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Zuena Nakhumicha: The Trials and Tribulations of Tanzania's 'Black Widow'

Jacob Zenn

Zuena Nakhumicha was once a Tanzanian banker, but has been arrested for her suspected ties to terrorists, with a wide web of links in Kenya. She was captured in a border town between Tanzania and Zambia on July 27, and has since claimed in court that the media's labeling of her as the new "Black Widow" makes it impossible for her to face a fair trial ([The Nation](#), August 21). Nevertheless, Nakhumicha was charged with facilitating the actions of terrorist cells throughout East Africa. This includes networks in Somalia, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Tanzania, suggesting that the charges against her are serious—and that the Tanzanian authorities are unlikely to relent in their prosecution of her case ([The Nation](#), August 14).

Nakhumicha's moniker is a reference to the "White Widow," British citizen Samantha Lewthwaite, who recruited Kenyans and other foreign fighters into al-Qaeda-affiliate al-Shabaab. The "Black Widow," in contrast, is allied with Islamic State (IS). Specifically, Nakhumicha leveraged her

regional connections to recruit fighters for IS's province in Somalia's Puntland region. Meanwhile, Lewthwaite has managed to evade authorities ever since she became an internationally known suspect for her contributions to al-Shabaab's Westgate Mall massacre in Nairobi, Kenya in 2013. In 2022, she reportedly fled from Somalia to Yemen, where she is believed to have remained—and married her fourth jihadist husband ([Garowe Online](#), January 16, 2022).

What made Nakhumicha unique was her ability to leverage her position as a banker (at two banks, before her resignation in mid-2021) to support IS's funding and logistics networks in East Africa and obtain travel documents for recruits ([Hiiraan Online](#), August 13). The next step in prosecuting Nakhumicha will be the investigation of her travel logs based on her cell phone movements in Tanzania and Zambia ([The Standard](#), August 25). This may help authorities identify those with whom she interacted and whose travel to Somalia she helped facilitate.

Nakhumicha's case is bound to attract significant attention—not only because she is a woman in a jihadist field otherwise dominated by men, but also because of her

white-collar job in the banking community, which makes her a somewhat atypical jihadist financier. In addition, her case underlines how much weaker IS's presence in Somalia is (with only several hundred fighters) when compared to al-Shabaab. Nevertheless, Somalia still continues to be a funding and logistics hub for IS. Prior to his death earlier this year in a US air strike, Bilal al-Sudani, for example, had also been a key Somalia-based funder and logistician behind IS operations from East Africa to Afghanistan ([Al Jazeera](#), January 27).

While IS in Somalia may not be IS's most active province in terms of militant activity, it remains an epicenter for the organization's global funding and logistics networks. If the allegations against Nakhumicha prove true, it would show that Somalia continues to play this role for IS, even after al-Sudani's death. The unique profile of Nakhumicha suggests that IS in Somalia is branching out and seeking to utilize operatives who are less likely to be detected than hardened jihadist veterans like al-Sudani.

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Jewel Molla: From Bakery Worker to Captured Founder and Leader of TUJ

Iftekharul Bashar

Between September 13 and 16, Bangladesh's Anti-Terrorism Unit (ATU) uncovered a newly formed jihadist group, Tawhidul Uluhiyah al-Jihadi (TUJ), which was recruiting members for attacks planned for 2024 ([The Daily Star](#), September 27). Jewel Molla, TUJ's founder, emerged on the jihadist scene rapidly at just 29 years of age, but has already had a significant impact on Bangladesh's militant landscape. Molla's journey from bakery worker to jihadist leader (until his arrest by the ATU) has shown how jihadists in Bangladesh—as with elsewhere in the

world—can emerge from unsuspected places.

Life and Radicalization

Molla is from Bagerhat, a southern district in the Khulna province of Bangladesh. His upbringing appeared unremarkable. Molla received an education up to seventh grade and initially worked as a staff member in a bakery. However, it was his exposure to jihadist materials online that set him on a dangerous path. Under the influence of online lectures by Jasimuddin Rahmani—currently in prison, but spiritual leader of the al-Qaeda-affiliated Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT) at the time—Molla joined the ABT. He then quickly rose to prominence within the organization and became the commander of the ABT in Khulna ([BanglaNews24](#), October 22, 2019).

Molla's role within the ABT was elevated when he was tasked with consolidating ABT activities in the city of Rajshahi. This mission included the collection of illegal weapons and the planning of sabotage operations across Bangladesh, including in the capital, Dhaka. His plan also involved targeted killings of figures perceived to be anti-Islam. However, Molla's campaign ended on October 21, 2019, with his arrest by the Bangladeshi police's Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) during a clandestine ABT meeting (held in a building under construction in Godagari, Rajshahi). During the arrest, incriminating evidence, such as jihadist materials and flags, a diary, and leaflets, were seized. While Molla and another ABT member were apprehended, several others managed to evade capture ([Rajshahi Post](#), October 23, 2019).

Molla spent nine months in prison, using the duration of his sentence strategically. He served as the *muazzin* (the man who calls Muslims to prayer) at the prison mosque and was able to radicalize and motivate fellow inmates toward his ideology. Upon his release on bail, Molla returned to work at the bakery and seemingly abided by the conditions of his release. Behind the scenes, however, he

began laying the foundation for his own jihadist organization. Molla's personal life took a dark turn as well, with his wife divorcing him; this only pushed his radicalization further ([NewsBangla24](#), September 16).

Forming TUJ

After Molla's release from prison, he established TUJ in Bangladesh; TUJ officially began operating in the second quarter of 2023. According to police estimates, TUJ has 80 to 90 members ([Dainik Bangla](#), September 16). It has also drawn recruits from various jihadist organizations in Bangladesh, including the banned Ansar al-Islam (AAI) and the openly operating Hizbut Tawhid. For reasons unknown, Hizbut Tawhid has not faced action from authorities in recent years, despite its "blacklisted" status ([Blitz](#), June 16, 2019).

TUJ gained attention when its members were found disseminating jihadist propaganda through secret online groups and advocating jihad to establish a caliphate and overthrow Bangladesh's democratic system. Molla claimed to have received a dream-inspired directive to reinstate the Caliphate in 2024, a century after the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, and he propagated this vision within TUJ. The group further used a unique black flag featuring the *shahada* (testament of faith) and a sword image that resembled flags used by other jihadist organizations. Molla attributed the flag's design to a dream, which added an enigmatic aspect to its symbolism ([NewsBangla24](#), September 16).

TUJ is strongly aligned with al-Qaeda due to Molla's past affiliation with ABT (which came to be called AAI). It is also recognized by both al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) and al-Qaeda Central. Molla's loyalty to AAI leader Jasimuddin Rahmani, who is known for orchestrating attacks on secular bloggers and activists, reinforces TUJ's alignment with al-Qaeda goals.

Live-Streaming and Arrest

Sometime between September 11 and 12, Molla live-streamed a video inside an empty train compartment to spread his messages. In this, he talked about TUJ. Molla's provocative speeches and views attracted followers and raised concerns about potential attacks. This prompted the ATU to intensify its surveillance of him ([NewsBangla24](#), September 16).

From September 13 to 16, ATU conducted operations across Bangladesh, which led to the arrest of Molla in Bagerhat District, along with two other top TUJ leaders from other parts of the country; this included TUJ second-in-command Mohammad Rahul Hossain. Hossain was caught while researching bomb-making online and planning to finance the group by selling his land. Leaflets and eight of the group's flags were seized during the raid to capture him ([Daily Sun](#), September 16).

Conclusion

Jewel Molla's transformation from a bakery worker to TUJ's founder and leader underscores the way radicalization occurs in the digital age. His arrest and that of other TUJ members show that Bangladesh's law enforcement's ongoing fight against terrorism is yielding results. Yet, only a fraction of TUJ's estimated members are in custody. This underscores the enduring threat of Molla's group to Bangladesh's stability and security.

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Hilal Ghazi: Jihadist Behind Pakistani Taliban's Expansion into Punjab

Kiran Butt and Riccardo Valle

On June 15, the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), or “Pakistani Taliban,” announced the establishment of two new “shadow provinces” in Punjab, Pakistan’s most populated province: “North Punjab” and “South Punjab.” This brought the total number of the group’s parallel proto-administrative units in Pakistan to twelve ([Twitter/TheKhorasanDiary](#), June 15). While TTP commander Muhammad Umar Muawiya was appointed as governor of South Punjab, veteran TTP member Hilal Ghazi became governor of North Punjab.

Ghazi is a paradigmatic example of a TTP fighter who ascended the ranks of the organization since its inception in 2007. He maintains deep connections to the watershed moment that turned many jihadist groups across Pakistan against the state: the siege of the Lal Masjid (Red Mosque) in Islamabad (see [Terrorism Monitor](#), July 19, 2007).

Who is Hilal Ghazi?

Originally from Malakand, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Ghazi received basic education in his native area before joining the Lal Masjid in Islamabad in 2002. At Lal Masjid, he became close to two Islamist ideologues, who were brothers that ran the complex. The complex included a mosque and two attached seminaries, Jamia Syeda Hafsa and Jamia Faridiya, (for the male and female students, respectively).

Ghazi spent most of his time with Mawlana Abdul Rasheed, who was the younger brother and head of the male seminary, where Ghazi was enrolled. Ghazi also maintained relations with the elder brother, Mawlana Abdul Aziz. **[1]** Ghazi spent five years studying at the Lal Masjid, but he did not remain in Islamabad the whole time. He joined the jihadist movement in

Afghanistan after the US-led invasion of the country in 2001, and frequently travelled to Afghanistan in support of the Afghan Taliban. At the same time, he continued training in the military domain, firstly in Mansehra district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and subsequently for some time in the Nakyal sector of Azad Jammu and Kashmir, where he prepared to fight in Kashmir. It is likely that in those years, Ghazi trained under Kashmir-focused militants inside Harkat-ul Jihad al-Islami (HuJI), which was a leading group that operated with several other splinter movements in spearheading jihad in Kashmir ([Perspective on Terrorism](#), December 2017).

Jihad in Afghanistan

Once Ghazi joined the jihad in Afghanistan, he mostly took part in operations in the eastern province of Paktika, while also coming and going from Wana, South Waziristan District, where the TTP and members of al-Qaeda in Pakistan formerly took shelter. In Afghanistan, he also frequently sojourned in Tora Bora, Nangarhar Province, and in Kunar Province. In Pakistan, he traveled in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and specifically between Swat, Mohmand, Bajaur, North and South Waziristan, and Khyber.

During his time at the Lal Masjid, Ghazi studied to memorize the Quran under the tutelage of Abdul Aziz Ghazi. However, he also had the opportunity to meet several Arab jihadists—including several associated with al-Qaeda—who were taking refuge in the mosque compound in-between travels in 2001. Ghazi’s stay at Lal Masjid was interrupted, however, by “Operation Silence/Sunrise” in 2007, which was launched by Pakistan’s security forces against the Lal Masjid ([Dawn](#), July 13, 2017). The siege led to the death of several affiliates of the mosque, including Abdul Rasheed. Although Ghazi was present during the siege, he survived. **[2]** The event was a watershed moment, and the TTP was born in the same year. Ghazi joined the movement and adopted the new name of “Ghazi” in addition to “Hilal,” in

honor of his late jihadist mentor, Mawlana Abdul Rasheed, whose surname was "Ghazi". Mawlana Abdul Rasheed's brother, Abdul Aziz, was also arrested in the aftermath of the operation.

Militancy in the TTP

As soon as Ghazi joined the TTP, he set up a branch of the organization called the "Ghazi Force" in honor of Abdul Rasheed. He thus pledged allegiance to the TTP's then-first emir, Baitullah Mehsud, with several other former students of the Lal Masjid. In the first stages of the organization's development, the Ghazi Force operated under the command of Hilal Ghazi with the collaboration of Hakeemullah Mehsud. Mehsud was the head of the TTP's chapter Orakzai District, though he would one day go on to be the TTP's second emir.

The Ghazi Force quickly became infamous for its ferocity, with involvement in several attacks against security forces in Punjab as well as in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Several of these occurred in Rawalpindi, which enjoys special prominence as the twin-city of Pakistan's capital, Islamabad. For example, the General Headquarters attack in 2009 was planned together by the Ghazi Force and the Amjad Farooqi faction of the TTP ([Dawn](#), September 21, 2011). However, the Ghazi Force was also characterized by a staunch sectarian agenda, leading the group to carry out several attacks against Shias. In 2012, the group detonated an improvised explosive device (IED) during a procession for Muharram (the first month of the Islamic calendar, when warfare is forbidden) in Rawalpindi, killing several Shias ([The Express Tribune](#), November 23, 2012). Several attacks against Shias also took place in other areas of Pakistan, including in Hangu and Kurram tribal districts. The anti-Shia agenda was typical of Abdul Rasheed and Abdul Aziz, who both derided Shias as an un-Islamic sect in their sermons.

Spiritual Succession

Ghazi rose to prominence within the ranks of the TTP thanks to his military activities and role as Abdul Rasheed's spiritual successor. In a video published in 2016 by Umar Media (the TTP's media branch), Ghazi is featured sitting next to then-TTP emir, Mawlana Fazlullah Khorasani, as well as TTP-veteran and top strategist, Adnan Rasheed, who had once been a member of the Pakistan Air Force. **[3]** In February 2022, the TTP issued another message detailing its organizational restructuring in the mold of the Afghan Taliban. As a result, Ghazi was appointed as administrative officer of the Nizami Commission of the North; in other words, his new post involved overseeing organizational units for the movement, which meant he assumed logistical and operational roles.

[4]

Ghazi became also part of the TTP negotiating team in Kabul, tasked with conducting talks with Pakistan's government in the wake of the ceasefire concluded in mid-2022. Initially, the team was headed by Qazi Muhammad Amir Mehsud, who was a top TTP scholar, and was aided by several jihadists, including Maulana Faqir Muhammad, who was a veteran TTP leader and the group's former deputy emir; Mufti Abu Hurairah, who was a member of the TTP Shura council and former Jamaat-ul-Ahrar member; Dr. Hamood Swati, who was head of the TTP's chapters in Malakand Division and Swat District; and Ghazi himself.

The apex of Ghazi's militant career was achieved with the inception of the so-called "Province of Punjab." While on the TTP's Umar Media podcast, Ghazi commented on his appointment as the head of North Punjab and stated that while TTP militants were already present and active in the area, the two new provinces were a further confirmation of the TTP being a movement not only confined to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa but also representative of other ethnicities in Pakistan. **[5]** His appointment was sanctioned by the Rahbari (Central) Shura

because of his militant activities in Punjab and the many TTP members from Punjab who joined his ranks. [6]

Conclusion

Since the return of the Taliban's Islamic Emirate in Afghanistan, the TTP has begun a process of implementing the Afghan Taliban's model of insurgency, which encompasses both military and administrative tactics ([Dawn](#), July 10). Since the start of 2023, the TTP has proven capable of staging major attacks outside of its usual areas of operations—including in Karachi—while at the same time it has set up new front groups such as Tehreek-e-Jihad Pakistan (TJP; see [TM](#), August 21) for conducting complex and controversial operations. This is done to avoid potential political backlash from Pakistan toward their erstwhile Afghan Taliban allies, who are hosting the TTP's leadership in the country ([TheKhorasanDiary](#), April 29). The latest move by the TTP to expand its perceived influence to Punjab by setting up two provinces there is a sign of the TTP's grip on the country, but it is indicative of more than just a new strategy for the group's public image.

In the past, the TTP had been able to stage attacks inside Punjab thanks to collaboration with other militant factions, including al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), which is affiliated with the Amjad Farooq group and Commander Muneeb group, both of which joined the TTP in 2020 ([MilitantWire](#), May 10, 2022; see [MLM](#), January 5, 2021; [TM](#), August 13, 2021). Notably, all such groups as well as the Ghazi Force became experts at urban warfare and the making of explosives; as such, they now carry said expertise to operations in the new province. Thus, elevating Punjab to the position containing not one, but two TTP provinces might signal an intensification of attacks, as the group already possessed the capabilities to strike in the region.

Furthermore, granting the control of North Punjab—where major cities like Lahore are

located—to a veteran militant like Ghazi is both a tactical and symbolic move. The TTP is reaffirming its links with the events at Lal Masjid and its commitment to support Mawlana Abdul Aziz. He remains one of the main jihadi ideologues in the region and Ghazi will follow in his footsteps.

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Notes:

[1] Both brothers also had the surname Ghazi. Interviews conducted by the authors with relatives and friends of Hilal Ghazi, conducted remotely, August 20.

[2] *Shariah ya Shahadat*, Umar Media (May 2016).

[3] *Idem*.

[4] Statement, Umar Media (February 2022).

[5] Pason, episode 21, Umar Media (June 2023).

[6] Interviews conducted by the authors with a TTP commander close to Hilal Ghazi, conducted remotely, August 10.

'Lina E.': Prosecution of the Woman Leading Germany's Militant Left-Wing Underground

Herbert Maack

On May 31, the *Oberlandesgericht* (state-level higher court) in Dresden, Germany sentenced the 28-year old university student "Lina E." to five years and three months in prison for her leadership position in a "criminal entity." Among other offenses, she caused "severe bodily harm" to others on multiple occasions ([Oberlandesgericht \(OLG\) Dresden](#), May 31). This prison sentence sparked severe

rioting in Dresden by around 1,500 left-wing sympathizers, who mobilized under the slogan "Tag X" [Day X] and demonstrated against the guilty verdict ([Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung](#), June 4).

The prosecution of "Lina E." and her co-defendants puts the spotlight on Germany's violent left-wing underground, which consists of a network spanning across Germany and beyond. There are signs that this underground is growing more radicalized. Its willingness to advance its political aims by violent means—up to and including the deaths of others—has revived memories of the wave of left-wing terrorism that engulfed West Germany in the 1970s and 1980s.

Path to Radicalization

The latest violence stemming from Germany's left-wing underground is directed against Germany's far-right. The radicalization of several left-wing activists appears to have been triggered by a violent attack by far-right rioters against the neighborhood of Connewitz in Leipzig. On January 11, 2016, several hundred far-right hooligans attacked the neighborhood in what the far-right celebrated as the "Storming of Connewitz." Although the police arrested 200 hooligans, subsequent investigations and court proceedings lasted for years, provoking left-wing criticism of the authorities ([Tageszeitung](#), January 11, 2021). The proceedings also strengthened the perception and narrative in radical left-wing circles that the German state is either colluding with the far-right or otherwise inactive in fighting it; as such, the far-left felt that was "forced" to take action against "fascism."

According to court documents, by 2018 a group of individuals willing to use violence against far-right activists had formed around a then 23-year-old pedagogy student at the Leipzig University: "Lina E." "Lina E." had a leadership position in this loose network of students, which was connected to the wider ANTIFA movement, itself linking militant activists across

Germany. Another key individual in the network seems to have been her fiancée, the now 29-year-old "Johann G." A well-known activist, "Johann G." was categorized as a "Gefährder" by German security authorities, which refers to an individual willing and capable to further a cause by violent means.

The network included several other members, including three 21-year-olds ("Emilie D.", "Clara W.", and "Moritz S."), 29-year-old "Tobias E.", 30-year-old "Johannes D.", 35-year old "Henry A.", 37-year-old "Jannis R.", 28-year-old "Jonathan Phillip M.", and 45-year-old "Thomas J." It is noteworthy that the network, which was assessed to comprise 15 people, featured both sexes and individuals whose age range spanned from 21 to 45 years. This made the group, which received the nickname "hammer gang," diverse in its composition ([Deutschlandfunk](#), May 20). Also, similar to the left-wing terrorist groups active in West Germany in the 1970s and 1980s, women seem to have played active leadership roles among the "hammer gang."

Attacks by 'Lina E.'

"Lina E." and members of her network were sentenced in May for several violent attacks from 2018–2020 against individuals that were—or were deemed to be—far-right extremists. These attacks included the following:

- In January 2019, "Lina E." and at least four other attackers assaulted a man who was wearing a hat that the attackers associated with right-wing extremism. The man suffered severe injuries to his head and almost died.
- In October 2019, around 15 far-left extremists attacked a bar in Eisenach, Thuringia, which was a known meeting place for the far-right. Using pepper spray, batons, and their fists, the attackers beat up five people there. The group then planned two other attacks against

the owner, who was a well-known far-right activist, but the bar owner was armed with a knife and the attackers were forced to abort their assault. The attackers ended up being arrested by the police, including "Lina E."

- In February 2020, at least eight members of the group attacked far-right activists returning from a demonstration in Dresden and beat up four of them, causing severe bodily harm.
- Lastly, the group planned a targeted attack on a far-right activist from Leipzig, who had participated in the "Storming of Connewitz." However, the plan was disrupted by police, who detected "Lina E." and "Jannis R." while they were gathering intelligence on the far-right activist. The attack was planned for June 8, 2020, with "Jonathan Phillip M." travelling from Berlin to Leipzig to participate in the attack ([Oberlandesgericht \(OLG\) Dresden](#), May 31).

Overall, the group assaulted 13 individuals, of which two sustained potentially deadly injuries. "Lina E." finally underwent a lengthy court process and her co-defendants "Jannis R.", "Lennart A.", and "Jonathan Phillip M." were sentenced to prison terms ranging from two years and three months to five years and three months. The prosecution was successful due to the testimony of 30-year-old "Johannes D.", who had become an outcast within the group after accusations arose about him sexually assaulting a fellow activist. His testimony enabled German authorities to piece together the internal dynamics of the network ([Tagesschau](#), March 27).

Left-Wing Militant Structures

According to the German Federal Police (*Bundeskriminalamt*), a key challenge in the investigation of the network of "Lina E." was its fluid nature, which was difficult to comprehend from the outside. While

"Johannes D." provided evidence against eight members of the network, authorities had difficulty in connecting these individuals with one other and their various interactions while conducting the offences. Nevertheless, with the assistance of "Johannes D.", the authorities were able to outline the contours of a model consisting of three circles. The network of "Lina E." formed the core, which organized the assaults. In addition to this, the "core" organized training, including in martial arts, and "invited" activists for specific "actions." Next, the mid-circle consisted of trusted individuals that had participated in several actions, while the outer circle consisted of loosely connected individuals spread around Germany, who were "brought in" for specific actions ([Tagesschau](#), March 27).

Germany's internal security service, the *Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz* (BfV), has assessed that the risk posed by left-wing extremism has grown. Far-left violence is becoming more "professional," aggressive, targeted, person-orientated, and unhinged, including against security authorities ([BfV](#), accessed October 4).

There are signs that Germany's problem is also spilling across its borders. "Lina E.'s" fiancé, "Johann G.", for example, is suspected to have participated in an attack in Hungary in February, which targeted participants of a far-right meeting in Budapest. Further, it seems that he was only one of at least 11 German nationals suspected of participating in the attack. The Budapest attack led to searches in the homes of seven suspects in Jena and Leipzig, but for now the main suspect, "Johann G.", remains at large (MDR, [March 15](#), [March 24](#)). Furthermore, German security authorities are reportedly investigating a link between a suspected member of the group and northern Syria, where the member is suspected to have joined a far-left armed militant group close to the left-wing Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). In northern Syria, the member allegedly served as a sniper in the fight against Islamic State (IS) and also had

close links to "Lina E." and other leading members of the group ([Die Welt](#), May 20).

Conclusion

While the case of "Lina E." demonstrates clear signs of radicalization within the militant left, it should be noted that her spiral into violence also stems from frustration. According to security authorities, the militant left has "grown old" and is weaker now than in previous years. For example, in Berlin, the underground is presently half the size it was in 2001, finding the recruitment of youths more difficult than in the past ([Tagesschau](#), November 23, 2020). It remains to be seen, however, if the activities of "Lina E." or "Johann G." will stimulate and inspire a new generation of activists that accept the use of violence in the pursuit of far-left causes.

German Interior Minister Nancy Faeser has also warned of an increasing willingness among the far-left to resort to violence ([Spiegel](#), May 31). The radicalization of the far-left adds to Germany's internal security challenges. The country is already confronting jihadism and far-right extremism, but now, with a more radicalized far-left, Germany's counter-terrorism environment has become one of Europe's most complex.

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