

# **JOINT COUNTER-TERRORISM CENTRE (GTAZ) IN GERMANY**

## **An Overview**

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The GTAZ (Joint Counter-Terrorism Centre) set up in Berlin in late 2004 is not an autonomous authority but a joint co-operation and communication platform used by 40 internal security agencies. Its founding did not require a new legal basis, because no agency was given additional competences or had to share sovereignty. Instead, each of the agencies involved takes its measures on its own authority and within the framework of the prevailing laws. *Due to its organisational structure, the GTAZ has no director, but representatives of the following agencies co-operate on an equal footing:*

- Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz
- Bundeskriminalamt (Federal Criminal Police Office)
- Bundesnachrichtendienst (Federal Intelligence Service)
- Generalbundesanwalt (Federal Public Prosecutor General)
- Bundespolizei (Federal Police)
- Zollkriminalamt (Central Office of the German Customs Investigation Service)
- Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge (Federal Office for Migration and Refugees)
- Militärischer Abschirmdienst (Military Counterintelligence Service)
- Landesämter für Verfassungsschutz (intelligence services of the federal states)
- Landeskriminalämter (criminal police offices of the federal states)

The GTAZ was established in the context of the increased threats emanating from Islamist terrorism. The 9/11 terrorist attacks committed by al-Qaeda in the USA constituted a turning point with a considerable impact on Germany's security architecture and the international community of states as a whole.

## **Intelligence Information and Analysis Units - NIAS and PIAS**

Crucial for the success of the GTAZ is the co-operation between intelligence and police institutions and actors. The prerequisite for their co-operation "under one roof" was setting up two separate pillars, i.e. the Nachrichtendienstliche Informations- und Analysestelle (NIAS – Intelligence Information and Analysis Unit) and the Polizeiliche Informations- und Analysestelle (PIAS – Police Information and Analysis Unit). Both NIAS and PIAS members closely co-operate in several working groups (WG) that serve various purposes. Besides dealing with current cases and threat prognoses, they also draw up medium- or longer-term analyses.

These working groups include:

- WG on daily briefings
- WG on threat assessment
- WG on operational information exchange
- WG on Islamist terrorism-related cases/analyses
- WG on individuals from the Islamist-terrorist spectrum
- WG on de-radicalisation
- WG on transnational aspects
- WG on 'accompanying measures concerning the legal residence status'
- Intelligence Board (only NIAS)

Successful counter-terrorism depends on co-operation among the various intelligence and police actors, flanked by measures concerning the law on foreigners and the co-ordination of preventive and repressive requirements aimed at long-term effectiveness (comprehensive approach). Intensified co-operation between agencies and with representatives of the law enforcement authorities also creates a culture of trust that is indispensable in order to identify and counter threats at an early stage.

Various cases, i.a. the successful investigations into the Sauerland Group, which led to the prevention of a terrorist attack in Germany, have shown that the GTAZ and NIAS structures are well-functioning and efficient.