



## **We must get in front of the wave**

**Ralph D. Thiele**

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### **Summary**

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The terrorist attack in Solingen throws a shocking spotlight on the dangers of Islamism in Germany. Further attacks are imminent. Hamas' heinous murderous campaign in Israel in October 2023 and the subsequent Gaza war have triggered a huge surge of motivation in the Islamist scene. There is still a chance to get ahead of the wave.

### **ISPSW**

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## Analysis

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### Foreign war

The strikes are getting closer. Hamas' heinous murderous campaign in Israel in October 2023 and the subsequent Gaza war have triggered a huge surge of motivation in the Islamist scene. Since then, there have been six smaller Islamist attacks and 21 attempted attacks in Western Europe. This alone represents an increase of 75 per cent. The ambitions of the attackers and their lust for murder are huge. We know from experience that the wave always comes three to four years after the triggering events. There is still a chance to get ahead of the wave.

Terrorist acts have a context. The world has become rougher. Here, state and non-state actors of political Islamism are positioning themselves to profit from the upheavals in the world order - actors with their own radical interpretation of Islam. They want to play a central role in shaping political, legal, social and cultural systems worldwide with an all-encompassing, totalitarian claim to the validity of Islamic law for all areas of state, law and society. They see a hybrid approach, which can start in grey areas of the democratic constitutional state, as a biotope of Islamist possibilities. The aim is to change the democratic political order in such a way that it is reorganised according to Islamist, undemocratic and anti-liberal principles. The caliphate and Sharia law send their regards.

### Not muslims, islamists are the problem

It is not our Muslim fellow citizens who are the problem. Islamists are the problem. The vast majority of Muslims in Germany and Europe support neither terrorism nor violence and are in favour of a moderate and peaceful interpretation of Islam within the framework of the democratic legal system. Incidentally, the way we deal with Islamists is also a problem. The discussion regularly drifts in the direction of self-incrimination. Anyone who questions Islamism, its string-pullers and their activities quickly ends up being accused of fuelling Islamophobia.

Terms such as Islamophobia, Islamophobia and anti-Muslim racism have long since become fighting words in the domestic political debate, successfully changing reality. And so today there are various committees and initiatives dedicated to combating Islamophobia, for example an expert group on Islamophobia, which in its reports discredits criticism of Islamism and problematic structures in Muslim communities, including forced marriages, violence in the name of honour and clan crime, as anti-Muslim racism. The work of the 'Political Islamism' expert group at the Federal Ministry of the Interior and Homeland, on the other hand, has been discontinued.

### String-pullers in the background

Who are the string-pullers? Among the state actors of political Islam, Iran masters the perfidious game of gangsterism like no other. With a network of proxies, including the Muslim Brotherhood, its subsidiary organisation Hamas and Hezbollah, it succeeds in sowing terror and instability not only in the Middle East and far beyond. In Western Europe, it promotes and supports political Islamism. For many decades, it has been establishing institutions in the West from which it instigates violence against those it considers its political enemies or accuses of blasphemy. The events in Hamburg, with anti-Semitic demonstrations and calls for a caliphate, have thrown this into sharp relief.



Governments that generally support political Islam include Turkey, for example. The ruling AKP party is regularly associated with political Islam, in particular with the establishment of an Islamist agenda in Turkey. At the same time, it is said to support various Islamist groups in the Middle East, including the Muslim Brotherhood and its subsidiary organisation, Hamas. The AKP's arm reaches as far as Germany. Here, the Turkish religious authority Diyanet in particular uses its opportunities to influence Turkish believers.

### **The role of the Muslim Brotherhood**

The Muslim Brotherhood is the most important transnational organisation of political Islamism. It promotes its Islamist values and objectives in Europe through a broad network of NGOs, mosques, schools, lobby groups and other organisations. These organisations exert a disproportionate influence both within Muslim communities and vis-à-vis European decision-makers and civil society. Salafist groups offer a fundamentalist, puritanical and radicalised version of Islam. As a language of revolt, they are comparatively easy to use against the West. In France, Islamists of this type have already taken over entire neighbourhoods.

And then there are still violent Islamist groups, such as al-Qaeda and the 'Islamic State'. They are currently reconstituting themselves despite enormous losses and remain determined to inflict violence and suffering on all those who do not agree with their extremist ideology. Europe is an important front for attacks on Christians. For a few years now, the 'Islamic State - Khorasan Province', an offshoot from Afghanistan, has been increasingly active. It is responsible for the bloody attack on a concert hall in Moscow in March, on a Catholic church in Istanbul in January and other attacks in Iran.

### **Young people as a target group**

Young people are a relatively new group. Their self-radicalisation begins on TikTok or Instagram. In the context of Islamism, they feed the young people with Islamist propaganda in an algorithmic spiral. They then end up in groups that send each other videos of attacks and are fuelled by the violence.

Unfortunately, migration increases the breeding ground for Islamists. The rejection of religious freedom, rampant anti-Semitism, the rejection of gender equality and the rejection of our liberal way of life by many migrants are welcome pick-up points for radicalisation. At the same time, these migratory impulses are directed against the core of our democracy. People in Germany sense this and are not satisfied with the political responses to date.

This is precisely why politicians must not leave them or other citizens defenceless against efforts that are fundamentally hostile to democracy. Technology can help enormously in improving our security situation and in preventing sabotage and terrorist attacks. A widespread scepticism towards technology in Germany, and often a lack of awareness, has so far helped Islamists in their dark activities.

### **Technology may help**

We do not utilise powerful and inexpensive technology to a sufficient extent, neither in social networks nor in event security. At Arab airports, technology has long been used to check travellers for weapons and explosives without barriers or contact. In fact, German industry sells such solutions all over the world. It is only in Germany that we find little use for them.



Data protection in particular is an obstacle to better protection for our security. There is an urgent need to find a better balance between civil liberties and the protection of life. In the future, it will be important to improve cooperation between the police, judiciary, media, civilian authorities, intelligence services and armed forces so that anti-state and anti-democratic endeavours can be recognised and stopped immediately. We must get in front of the wave.

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**Remarks:** The opinions expressed in this contribution are those of the author. The article first published in German in the German newspaper *Rhein-Zeitung* on August 29, 2024.

Thomas Jäger's and Ralph Thiele's *Handbook of Political Islam in Europe. Activities, Means, and Strategies from Salafists to the Muslim Brotherhood and Beyond*, Springer 2024, 672 pages, published in spring 2024 together with numerous renowned Islamic scholars, describes in great detail the aims, methods and means of Islamist string-pullers in Germany and our European neighbourhood ([Handbook of Political Islam in Europe: Activities, Means, and Strategies from Salafists to the Muslim Brotherhood and Beyond | SpringerLink](#)).

In a recent letter, Bassam Tibi praises the project as very successful and hopes that this publication will establish itself not just as a handbook but as 'THE Handbook'.

### About the Author of this Issue

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Ralph D. Thiele, retired Colonel, is a distinguished Defense Expert and Thought Leader. He is the President of the independent Initiative EuroDefense Deutschland e.V., Chairman of Politisch-Militärische Gesellschaft e.V. and Managing Director of StratByrd Consulting. He is active as strategy consultant, security expert, researcher, appraiser, and publisher. In his military career, he has held important national and international positions. He has most recently published the book "Hybrid Warfare. Future and Technologies."



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