The German Winter

When Far-Right Hatred Turns Into Terrorism

The man responsible for the massacre in Hanau was not only a racist, but also a confused and clearly troubled person. He may have acted alone, but he was part of a global network of web-based hatred. By DER SPIEGEL Staff

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A bullet at the site of the massacre in Hanau: "Right-wing extremism and right-wing terrorism are currently the greatest threat to our democracy." Foto: Michael Probst/ AP

There's Mercedes K., 35 years old, a saleswoman. She lived for years with her parents and her 10 siblings in the Kesselstadt district of Hanau, Germany, a neighborhood populated by people from many nations. Members of her family, who are

part of the Roma ethnic minority, say they had never experienced any problems until now, that everything had been peaceful.

On Wednesday night, Mercedes K. was sitting in a corner store on a square called Kurt-Schumacher-Platz, next to Arena Bar, eating a salad. Shortly after 10 p.m., a man stormed into the shop, and began firing shots. Mercedes K. died instantly.

She was one of 10 victims that night of a crime that has once again raised old questions that are still haunting Germany. Why does the country so often find itself helpless in the face of the threat of deadly violence from the far right?

Mercedes K. was the final victim of Tobias Rathjen, a 43-year-old man who held a degree in business administration and had trained as a banker. He first shot and killed four people at Hanau's Heumarkt square and injured several more before moving on to a shisha bar called Midnight and a café called La Votre.

He then proceeded to get into his car and drive to Kesselstadt, where he killed another five people.

All of his victims were first- or second-generation immigrants.

Rathjen then drove home and, according to the preliminary details in the investigation, killed his bedridden mother before shooting himself.

An Increase in Deadly Far-Right Crimes

The massacre in Hanau is part of a string of crimes that included the assassination -- in the same state -- of Kassel District President Walter Lübke and the attempted attack on a synagogue in Halle in the eastern state of Saxony-Anhalt. All are signs of an increase in deadly crimes in Germany with far-right extremist motives. The frequency, intensity and brutality are also growing. Walter Lübcke was the first politician to fall victim to a right-wing terrorist attack in Germany since World War II. And the deaths in Hanau have now produced another troubling benchmark: It has been years since any individual racially motivated attacker has killed so many people in Germany. The crimes of the past year have left some wondering if Germany is reliving the kind of terror spree committed by the far-left Red Army Faction during 1977, famously known as the "German Autumn," only this time by the far right - if it is living through a "German Winter" of 2020.

On Thursday, the German chancellor decried racism and hatred as "poison," but Angela Merkel had little to offer as an antidote.

Politicians here may be united in thinking that "right-wing extremism and right-wing terrorism are currently the greatest threat to our democracy," as German Justice Minister Christine Lambrecht of the center-left Social Democratic Party (SPD) told DER SPIEGEL. Or, as German Interior Minister Horst Seehofer of the conservative Christian Social Union (CSU) warned state interior ministers in a conference call on Thursday night, that there is an "increased danger" from right-wing extremists. And German security agencies may have been massively staffing up their departments dealing with right-wing extremism and improving the measures they take. But the government still hasn't provided any comprehensive answer to the complex threat posed by the far right.

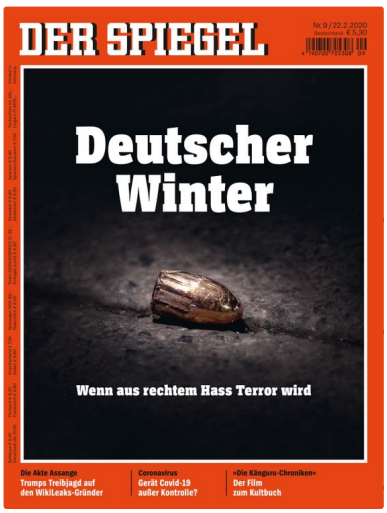
Convergence of Delusion and Reality

There are perpetrators like Stephan Balliet from Halle or, presumably, Tobias Rathjen from Hanau, who concoct their deadly plans as "lone wolves," without any network of allies.

They shape their world views according to conspiracy theories and far-right slogans and, at some point, believe they must act because nobody else is doing anything.

But there are also groups like "Revolution Chemitz" or "Gruppe S.," of whose members 12 have been taken into police custody in the past week because they were hoarding weapons and wanted to spark a civil war and also, apparently, kill Muslims. They exchange ideas on the internet, stir up their hatred against anything foreign and jointly prepare for a supposed future coup against the German government. In their writings, delusion and reality never seem to be very far apart.

DER SPIEGEL 9/2020



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The current wave of terrorist attacks is being carried out by perpetrators experiencing a dangerous convergence of psychological problems and political thinking. This may not be important to the victims and the family members who are suffering right now, but it is vital for the greater societal debate.

Is the current political environment triggering these mentally disturbed perpetrators and encouraging them to act?

Does a particular societal discourse supply the perpetrators with targets for their rage?

If that were the case, then anyone involved in the public debate – but particularly politicians and the media – would have a duty to be more mindful about what they say. And those who fill the discourse with hatred would have to be held accountable.

Or are the perpetrators ideologues who have become so delusional they somehow think that their own inhuman convictions make them respectable rebels?

This could be countered with a professional security apparatus, rigorous criminal prosecution and a vigilant environment capable of detecting when hatred is beginning to spin out of control.

Is Language Promoting Deadly Crimes?

During the German Autumn of 1977, the terror spree by the RAF plunged the country into one of the biggest crises in its postwar history. But in the German Winter of 2020, the country has been forced to admit that it has been unable to eliminate the breeding ground for far-right violence. And the latest crimes have made clear that merely hiring more staff at the security agencies or granting them greater powers by law won't give it the upper hand on right-wing terror. What's missing is an overarching idea, a master plan for combating

right-wing hatred, the will on the part of society as a whole to tackle the problem at its root.

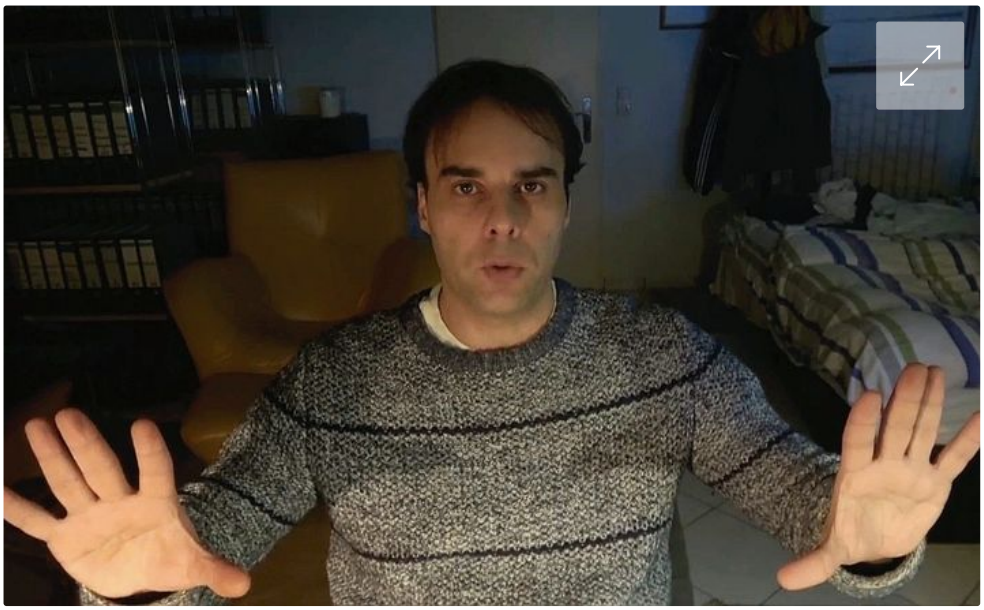
A pattern is already visible in the recent wave of right-wing terror. Many of the perpetrators consider themselves to be the executors of a collective will, the defenders of a West they believe has been watered down by multiculturalism and is threatened by a targeted "population exchange," the idea that the ethnic German population is being swapped out with immigrants.

The novelty here is that, as of a few years ago, this thinking is no longer the taboo it had been for decades after World War II. Today, groups like the Islamophobic Pegida (Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the Occident) or the right-wing populist Alternative for Germany (AfD) party can express these views on any town square and any corner of the internet. Confession letters and manifestos by the perpetrators are often peppered with the same kinds of neologisms. Within these circles, words like "Umvolkung," which translates roughly as "ethnic inversion," have attained an almost iconic status. It's also the kind of vernacular that promotes these deadly crimes.

What makes the current situation particularly dangerous, though, is the fact that perpetrators have no apparent links to the right-wing extremist scene. From the outside, some of them may have seemed like difficult people, but it's possible that the signs of their deadly thinking could, at most, be detectable on the internet. Or in places where the lines between delusion, ideology, conspiracy theories and racial hatred are blurred entirely. As such, it is difficult to say whether Tobias Rathjen was insanely dangerous or just dangerously insane.

For years, it looked like he was on the path to a normal, middle-class career. Although he completed high school, he already stood out as a peculiar character at the time. "One of the weirdest people in the class," a story in an off-the-cuff newspaper put out by the school's graduating class stated.

"Tries to be uber-cool and career-focused." "Often gushes without substance or goals. Varies between sweet and hyper-aggressive."



The perpetrator: In videos on his homepage, Tobias Rathjen presented the conspiracy theories of a man who had lost his way.

After his mandatory civil service, Rathjen completed his degree in business administration at the University of Bayreuth in 2007 after seven years of study. In a pamphlet he posted on the internet before his murderous rampage, Rathjen expressed his disappointment at the "reality at the university," claiming that the school only "skirted" the question of how to make a company successful.

Rathjen lived with his mother and father in a row house with a long, narrow backyard in the Kesselstadt neighborhood of Hanau. A housing development is located at the western edge of the neighborhood with multistory apartment blocks from the 1960s and 1970s. It's home to a Protestant community center, a school, a daycare center and flat, terraced houses with garages in-between. It's only a few hundred meters away from the site of the second round of shootings, at the corner store next to the Arena Bar at Kurt-Schumacher-Platz.

Neighbors say that Rathjen's 72-year-old mother was bedridden, required care and that a nursing service attended to her several times a day. His father was considered a difficult person in the neighborhood. People say he was often grumpy,

especially toward people who had recently moved to Kesselstadt. They say he would complain when somebody would move in near his home who he considered to be a foreigner.

In 2011, his father ran as a candidate with the Green Party for the neighborhood council. At the time, he was interested in protecting trees. Green Party leaders in Hesse say he had never been an official member of the party and that contact had been broken off with him.

Neighbors say they knew very little about Tobias Rathjen. They had the impression he wasn't home very often. When people would run into him on the street, they say he would often quickly look away. At best, you could get a brief "hello" out of him.

Following his graduation from college, Rathjen got hired at MLP, a financial-services provider in Trier, Germany, where he worked from 2008 to 2011. Sources within the company say he was dismissed because they didn't feel he was up to the task of providing consulting to up to 200 clients at the firm.

"The AfD Wasn't Radical Enough for Him"

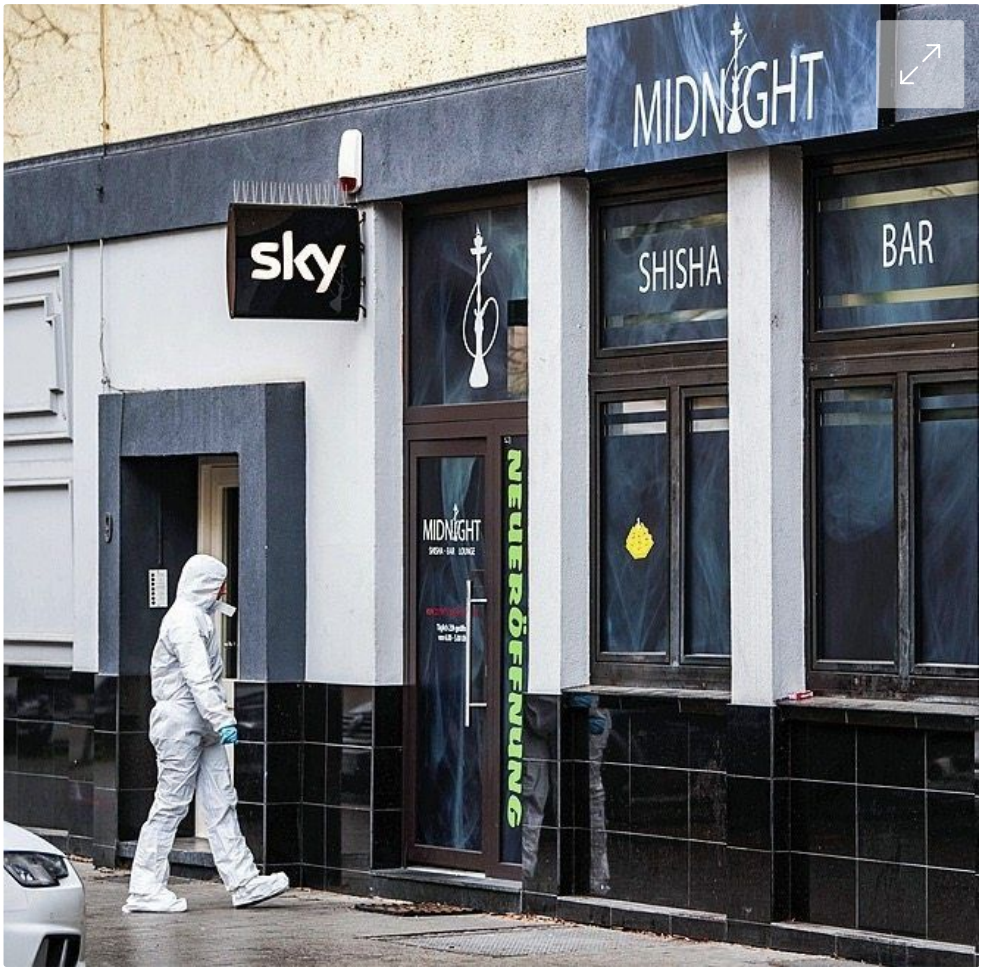
Rathjen then apparently found a job as a customer-service representative at a company called Check 24 in Munich, a German shopping comparison portal. He sublet a furnished apartment in the city.

People who have worked with him in the past describe him as a "workaholic" who put in up to 12-hour days. They say he once got sent on forced vacation "to settle down." Rathjen, they say, was "incredibly ambitious," a competitive person who even took office table tennis matches seriously. They say his work was always by the book, but that he was socially challenged. That he showed no interest in others and that he had "zero" social skills.

Rathjen also made no secret of his views at work. One former colleague recalls him saying that the German national football team was comprised solely of foreigners and that he didn't consider it to be his national team. "The AfD wasn't radical enough for him."

In Munich, Rathjen played football and, from 2014 to the end of last year, he was a member of one of the city's most exclusive sport-shooting clubs, HSG Munich.

The club is very hard to get into. To become a member, you have to submit a clean police record and also be recommended by two longtime members. Gun club president Helmut Fischer says he has no recollection of ever having had anything to do with Rathjen. Fischer says Rathjen had been a loner and that "nobody at the club can remember any personal encounter" with him.



The shisha bar Midnight was one of the site's of Wednesday night's massacre.
Foto: LUKAS SCHULZE / GETTY IMAGES

From his records, it is clear that Rathjen practiced regularly with small-caliber pistols, "which aren't the kinds of weapons that were used to cause the bloodbath in Hanau." It's important to Fischer to emphasize that fact. "We are deeply shocked and saddened," he says of the crime.

As far back as his college days, Rathjen had been convinced that he was being monitored by an intelligence agency. At least that's what he wrote in the 24-page pamphlet that he posted on his homepage before committing the crime.

In it, he claimed that he went to the police in 2002 to file a legal complaint over illegal surveillance. He wrote that no measures were undertaken as a result, that he filed another complaint in 2004 at a different police station and that it was once again rejected. Finally, in November, Rathjen wrote a 19-page criminal complaint to the Federal Prosecutor's Office in Karlsruhe – the very agency that is now investigating his racially motivated murder spree. He directed his complaint against an "unknown secret service organization."

Blatant Racist Views

The complaint also includes a number of passages that he used in the pamphlet posted on his website as well. In it, he ranted about the United States' strategy in Iraq and Afghanistan and also stated he had never had a girlfriend. "If I forget for a moment that up to this day I have never had a private or intimate sphere," Rathjen wrote, "there are several events that have made world history that can be traced back to my will, and I can also feel good about that."

Rathjen is very blatant about his racist views in the text. He listed more than two dozen countries where he believes "the entire population needs to be annihilated," including Algeria, Turkey, Israel, Afghanistan and others. Even as a young man, he wrote, he had already developed the belief that the "bad behavior of certain ethnic groups" was a problem.

"These people are outwardly, inherently objectionable and have also proven themselves historically incapable," he wrote of immigrants in the paper. "Conversely, I came to know my own people as a country in which the best and most beautiful things in the world are born and grown." The Germans, he wrote, "would have elevated all of humanity." He also wrote that intelligence services could tap into people's minds and "take control of them" from a "sort of remote control." Rathjen offered similarly strange theories in four videos he posted on YouTube and on his website. In one of the clips, he can be seen standing on a meadow wearing a knitted hat and jacket from a well-known German outdoor brand, with hills and the forest in the background. He speaks freely, calmly and serenely, his gaze never straying from the camera. He says he knows it sounds crazy, but some people can "see things that you're not supposed to see." Rathjen appears to be referring to himself.

American Conspiracy Theories

His views appear to have been shaped by forums on the internet that are hubs for conspiracy theories, where he apparently found "knowledge that is being deliberately withheld from us." From the vocabulary used in his writing and his view of the world, it appears that he spent much of his time on right-wing forums in the United States, where a conspiracy theory has been circulating for some time now under the initials "D.u.m.bs" about the U.S. Army building underground cities, all of which are connected by a tunnel system. Rathjen mentioned alleged secret military bases in the U.S. And his claim that children are abused, tortured and murdered there in large numbers is reminiscent of "Pizzagate," the fake reports of an elite satanic circle raping children in the backroom of a Washington pizzeria. An armed man from North Carolina went to the restaurant in December 2016 to "self-investigate" the matter and even opened fired. Nobody was injured in the incident.

After that, a movement known as QAnon latched onto the theory and continued perpetuating it. The movement's followers believe that Donald Trump is fighting against a powerful "deep state" whose representatives are running a child trafficking ring. Crazy ideas like these are increasingly seeping out of remote internet forums and into the real world. Attendees of Trump campaign events have repeatedly been seen wearing QAnon t-shirts.

"The perpetrator in Hanau argued in a clearly racist way and you can also find esoteric bits and pieces from the QAnon movement," says Miro Dittrich of the Amadeu Antonio Foundation, who researches online right-wing extremism for the anti-racism organization. "The perpetrator also subscribed to this idea of a secret satanic network ruling the world."

Rathjen's writings also included ideas from the incel online subculture (short for "involuntarily celibate"), which appeals to men who are not having sex unwillingly because they can't attract women. It's also a place where they can give free rein to their misogyny.

A Classic Argument of the Far Right

Stephan Balliet, the perpetrator in Halle who killed two people on Oct. 9 in a failed attempt to storm a synagogue, harbored similar views. He said he considered his chances of finding a woman to be low, mainly because so many immigrant men had come to Germany – a classic argument from the far right.

It is unclear whether Tobias Rathjen was directly inspired by any other perpetrators. But there are parallels to Anders Breivik, who killed 77 people in Oslo and on the island of Utøya in 2011. Like Breivik, Rathjen may have been someone with a narcissistic personality who believed his mission was to wipe out part of the world in order to save it in its entirety.

Both are the kind of lone wolf perpetrator who makes the decision to act alone and then prepares it meticulously, right

down to their a PR strategy. Rathjen posted his declaration as a PDF file on his own website. It even included a masthead and a short biography. The address of his website was spray painted in black on the wall of a house near the scene of the crime.

He directed his writings at the "the German people as a whole," and addressed his English-language videos to American citizens. He seemed to want to reach the biggest possible audience. And like many of his predecessors, he had a message for potential copycats. "Wake up" and fight, one of his videos said.

On the far right, some seemed to have a certain amount of understanding for Rathjen's act. "Thanks to Merkel's policy, countless people in the country are at their wits' end," tweeted Daniel Rödding, an AfD lawmaker in the federal parliament in Berlin who is also a member of the federal expert committee on digitalization, in reference to the chancellor's refugee policies. "Somehow it's unsurprising that, occasionally, someone really flips out." Rödding's party leadership, on the other hand, spoke of an "appalling crime," a "terrible act" and of "the horrendous state of our country." But they didn't see this as a right-wing extremist act, but rather a crime committed by a "crazy person," as AfD party boss Jörg Meuthen described the perpetrator.

But the lone wolf metaphor is only of limited use in describing perpetrators like Tobias Rathjen or Stephan Balliet, who are certainly connected on the web and through shared ideologies.

"Hanau is part of a transnational phenomenon that has grown stronger in recent years, not only in Germany, but also globally," says Peter Neumann, a terrorism expert at King's College in London. He says the Hanau killer is "in the same ranks with El Paso, Christchurch and Halle. It's always socially isolated men who primarily radicalize online and then assemble their ideologies on their own." In Rathjen's case, he argues, this ideology is "an incredible jumble of right-wing extremist ideas, conspiracy theories and misogyny."

Authorities Found Nothing Suspicious

The question of how a man with these kinds of ideas and delusions was able to legally obtain and own firearms in a country with stict gun-control laws like Germany's will be an issue for politicians and the responsible authorities for some time to come. Rathjen, after all, didn't just own any weapons: He had a nine-millimeter Sig Sauer P226 pistol, as well as a Walther PPQ M2, a firearm designed for special military units.

It had been possible for him to obtain them because he was officially registered as a sports shooter. Even before he joined the Munich gun club, Rathjen trained at the Diana Bergen-Enkheim shooting club in his hometown of Hanau with a small-caliber pistol and a nine-millimeter weapon. Club leader Claus Schmidt says that Rathjen had been completely unremarkable, and that he had never said anything suggesting he had far-right extremist views. He says that Rathjen had been a member for nine years, and that he had said last summer that he planned to go on a "work and travel" trip to the U.S. As a result, Schmidt says, he hadn't wondered why Rathjen had been absent in the last few months. "This is a terrible crime that pains us all the core."

The authorities responsible for weapons in the Main-Kinzig region apparently also had no doubts about Rathjen's character. They carried out a pre-announced inspection at his home as recently as this past August. According sources close to the authorities, they didn't detect anything suspicious.

> **"An incredible jumble of right-wing extremist ideas, conspiracy theories and misogyny."**
>
> Peter Naumann, terrorism expert at King's College in London

One of the conditions for having a gun permit is having "the requisite dependability" and "personal suitability." Someone

would be unsuitable, for example, if they pursued goals that violated the constitution or were psychologically ill.

The authorities are required to conduct checks at least once every three years, although only gun owners under the age of 25 must be thoroughly tested for their "mental fitness," and also only for large-caliber weapons. In response to the deadly attack against Kassel District President Walter Lübke, the German parliament passed a new law that will go into effect in September that will require weapons authorities to run any application for a permit by the domestic intelligence agency, the Office for the Protection of the Constitution, before it can be issued.

There have been several cases in which gun-owners have killed people while suffering from delusions. In 2015, a 48-year-old man from Bavaria believed himself to be on a kind of military expedition launched by Angela Merkel. He killed two people and threatened two others in the belief there had been a nuclear attack and that he was being confronted by werewolves. In January, a 26-year-old shot and killed six relatives and seriously injured two more in the small central German community of Rot am See.

A Terror that Spans Class Boundaries

Lone perpetrators aside, there are also networked groups who want to abolish Germany in its current form. To accomplish this, they are willing to resort to violence, and, if they believe it necessary, kill people.

Only five days before the murders in Hanau, the federal prosecutor general exposed a suspected right-wing terrorist group composed of men from across the country -- from Bavaria to Saxony-Anhalt to the city of Hamm in western Germany. They egged each other on via Facebook, Telegram and other chat groups, and made inflammatory remarks about Muslims and left-wing "parasites." After several in-person

meetings, a plan had apparently been hatched to murder Muslims.

Domestic intelligence employees apparently recorded conversations mentioning plans for "10 men" to attack mosques in "10 German states," or alternatively, for two-person commandos to carry out attacks in five locations.

German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier and his wife during a visit to show their condolences for the victims in Hanau Foto: KAI PFAFFENBACH / REUTERS

The men, notably, come from very different backgrounds. Some were members of right-wing citizens' militias, others were conspiracy theorists and so-called Reichsbürger, an extremist movement that rejects the legitimacy of the German government. Others, however, lived in seemingly unremarkable middle-class environs: One is the owner of a metalworking company in southern Germany. All were united by a hatred of refugees, of Merkel's government and of the supposed Islamification of Western culture.

Right-wing terror spans class boundaries. It hides in brick-walled houses, bungalows, gray single-family homes. It can even stew in places like Hummelgautsche, a historical mill in the southern German village of Altdorf.

"Things Are Going To Happen"

Several members and supporters of the suspected terrorist group supposedly met at the idyllic mill with a BBQ area in late September for the first time. Werner S., 53, allegedly led the conversation. The Bavarian man likes to wear a hat and is referred to in the scene as "Teutonico." His defense attorney says "there was no clearly defined attack target," and that the arrest warrant doesn't mention one.

According to the investigators, Werner S.'s right-hand man is Tony E., 39. He recently lived with his wife and two small children in a bungalow on the edge of a community in a rural region of the eastern German state of Saxony-Anhalt. There's a children's slide in front of the house and a toy excavator next to the sandbox.

In a phone conversation that authorities were able to wiretap, he told the leader of the suspected terror cell that he was prepared to die.

People who know him, say Tony E. led a "double life" that they never would have suspected. Tony E. worked for a care service and shuttled dementia patients back and forth to the doctor. He also had a low-paid job as a guard at the logistics center of a large supermarket for 450 euros a month.

But Tony E. wasn't quite so unremarkable. In his care service's Whatsapp group, he shared a photo showing him as a member, alongside Werner S., of a militia-type body called "Freikorps Homeland Security." On the internet, the group wrote of "400,000 unregistered migrants" who "move through our homeland while plundering and murdering."

Investigators believe Werner S. tried to recruit battle-ready men via a chat group in December. Twenty-one sympathizers joined a closed chat group.

"Teutonico" suggested holding a meeting on Feb. 8 in northern Germany. He argued that there were no more excuses in the new year, writing that "things are going to

happen." Twelve men traveled to the western German state of North Rhine-Westphalia that weekend, to the outskirts of the city of Minden.

The host of the secretive meeting, Thomas N., 55, lived in a house with a gray facade. The conspiracy theorist and follower of the Reichsbürger ideology was seen as a hardcore member of the group. In his house, he hoarded gold bars and coins as well as an arsenal of self-made axes, spiked maces and knives of various lengths. But the man's defense lawyer, Daniel Sprafke, expressed doubt about the group's "supposed potential for violence," saying, "My client has never been known as a violent man."

Plans To Attack Muslims

According to the investigators' findings, the members discussed potential attacks at the meeting in Minden, with plans to attack Muslims during prayers in several small towns.

Guns were to be procured by two men from right-wing extremist vigilante groups with names like "Viking Security Germania" and "Wodan's Heirs" (a reference to a Germanic god) and who wore cowls similar to those worn by biker gangs and T-shirts with a logo made up of two crossed axes. The federal government had issued warnings in the fall that some of these vigilante groups, whose role models are the "Soldiers of Odin" in Finland, could become terrorists.

During the raids, investigators found self-made hand grenades and a large-caliber shotgun known as a "slam gun." Tests showed that shots from this firearm could make holes in human flesh up to 6 centimeters (over 2 inches) wide. The perpetrator in Halle used a similar weapon.

Thorsten W.'s occupational background is problematic. Until his arrest, the 50-year-old worked as an administrative employee at the police headquarters in Hamm, most recently in the traffic commission. He reportedly said he would be

willing to give the right-wing extremist group 5,000 euros, and even more if necessary.

W. didn't always have a harmless desk job. He reportedly used to work in the "weapons licenses" department of the Hamm police. Apparently, he was also involved in decision-making about who could receive a weapons permit. An internal investigation is now taking place to determine whether any irregularities took place during that time.

In his spare time, the 50-year-old would dress up like a Germanic warrior, with a sword and rune-covered shield. Colleagues also claim he never hid his beliefs at work, and they told authorities that he had convictions similar to those of the right-wing extremist Reichsbürger. They also came across a social media profile teeming with swastikas and SS symbols. The police in Hamm have since admitted that they didn't take a close enough look at his individual actions.

More of the Same from Politicians

Even if the politicians are facing growing pressure to counter the mounting threat from the right, they are answering it in the usual way: by proposing new laws.

The evening before the investigators moved to arrest the members of "Group S," two ministers visited the command center of the German terror defense in Berlin. Behind the tall fences, Interior Minister Horst Seehofer and Justice Minister Christine Lambrecht listened to the concerns of workers at the Office for the Protection of the Constitution and of police officers at the Federal Criminal Police Office. The meeting lasted until 9 p.m.

Although experts reported that the authorities have repeatedly managed to thwart the attack plans of right-wing extremists and Islamists in recent years, they argued that this often only happened by coincidence or because of tips from the authorities in allied countries.

Members of the delegation from the center-left Social Democratic Party and the center-left Christian Democratic Union left with the message that they shouldn't expect everything to always work flawlessly, and that they need to provide the authorities with the resources they need to stop terrorists in the digital age.

Seehofer has now proposed a new law for the Office of the Protection of the Constitution calling for more powers to be given to the domestic intelligence service. This is no longer being justified, as has been the case in the past, by the danger posed by Islamism, but rather by the right-wing extremist terror attacks in places like Norway and Halle. To discover perpetrators early, it argues, individuals should be targetable before they are known for having violent inclinations. It also argues that, above all else, the authority needs new digital tools allowing it to break into right-wing extremist chat groups and to read encrypted messages - things like government-controlled software trojans that can infiltrate their smartphones and computers.

The SPD had long resisted calls for these kinds of far-reaching powers for the intelligence service. But concerns about the deadly danger emanating from the right are chipping away at those objections.

Justice Minister Lambrecht argues that the intelligence services need to be up to date. "Generally speaking, terrorists don't call each other on landlines anymore," she says. "This means we need to talk openly about whether further powers for the Office for the Protection of the Constitution are called for, so the chat messages extremists are sending each other can be read. In recent years, planned attacks were foiled largely due to luck."

Playing Catch-Up

In a development that was once scarcely imaginable, Seehofer and Thomas Haldenwang, the head of the Office for the

Protection of the Constitution, have admitted in recent months that politicians and authorities have neglected the fight against right-wing terrorism.

Now they are changing course. Hundreds of additional positions have been created. But it will take some time until the new police officers and intelligence workers are trained. There is an urgent need for more expertise about how extremists radicalize in the 21st century, how the hate moves from the online world into real life and data turns into deeds.

Late last summer, the Federal Criminal Police Office, the Office for the Protection of the Constitution and the Military Counter-Intelligence Service explained in a confidential report which digital spheres they believed the intelligence services needed to make progress on.

According to the report, radicalization is increasingly moving from Facebook and Twitter to platforms that are harder for the authorities to access, like Telegram, Steam and Discord. In the paper, the authorities also warned about so-called imageboards like 4chan and 8chan, which perpetrators and mass shooters have used as platforms – but where the German authorities have made little headway.

"Striking Parallels"

A few weeks after that analysis, Stephan Balliet, a man who was deeply enmeshed in these digital shadow worlds, attempted to storm a synagogue in Halle. He linked to the live video of his crimes via an image board.

"Given the very striking parallels between almost all past acts and the large number of related cases that are currently being pursued by the federal prosecutor, it is apparent that right-wing terrorism in Germany in 2020 is a problem that must be taken very seriously," says Konstantin von Notz, the domestic affairs expert of the Green Party's parliamentary group. "We must continue, with all the necessary determination under the

rule of law, to take a much closer look than has previously been the case at right-wing networks and structures."

Vice-Chancellor Olaf Scholz (SPD) is calling for the same. "On this, there cannot be any misplaced misgivings," he says. CDU lawmaker Volker Ullrich is also wondering, "How can protection for people with immigrant backgrounds be further strengthened?"

But additional police officers and better methods won't help detect the criminal intentions of perpetrators like Tobias Rathjen. The ones most likely to notice that there was something wrong with him were those who were close to him.

A Deep Sense of Mourning

On Thursday evening, there was a deep sense of mourning in Hanau. Over 100 men assembled at a local community organization to say their goodbyes to Gökhan Gültekin. The night the perpetrator carried out his attack, the 36-year-old had been working in the corner store next to Arena Bar. On Thursday, an imam recited verses from the Koran, and the men spoke in hushed voices and drank black tea during the breaks.

"He didn't have an easy life," one of them said. Several years ago, he recalled, Gökhan had been hit by a car and fell into a long coma. "He was very lucky that he survived at the time. And then something terrible like this happens."

Kemal Kocak is sitting in a corner store on a square less than a minute by foot from one of the murder sites. The part-owner of the corner store next to the Arena Bar is here together with a few other men.

The events of that night have left visible traces on him: Exhaustion, shock, mourning. He says he raced to his corner store at Kurt-Schumacher-Platz just as soon as he heard what had happened. "First, I went in Arena Bar, but when I got

there, almost everyone was dead. One or two were still alive and wanted help, but I couldn't help anymore."

Ömer Demir is sitting in the back of the corner store on a barstool and leans his forearms on a standing table on which an empty Capri Sun lies. He believes the government is responsible for the killings. "Why isn't anyone checking the shooting clubs? Why are there no stricter regulations on firearms? Who is going to be held responsible?" he asks.

He knows Interior Minister Seehofer is visiting the Heumarkt at that very minute, less than 100 meters away.

By Laura Backes, Matthias Bartsch, Maik Baumgärtner, Felix Bohr, Anna Clauß, Jörg Diehl, Katrin Elger, Ullrich Fichtner, Jan Friedmann, Marie Groß, Hubert Gude, Dietmar Hipp, Roman Höfner, Julia Jüttner, Martin Knobbe, Roman Lehberger, Michael Liedtke, Cordula Meyer, Ann-Katrin Müller, Christopher Piltz, Sven Röbel, Marcel Rosenbach, Lydia Rosenfelder, Fidelius Schmid, Wolf Wiedmann-Schmidt, Lukas Stern, Jean-Pierre Ziegler

Feedback

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