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OTHER

Grey Swan #4: A Very Peculiar German Coup

By Thorsten Wegener

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The White House chief of staff entered the Oval Office through the door connecting his office to the president's. He almost felt bad ruining the president's planned trip to Nantucket – a nice distraction he had been looking forward to all week. Well, the president would get his distraction. His report was almost too absurd not to feel a tingle of excitement.

The president lifted his head from the papers in front of him. 'Ah, Ron,' he said, 'ready for the weekend? I really earned this one. The majority leader really made this whole...'

The chief of staff cleared his throat, interrupting the president's attempt at jovial banter.

'Sorry, Mr. President, but we have a serious situation in Europe. There has been a coup d'état among one of our allies.'

The president removed his spectacles, now facing his chief of staff. 'Don't tell me the bloody Ukrainians are at it again after we just saved their asses. Why didn't intelligence give me any...'

Again, the president was interrupted.

'It's Germany, not Ukraine, Sir.'

A moment of silence followed, the two men eyeing each other. 'You are kidding me, Ron, right?' The president noticed his chief of staff was not smiling. 'Explain,' came the order, as he switched from man of the people to commander in chief.

Referring to his notes Ron Clain did as told. 'At 16:00hrs Washington time, 22:00hrs Berlin time, a Colonel Schmidt demanded to immediately see Ambassador Gutman about a matter of international urgency. Gutman, holding a reception for the British and French ambassadors, excused herself and received Schmidt on short notice.

'The colonel informed Gutman,' continued the chief of staff, 'that, as of 22:00hrs today, Germany was under martial law. With reference to Article 20, Section 4, of the German constitution, the Executive Branche of Germany was relieved of its duty and put under house arrest. The Berlin police, with the assistance of the German forces, has taken over the Reichstag and closed the German borders for all German citizens; the right of free movement of American citizens is unaffected.'

The president interrupted. 'What's that Article 20 shenanigans all about?'

'I was getting to that, Mr. President. After at first suspecting an elaborate hoax, our ambassador called her French and British counterparts into the meeting with Colonel Schmitt. He explained that under Article 20, Section 4, of the German constitution, every citizen has the right in an emergency to exercise resistance against those organs of the state that violate the constitution. As of today, the constitutional court of the German Federal Republic unanimously stated that such a state of emergency exists and has therefore requested the German Forces to activate Case Black.'

'What on earth is Case Black?' the president interrupted.

Suddenly feeling uncomfortable, the chief of staff lowered his voice. 'Apparently, it is a secret provision to enable a, hopefully, mostly peaceful transition of power in case that was ever necessary.'

'Necessary for whom?' asked the president.

With an almost resigned look in his face, the chief of staff admitted, 'For us, Sir, the secret provisions for such a case were originally drafted during the Cold War by us, to be executed in cooperation with the German forces in case there ever was a communist takeover.'

A moment of silence followed. 'And did we, I mean, are we involved? And why the hell am I hearing about this now for the first time?'

'Of course we aren't involved, Sir. The Germans, I might add, in a very ruthless and efficient German fashion, kept updating the procedures even after the end of the Cold War and the massive reduction of US forces in Europe... They are pretty much sticking to the rule book so far. They even executed their coup on a Friday after US market close, as originally drafted by us.'

A brief, sarcastic smile flickered across the president's face, 'Nice touch.'

'To answer your second question, Sir, it seems that only some people in the Pentagon and the CIA knew about Code Black. Naturally, no one considered it to be even remotely relevant.'

'Until now... So, at least we know the playbook, I assume'

'Yes, Sir. The Situation room is being prepared, the joint chiefs of staff are present, and Director Burns, CIA, is expected to arrive imminently.'

The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Milley, reported in an unexcited, professional tone to his commander in chief. 'All our assets, installations and personnel are safe, Sir. While Colonel Schmidt was making representations to ambassador Gutman, I was contacted by General Zorn the Head of the German Forces. He assured me that this is a purely a political, internal matter of the German State and all bilateral and NATO treaties will be fully respected. He informed me that simultaneous to his representation to the United States, China, Russia, the European Union and NATO have been informed about the unfolding situation and will be briefed shortly by the German Caretaker Government under the transitional leadership of the president of the Supreme Court, Chief Justice Judge Harbarth, who will make a Statement at 00:00hrs local time.

'As ordered by you,' he continued, 'our troops have been alerted to DEFCON level two. There seems to be a similar response from the Russians. No change in readiness on the Chinese side.'

The president turned to the director of the CIA. 'Bill, how did this happen? Why have we been caught with our pants down?'

Burns stroked his moustache. 'Mr President, we were blindsided. For weeks now, Germany was faced with riots that unfortunately also led to the loss of citizen lives in a heavy-handed response by the authorities.

'Frequent power and gas shortages and an unexpectedly severe winter drove ordinary citizens onto the streets. This is usually something one would expect from the French, not the Germans. With inflation in the high 20s, we expected resignations or a breakup of the coalition government. There was no intelligence on unusual movements or orders of the security forces.

'We now know why,' Burns continued. 'It seemed in line with what we drafted in Case Black. In a very German, almost peculiarly orderly way, this seems to be the most civilized coup ever witnessed. The chancellor and the cabinet have been arrested. Proper search and arrest warrants have been presented; legal representation was granted. Members of parliament have been "asked" to stay in their constituencies and make themselves available on request.

'The German president, the official head of state, is at this minute in conference with the provisional government. We do not expect an uprising or resistance by the German people, parts of the military or police force.

'As of now, excuse my expression, this seems to be a "thing" – a very Germanic thing. No Russian interference as far as we know. We have the weekend to sort this mess out, one way or another. If markets should open on Monday and we haven't defined our position by then, the world might be in trouble.'

Without comment, the president turned to Secretary Yellen. 'Janet?'

'We have to close markets and consult with our partners so they do the same to prevent a global financial catastrophe, Sir,' the secretary of the Treasury responded. 'There is no way of even remotely anticipating what could happen until the political situation is under control. Armageddon will no longer just be a place in Israel.'

Note by the author: I will leave you here with your thoughts on unanticipated or even anticipated fragilities of the world we live in. Needless to say, I could easily spin this little tale into epic proportions the size of a very big book, and maybe one day I will, when the world is steering towards calmer waters again. In the meantime, I wish you and your families a peaceful 2023 and hope my twisted mind is just that.

Thorsten Roland Wegener spent twenty years trading equity derivatives and was a partner at Bear Stearns. Currently, he teaches as well as cooking, driving, and cleaning lots.

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