Hoffmann, a paramilitary group of right-wing extremists who dreamed of civil war. The Hoffmann group had already been banned before the Oktoberfest bombing.

Another example is that of Berlin right-wing extremist Kay Diesner, who shot a police officer in 1997 while he was being chased, and was then sentenced to life in prison. And in Munich, several followers of neo-Nazi leader Martin Wiese were sent to prison for several years after police uncovered their 2003 plot to bomb a cornerstone-laying ceremony at a synagogue in the city.

But there is no precedent in German postwar history for an underground right-wing combat group that funds itself through bank robberies and plans and commits deadly attacks, defying the authorities' attempts to stop them using manhunts, informants and state-of-the-art surveillance technology. In fact, this sort of terrorism has until now only been associated with a group operating on the other side of the political spectrum, the Red Army Faction (RAF).

All of this raises many new questions. For example, what other crimes did the group commit? Investigators believe that they can pin at least 14 bank robberies on the trio. But in addition to the doner murders, which can now apparently be attributed to them, were they involved in other terrorist attacks? Suddenly everything seems possible, and every angle is being investigated. For example, police now speculate that the group may have been behind an unsolved bombing in the southwestern city of Saarbrücken, at a 1999 exhibition focusing on war crimes committed by the German army, the Wehrmacht, in World War II.

Beate Zschäpe, who had disappeared from the Zwickau flat shortly before it was firebombed, has since turned herself in to the police. Nevertheless, when SPIEGEL went to press she was still refusing to make any statements, and her role in the group remains unclear. When contacted by SPIEGEL, her attorney also declined to comment on the accusations.

Rumors that Trio Were Informants

The greater the mystery, the more outrageous the speculation. There have been persistent rumors that German intelligence agencies once helped the trio escape, or even used Böhnhardt, Mundlos and Zschäpe as informants, despite vehement and repeated denials by federal and state officials. In a 2001 memo, even police officers with the State Office of Criminal Investigation speculated that Zschäpe at least might have been working as an informant -- a charge that, once again, the intelligence agencies vigorously deny.

The German Federal Prosecutor's Office has now taken charge of the investigation and, with the help of the Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA), is trying to make sense of the case. The mystery already begins with the three would-be terrorists' individual backgrounds. Even their closest relatives probably do not know what they have been doing for the last 14 years. The families of Böhnhardt and Mundlos had not heard anything from them until they received a call from Zschäpe on Nov. 5, at about 8 a.m. She was calling to tell them that the two men were dead.

Drifting into Extremism

Their death in the burning camper and the explosion at the Zwickau apartment soon afterwards marked the end of a journey that began in the mid-1990s and proceeded in one direction: the pursuit of even more hatred and more violence.

At first, there was little to distinguish the three Thuringia residents from so many other young people in the states of the former East Germany who drifted into the right-wing extremist scene after German reunification. For many people, it was a milieu that seemed to offer a home of sorts. Some turned away from the far-right groups after a while, because they wanted prospects for the future rather than just slogans. But Mundlos, Böhnhardt and Zschäpe were different.

Instead of seeking reconciliation with the system, they wanted to sever all ties with it. When they went underground, they burned all bridges behind them for good. It was the three of them against everyone else, that was their new belief.

Zschäpe was born in 1975 and grew up in a drab, prefabricated apartment building in the eastern city of Jena. Böhnhardt, three years younger than Zschäpe, was a construction worker who was

often out of work. Mundlos, born in 1973, was the son of a professor and had originally planned to obtain the Abitur, the German school-leaving certificate that is required to enter university.

Mundlos enrolled at the Ilmenau College in Thuringia in 1995 to complete his high-school education and get the Abitur. Former fellow students describe him as "ambitious and hard-working" and say that he was particularly strong in physics and mathematics. But his habits seemed odd to them. He always wore "black, uniform-like clothing." They also say that there was a self-drawn portrait of Hitler's deputy, Rudolf Hess, tucked away in the back corner of the desk in his room at a Christian student dormitory. Mundlos apparently went to see his far-right friends in Jena whenever he could.

'Weapons Nut'

The neo-Nazis in Jena were a secretive group. Someone familiar with the milieu calls it "tight-knit," and describes Mundlos, Böhnhardt and Zschäpe as close friends opposed to the rest of the world: foreigners, people on the left, and "cops." They called themselves the Kameradschaft Jena (the term Kameradschaft, literally "comradeship," is used by German neo-Nazis for small militant groups), and their hard core consisted of no more than eight people. A neo-Nazi called André K. apparently acted as the group's leader, or "Führer," while Mundlos and Böhnhardt were his "deputies," forming the second rank. Zschäpe was one of the group's ordinary members. All of them were well known in the city.

In the mid-1990s, Zschäpe, Mundlos and Böhnhardt made regular appearances at the Wednesday meetings of the right-wing extremist group Thüringer Heimatschutz (THS), as its former leader Tino B. recalls. According to B., Mundlos was "not exactly the dumbest of people," while Böhnhardt kept quiet during discussions. "His area of expertise," says B., "was weapons. He was a weapons nut."

Zschäpe contributed her staunchly nationalist sentiments to the group. Former acquaintances say that the trio sometimes got together to play Monopoly, except that they had modified the board to conform to their worldview. The "Jail" square, for example, had been renamed "Concentration Camp."

What they apparently didn't know was that the THS group was under constant surveillance from the very beginning. In 1994, the Thuringia branch of Germany's domestic intelligence agency the Office for the Protection of the Constitution, based in the state capital Erfurt, recruited young neo-Nazi Tino B. as an informant. From then on, he was informant No. 2045 (code-named "Otto"), and he provided the state intelligence agency with prime insider material on the militant organization. The officials in Thuringia felt that up to two dozen reports were so important that they forwarded the material to the Office for the Protection of the Constitution's national headquarters in Cologne.

Fake Letter Bombs

Intelligence agents recall that there were additional attempts to recruit informants in the second half of the 1990s. But, at least according to the files at both the state and federal intelligence agencies in Thuringia and Cologne, Böhnhardt, Mundlos and Zschäpe were not among the would-be recruits.

The three apparently viewed themselves as something of an "elite" circle, says a THS insider. The men wore combat boots and bomber jackets and attacked "ticks," as leftists and people with an alternative lifestyle were known in neo-Nazi slang. They reportedly picked fights at events in the area such as local fairs and badgered foreigners. But apparently it wasn't enough for them.

In mid-April 1996, Böhnhardt placed the torso of a mannequin on a highway bridge near Jena. The mannequin was dressed in a sweatshirt with a yellow Star of David and a sign that read: "Careful -- Bomb!" The state police formed a special task force to investigate what was deemed a possible hate crime.

A few months later, in November 1996, Böhnhardt's car was searched at a police roadblock. The authorities found a small arsenal in the vehicle, including a knife, throwing stars sharpened on both sides and gas cartridges.

The incidents continued. When fake letter bombs with swastikas on them were sent to the *Thüringische Landeszeitung* newspaper, the city government and police headquarters in Jena between Dec. 30, 1996 and Jan. 2, 1997, the authorities immediately suspected the hard core of the Kameradschaft Jena. In fact, they had no other suspects. The public prosecutor's office investigated the group on charges of "disturbing the public order with threats to commit crimes," but there was no evidence. The neo-Nazis either denied everything or simply refused to testify. The case was dropped on June 18, 1997.

Oversight or Warning?

The incidents continued. On Sept. 28, 1997, pedestrians found a bomb in front of the city theater in Jena. It was hidden in a red suitcase adorned with a swastika painted on a white background. The device contained 10 grams of TNT but, as the prosecutors investigating the would-be attack soon discovered, although it was a working bomb, it was not capable of being detonated because the battery was missing. Was it an oversight? Or was it meant to be a warning? At any rate, this time the perpetrators had demonstrated that they could do more than just build fake letter bombs.

In October 1997, a court in Thuringia sentenced Böhnhardt to two years and three months in a youth prison, because of the mannequin he had hung from the highway bridge and other crimes.

But Böhnhardt was not required to serve the sentence right away, and he promptly took advantage of the time he was given.

The next dummy bomb turned up only about two months later, on Dec. 26, 1997. Again, it was in a red-painted suitcase featuring a swastika in a white circle. This time it was found in front of a memorial to the anti-fascist resistance movement at a cemetery in Jena. Investigators set their sights on the Kameradschaft Jena once again. This time they did a thorough investigation and combed through all the files. A canister filled with gasoline and a wooden box with a swastika painted on it -- hadn't they seen this before? As it turned out, they had, at the Ernst Abbe Stadium in Jena, in an earlier incident in 1996.

They also discovered that the canister and the box were from the construction yard of a company where Böhnhardt's father had worked and where the son had received occasional jobs. His fingerprints were also found on a metal tube that had turned up in connection with a bomb threat in Rudolstadt near Erfurt on Oct. 15, 1997. In addition, a friend had denounced Böhnhardt, claiming that he was also responsible for an explosion in a center for foreign asylum-seekers.

Going Underground

Böhnhardt was now under surveillance, but in retrospect it seems almost unbelievable how amateurishly the authorities acted. At the end of January 1998, police officers rang Böhnhardt's doorbell and presented a search warrant. But they found nothing, and Böhnhardt was allowed to calmly drive away.

On Jan. 26, 1998, police searched Mundlos's Jena apartment on the basis of "exigent circumstances." Zschäpe, who was living in her mother's house, also received a visit. The police confiscated a crossbow, slingshots, a "morning star" weapon and the banned war flag of the German Reich. They also found the Monopoly game with the "Concentration Camp" square on it, which resulted in Zschäpe being charged with hate speech.

But the investigators discovered their biggest find in a garage near the Jena sewage treatment plant, after receiving a tip-off from the Office for the Protection of the Constitution. When they opened the garage, they discovered right-wing extremist propaganda material, four pipe bombs and 1,392 grams of TNT. They learned that Zschäpe had rented the garage, and neighbors told them that they had also seen Mundlos and Böhnhardt entering and leaving the property.

By this point, the police had enough evidence to proceed against the trio. But then the group found out that their bomb workshop had been discovered -- something that wasn't surprising, given the series of searches. The group found themselves facing a crucial decision: Should they flee or not? Böhnhardt had little to lose. But Mundlos only had only a year to go before graduating from the Ilmenau College. Zschäpe also seemed to hesitate, and went to see her

attorney in Weissenfels, near Leipzig. But then they reached a decision, and all three went underground. An arrest warrant was issued on Jan. 28, but by then it was too late.

Nowhere to Be Found

It was an embarrassing gaffe for the Thuringian state police, but it was about to get worse. Only two weeks later, the Thuringia State Office of Criminal Investigation (LKA) put up wanted posters for the trio and announced a reward of 3,000 deutschmarks (€1,534). The LKA also dispatched special investigators, but the neo-Nazis were nowhere to be found.

Tino B. alias "Otto," the informant working for the state intelligence agency, recalls today how the Kameradschaft Jena helped the trio. He reported that a certain Ralf L. had lent his car to Mundlos, Böhnhardt and Zschäpe, but that the neo-Nazis were promptly involved in an accident while trying to flee. According to the informant, André K. was in charge of obtaining fake passports, and donations were collected at solidarity concerts to pay a Russian for the forged documents. But apparently things never got that far.

The neo-Nazis from Thuringia apparently remained in touch with their friends for six months after going underground. "Otto" once told his contacts about a telephone conversation with Mundlos and Böhnhardt, in which they had said that they wanted to abscond to South Africa. The two men were already invisible to everyone else.

When Böhnhardt's grandfather died and was buried at a Jena cemetery on March 24, 1998, the police were on the lookout. But Böhnhardt didn't turn up.

Giving the Police the Slip

Nevertheless, the state interior ministry was confident that it could soon capture the trio. On June 19, 1998, the domestic affairs committee in the state parliament announced that an "extensive manhunt" was underway for Böhnhardt, Mundlos and Zschäpe, and that it expected an arrest "very soon." The Office for the Protection of the Constitution also got involved, first on the state level in Thuringia and later on the national level.

But it was all to no avail. The files contain a surveillance photo taken in the eastern state of Saxony-Anhalt in early 2000, which shows three people. But the officers in question were not certain it was the trio, and by the time they had confirmed the identity of the three suspects, they were gone.

The investigators even pursued clues that Zschäpe, Böhnhardt and Mundlos may have left for Namibia or Lake Balaton in Hungary. But, once again, they found nothing. According to sources close to the investigators, Zschäpe, Böhnhardt and Mundlos also turned up near Chemnitz in the

neighboring state of Saxony. The authorities were apparently on the verge of arresting them several times. But it never happened.

It is possible that the investigators came within a hair's breadth of catching the trio at the time. Apparently the trio was indeed active in Chemnitz. They had obtained weapons and the two men had specialized in bank robberies. The public prosecutor's office now believes that Böhnhardt and Mundlos were responsible for at least 14 robberies since 1999: two in Thuringia, two in the northeastern state of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania and 10 in Saxony, of which seven were committed in Chemnitz.

In a noticeably large number of these cases, two masked men rushed into a bank, always proceeding with extreme brutality, and they usually fled on bicycles, seemingly disappearing without a trace. They had planned to use the same approach in their last robbery, in Eisenach, when they rode bikes to their parked camper. But this time the police had changed their strategy. They had blocked all arterial roads and searched for the camper within the sealed-off ring. Apparently, Böhnhardt and Mundlos decided to wait it out inside the ring. But the police officers in Eisenach had already figured out that a camper was an ideal place for two men on bikes to go. The two bank robbers were trapped.

But 12 years had already passed until then, years in which there could have been casualties during the robberies. In 2002, for example, a shot went off in the midst of a scuffle, and a young bank employee was hit in the stomach.

Killing Spree

There were in fact deaths in all those years, at least 10, as the investigators now believe, and all the victims were targeted. Even while in hiding, the trio led a double life. On the one hand, they committed ordinary bank robberies to keep themselves afloat while they were fugitives. On the other hand, Böhnhardt and Mundlos apparently committed politically motivated murders, for which they almost always used the same weapon: the Ceska pistol.

The first was on Sept. 9, 2000. Enver S., 38, a florist from the western state of Hesse, was only helping out a friend. One of his customers owned a flower stand on a deserted arterial road in Nuremberg. When he decided to travel to Turkey on vacation, Enver agreed to watch his stand. Shortly after lunch, he was found covered in blood, after having been struck by several bullets from the Ceska and a second weapon.

Less than a year later, on June 13, 2001, Abdurrahim Ö., an alteration tailor, died in his small shop in downtown Nuremberg, from several shots to his head. Again, it was the Ceska. Neighbors told police that, a few days before the murder, they had heard Ö. arguing loudly and

intensely with two men in an Eastern European language. They were reportedly arguing about money.

The next murder victims were two vegetable sellers, one in Hamburg and the other in Munich. The Munich victim's wife later told police that her husband had felt threatened weeks before the murder, and that he had also been afraid of other Turks, who had visited him. At first glance, these are not signs that would point to the involvement of Mundlos or Böhnhardt, although the weapon, the Ceska that was used in each case, does. Most incriminating, however, is the DVD that police fished out of the wreckage, complete with photos the killers had apparently taken themselves.

The killing spree would also explain why Böhnhardt, Mundlos and Zschäpe remained in hiding even after June 22, 2003, the day when they might have been able to return to society. It was the day on which, under the statute of limitations, the time limit ran out for prosecuting the crimes they could have been charged with on the basis of their neo-Nazi past in Thuringia. They could have started with a clean slate. But obviously that would not have been possible if they had several murders under their belts.

No Scruples

The next Turk, Yunus T., died in the northeastern city of Rostock on Feb. 25, 2004, just as he was opening a kebab stand. Then a kebab stand owner in Nuremberg was killed.

Eyewitnesses later remembered two cyclists, whom they had seen enter the kebab stand for a few moments and then get back on their bikes and ride away again. It seemed to fit the pattern: Böhnhardt, Mundlos and two bikes. Then a Greek, the co-owner of a locksmith company who had gambled for money in Turkish and Greek cafés and apparently had debts, was killed in Munich. The next victim was a kiosk owner in the western city of Dortmund, also a man with financial troubles, followed by a German of Turkish origin who ran an Internet café in the central city of Kassel.

By that point, the two neo-Nazi terrorists apparently had no scruples left. It appeared that, to them, killing was an everyday, banal and normal activity. In the video in which they claim responsibility for the murders, they ridicule every victim.

Wednesday April 25, 2007 was a sunny day in Heilbronn in the southwestern state of Baden-Württemberg. There was hardly a cloud in the sky, and it was warm enough to wear a T-shirt. The booths for the traditional May festival were being set up on the Theresienwiese fairgrounds.

When police officer Michèle Kiesewetter and her partner Martin A. drove on the grounds in their police car, they parked at the northern end of the site. At 1:50 p.m., the two officers were taking

their lunch break. Kiesewetter, 22, sat in the driver's seat and A., two years her senior, sat next to her, as they ate their lunch in the car, with the windows open.

'You Don't Forget Those Images'

A 2:13 p.m., the emergency call center in Heilbronn received a call stating that a cyclist had found two dead police officers. The police arrived at the scene three minutes later, where they found Kiesewetter and Martin A. lying next to their squad car. Both had been shot in the head. The young policewoman was dead, and her partner A. barely survived.

According to the reconstruction of the crime scene, the killers must have snuck up on them from behind. "They were downright executed," recalls Frank Huber, who led the task force investigating the crime at the time. "You don't forget those images. They burn themselves into your memory."

The murderers stole Kiesewetter's Clejuso handcuffs, a container of pepper spray and a Victorinox Swiss Army knife. All of these items were later found in the ruins of the building in Zwickau, as was the presumed murder weapon. The two stolen Heckler & Koch service weapons were found in the burned-out camper, next to the bodies of Böhnhardt and Mundlos.

The Stuttgart public prosecutor's office believes that there is overwhelming evidence that Böhnhardt and Mundlos are connected with the murder of the young police officer.

But what was the motive?

A New Kind of Terrorism

A possible connection between the victim and the presumed murderers is that they were all from Thuringia. Kiesewetter was from Oberweissbach in the Thuringian Forest, while Böhnhardt and Mundlos were from Jena. Kiesewetter had never worked in Thuringia. She was about 10 years younger than her presumed killers, and it seems highly unlikely that there was a personal connection.

The killers, for their part, had no reason to shoot two police officers in broad daylight. It was too risky. They already had guns, so the dangerous and horrific attack on the officers would not have been necessary simply to steal their service weapons. Then what was the reason?

Despite the DVDs found at the house in Zwickau, which show an image of the Pink Panther holding a gun to a police officer's head and pressing the trigger, the investigators are still left with many loose ends, partly because the group doesn't fit into any pattern.

Until now, only two forms of political terrorism have existed, whether it was committed by people on the left or the right or by Islamists: the "propaganda of the deed," as the 19th-century French anarchist Paul Brousse dubbed his concept, which was later perfected by Russian and Italian anarchists. According to Brousse, deeds were meant to speak for themselves and be self-explanatory for the masses. Words merely deprived deeds of their power.

The second approach merely requires the deed as a template for the declarations, manifestos and claims of responsibility that follow. For each of its attacks, Germany's Red Army Faction wrote a long letter in which it explained why a particular high-ranking political or business figure supposedly deserved to die. Al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden regularly explained himself in video messages and called for attacks on the West.

Survival Guarantee

For Böhnhardt, Mundlos and probably Zschäpe, their alleged actions, which lasted over a decade, followed neither approach. They certainly must have been pleased to read all the speculation over who could be responsible for the doner murders, the police killing in Heilbronn and the many bank robberies. But none of them ever left any indication that there could be a political motivation for their crimes, and right-wing extremists were also kept out of the loop. As a result, there could be no copycats, no public supporters, as in the case of the RAF, and no way of gauging the public reaction to the attacks. The trio had to be content with the knowledge of what they had done.

From a crime-fighting perspective, it was a recipe that guaranteed survival for 13 years. Silence was a sort of survival guarantee, even if it came at the cost of no one understanding the racist motivations for their alleged deeds. Only in the last few months did the neo-Nazis apparently feel strong enough to take the next step and reveal the reasons behind their deeds. Perhaps the trio had indeed gathered a group of supporters and was planning to launch a new deadly offensive.

But what kept them going over the years? Was it pure hatred, aimed at foreigners and the government alike? Fascist fantasies of omnipotence? The items that investigators are gradually recovering from the debris in Zwickau provide at least a few clues. Why, for example, did Mundlos, Böhnhardt and Zschäpe want to keep Kiesewetter's pepper spray, weapon and handcuffs? For neo-Nazis with a 9mm Luger automatic pistol in their closet, four-year-old pepper spray couldn't have been very useful.

Mundlos and Böhnhardt could also have put Kiesewetter's weapon in a plastic bag and dropped it into a lake, and no one would have been able to solve the murder. They could have done the same thing with the Ceska that was used for the doner killings. These items only acquire significance as trophies.

The DVDs also fit into this pattern. It seems as if, in the end, Böhnhardt and Mundlos did want to leave a document behind detailing their exploits.

Funeral Pyre

The two men must have known that there was no way out. Their suicide was apparently planned in advance, as were the explosion in the apartment and the fire in the camper, which became a funeral pyre for the two suspected right-wing terrorists.

The only person who could provide information about what happened is the last surviving member of the group, Beate Zschäpe. But she isn't talking.