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German Jihad Colonies Sprout Up in Waziristan The Third Generation

By Yassin Musharbash, Marcel Rosenbach and Holger Stark

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A wave of Germans traveling to training camps for militant jihadists has alarmed security officials back in Europe. The recruits are quickly becoming radicalized and, in some cases, entire families are departing to hotbeds for terrorism. It is even believed that colonies catering to German Islamists have taken shape in the border area between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

It was a Sunday in September when they lost their son Jan*. He gave his parents a particularly tight hug, his father recalls, a long and intense embrace. The father says that he could sense that this was no normal goodbye, and that it was about more than the supposed vacation trip to celebrate the couple's first wedding anniversary -- which was the story that Jan, 24, and his wife Alexandra* had cooked up for him.

It was the day of the German parliamentary elections in 2009, and the autumn sun was shining in Berlin, but Jan and Alexandra weren't interested in who would govern the country. They were going to leave Germany. They had rejected this society and this state. Jan and Alexandra packed their things into a rental car, picked up another couple, and the four friends headed off into exile.

One of their traveling companions was 17 years old and six months pregnant -- her husband had just turned 20. Their child would not be born in Germany.

The two married couples headed to Budapest, where they boarded a plane for Istanbul. Jan placed one last call to his parents from a hotel.

Since then there have been only sporadic e-mails. These have been loving messages to his father and mother. But he also writes things that frighten his parents. He is living among brothers and doesn't need much money, Jan writes. No, they can't visit him -- it would be too dangerous, he says. And no, he can no longer imagine returning to Berlin, to a life among the *kuffar*, the infidels.

Then, in December, he wrote that he didn't know if he would live to see the next summer. Since then his parents have been looking in their mailbox every morning -- and every morning it's the same: nothing. They can hardly bear the uncertainty.

Extremist Expats

German intelligence agencies presume that Jan and Alexandra are now living in the Afghan-Pakistani border region. It is a world in which al-Qaida and the Taliban are strong and the state is weak, where conflicts are resolved according to the rules of the sharia and local chieftains. This is also allegedly the last refuge, at least for the time being, of Osama bin Laden.

In this remote mountain region, a colony of Germans has sprung up -- expats who have severed all roots and found a new homeland in the Hindu Kush. Germany's Federal Office of Criminal Investigation (BKA) maintains a list of suspects who have taken off to Afghanistan or Pakistan -- or at least tried to leave -- over the past few years. The list has nearly 100 names. It's a directory of the third generation of Islamist terrorists after the 9/11 suicide pilots and Germany's so-called "Sauerland Cell". Like their predecessors, they are eager to fight the holy war and die a martyr's death. Intelligence agencies are now wondering who among this generation will become the next **Mohammed Atta** or the next **Fritz Gelowicz**, the ring leader of the Sauerland Cell -- or who will emulate former Bosch employee Cüneyt Ciftci, who hailed from the quiet southern German town of Ansbach and carried out a **suicide bombing** in Afghanistan in March 2008, blowing himself to pieces and killing four people.

The list includes Jan and Alexandra from Berlin, Michael W. from Hamburg -- who tried to slip away last spring but was arrested in Pakistan and sent back -- and the 19-year-old Berliner Omar H., who disappeared with his girlfriend last January. They are driven by the dream of a life that they see as a pure reflection of the teachings of Islam. They want to exchange the Western world for an archaic life in barren huts, where they only occasionally have electricity and where the Koran stands above everything.

The first two generations consisted of angry young men who yearned to go into battle, and opted to leave their women behind. The third generation is different, though. They are younger and highly ethnically mixed, often men and women who leave Germany together -- or even shortly before the birth of their children -- on their way from the Berlin district of Wedding to Waziristan, the porous border region skirting the Afghan-Pakistani border.

'It's Shocking How Quickly Your Own Child Can Slip Away from You'

Agencies such as the Office for the Protection of the Constitution, Germany's domestic intelligence agency, and the BKA are particularly worried about the speed at which these young men and women are prepared to leave their lives in Germany, usually burning their bridges behind them. Occasionally, as in the case of Jan and his wife, it takes only a few months before they become unreachable -- first in terms of their willingness to listen to opposing points of view, then in a very literal sense.

Jan's parents, who came to Berlin from Eastern Europe 20 years ago, noticed the first change in May 2008, when their only son suddenly refused to eat pork. He told his mother earlier that he had purchased a copy of the Koran.

His parents weren't concerned because Jan had completed high school and planned to become a career soldier. He also had his girlfriend Alexandra, who was two years younger than him. The two young people wanted to get married. It looked like the makings of a picture-book life: peaceful, happy and unspectacular.

The wedding was in September 2008 -- a beautiful ceremony, held in the middle of the religious fasting month of Ramadan. They didn't eat until after sunset, but there was music and the bride was dressed entirely in white, just as she had wanted. In November, the couple married again -- this time in a Muslim ceremony -- and after that everything went very quickly. By March 2009, the parents only saw their daughter-in-law wearing a full veil. And the number of conflicts started increasing.

Jan tried to convert his father to Islam. His father accompanied him to the mosque to see who his son was meeting with. Jan even tried to convert his elderly grandmother, who is a fervently pious Catholic.

He decided to drop his original career plan of becoming a professional soldier, preferably stationed abroad. Jan told his parents that he otherwise might be forced to fight against his fellow believers. He also dropped out of vocational school.

By early 2009 the young couple mentioned for the first time that they would rather practice their faith undisturbed by distractions, in a country where this was still possible -- in Yemen, for

example, Somalia or Pakistan, far away from the big cities. Last autumn, Jan and Alexandra started to secretly auction off their possessions on eBay. The process of radicalization had taken little over a year. "It's shocking how quickly your own child can slip away from you," says Jan's mother, who is now seeking contact with other families who have had similar experiences. "Hardly anyone else can understand our situation," she says.

The Recruiter

German officials believe that Jan can be seen in a video made by a relatively new group that calls itself the "German Taliban Mujahedeen". Up until now, they have drawn attention to themselves with noisy propaganda -- in a video released last fall that threatened to take the war to German cities, for example. This message was illustrated with images of the Brandenburg Gate and the main railway station in Hamburg. The man who appears to be responsible for the propaganda is Ahmet M., 32, who has apparently become something of a media services provider for a segment of the German colony.

Ahmet goes by the name of "Saladin" on the Internet, and every few weeks his "Elif Medya" label issues a new propaganda film aimed at luring new volunteers to Afghanistan. The muddled messages of **German Islamist Eric Breininger** from the milieu of the Sauerland Cell carry this same trademark, as do the communiqués of the "German Taliban."

Saladin's specialization with recruits from Germany can be explained by his personal history. He was born in the northern town of Salzgitter and his last German place of residence was in the state of Saarland. He ran afoul of the law in Germany at an early age and was caught stealing for the first time at 15. Later, he was convicted of dealing hash and cocaine, sentenced to three years in prison and deported to Turkey in April 2000.

German investigators believe that Ahmet M. alias Saladin is a key recruiter on the German-speaking scene. Only a few weeks ago, he personally tried to direct a willing recruit all the way from Germany to the Hindu Kush, but the German police intercepted the Berliner en route.

Ahmet M. boasts that he has served as the spokesman for the Islamic Jihad Union over the past few years, but he says "now I work for the Taliban." The German-Turk is thought to act as a link between the young new recruits and the front. During the month of Ramadan, he collected donations on German online forums to purchase "basic foodstuffs for the widows and orphans" and the wounded on the jihad battlefields of Afghanistan.

From Pothead to Mujahedeen

The videos from the combat zone may seem bizarre, but they are effective. They lure men like Michael W. from Hamburg, an ethnic German born in Kazakhstan, who headed off in March

2009. Traveling with a friend, he flew with Qatar Airways from Vienna to Doha. When the two men checked in that morning in Vienna, Austrian officials asked them questions such as where they intended to travel and what they planned to do in Pakistan.

Take a vacation, said one.

Do business with carpets, said the other.

Police discovered that Michael W. was carrying two notes that smacked of neither vacationing nor the carpet trade.

One of them bore the headline "Rules of Conduct for the Jihad" and focused on highly practical issues. "Remain calm during battle. Do not scream," was one of the guidelines. "Do not punish with fire" and "no mutilating corpses," were two other bits of advice. The second piece of paper was a letter of recommendation from someone called "Ibrahim, the Lebanese from Hamburg," apparently to grant the holder access to a training camp. In addition, both men had laptops and mobile phones in their original packaging. The Austrians allowed them to pass, and they traveled via Doha to Karachi in Pakistan. There they were arrested because they were apparently traveling under false pretenses. Later, they were deported to Germany.

Michael W. is now 24 years old. He usually wears long, light-colored garments, has a big flowing beard and smiles a great deal. The police have identified him as a "dangerous element" and federal prosecutors are investigating his activities. He is seen as one of the new enemies of the state. It is likely that he was introduced to the scene by a fellow high school student in his graduating class of 2006.

In Hamburg there is a group of young believers who have been meeting since the summer of 2008, and it reportedly includes Michael W. The leader of the group has slipped past the border controls and is now in Waziristan -- a former pothead who has become a mujahedeen. Those who have been left behind meet every Friday in the former Quds Mosque on Hamburg's Steindamm street -- the very same house of worship once frequented by Mohammed Atta, and now called the Taiba Mosque. During religious services, Michael W. sits extremely close to the low wooden pedestal where the prayer leader stands.

Isolation, Deprivation and Suffering

It's possible that Michael W. should be thankful to the Pakistani border authorities. They may have saved his life. Reports currently arriving from the Hindu Kush in Hamburg, Berlin and elsewhere sound like a far cry from paradise -- and more like war and death. They paint a picture of life in isolation, full of deprivation and suffering.

Ever since the Pakistani army launched an offensive last fall and advanced on Waziristan, the Islamist groups have had to fear for their existence. "The kuffar are attacking us with all their might," one report from the combat zone states. There are also Germans among the heavily wounded. Relatives back home in Germany are now afraid that their children will be killed by the bullets of the Pakistani army -- or by a US drone attack.

Ever since he left Germany, Jan's parents have been asking themselves if their son is actually capable of fighting. On the one hand, his father says, Jan has never been violent. The father says he once asked him directly about it, and his son replied: "I'm not crazy." On the other hand, he recalls that they once went to see the combat-filled film "300," and Jan said how great it must be to have something worth fighting for.

And then there's that last will and testament. It was written by Omar H., one of Jan's acquaintances from Berlin. He slipped off the radar in late January together with his 16-year-old girlfriend Stefanie, who now calls herself "Amina". They are probably on their way to the German colony -- to the others from Berlin.

"I want to be buried in a Muslim cemetery. Care should be taken to ensure that no non-believer (including Jews and Christians) is buried near my grave," Omar decreed in his testament with his rounded, flawless schoolboy handwriting. "When I die, I would like to be washed according to Islamic rites by my wife Amina along with the helpers of her choice, then wrapped and buried. This is my wish unless Allah, in his mercy, honors me with a martyr's death."