

Leadership Profile: BND President Dr. Bruno Kahl

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Dr. Bruno Kahl became president of Germany's Federal Intelligence Service (*Bundesnachrichtendienst* – BND) on 1 July 2016, replacing Gerhard Schindler about two years ahead of his expected retirement.¹ As head of Germany's only foreign intelligence service, Kahl heads an agency of about 6,500 personnel charged with the collection and analysis of political, economic, military, and technical information and the production of integrated intelligence products to support foreign and security policy decision-makers as well as foreign deployments of the German armed forces.² He is subordinate to Chancellery State Secretary Klaus-Dieter Fritsche, who is responsible for the coordination of Germany's intelligence services and their cooperation with other government departments and agencies.³

Kahl is a long-time trusted aide and protégé of Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble and also a close associate of Chancellery Director Peter Altmeier, who reportedly proposed that Kahl replace Schindler as BND chief.⁴ Kahl served Schäuble as office director and chief of staff in the CDU/CSU parliamentary group, interior ministry, and finance ministry from the mid-1990s until 2011. He then served as director of the finance ministry's department for privatization, industrial holdings, and federal real estate until his appointment as BND president. Kahl and Altmeier reportedly have a valued relationship going back some fifteen years to the time they first worked together on European legal issues.⁵

According to Stephan Mayer, domestic security policy spokesman for the CDU/CSU parliamentary group, Kahl is a "security policy generalist", who is familiar with all the important security policy themes because of his earlier service as director of the interior ministry's executive staff.⁶ As a reserve officer in the Bundeswehr, Kahl also has experience with the military's intelligence and reconnaissance capabilities, most recently from his participation in exercises conducted at the Bundeswehr's Joint Forces Operations Command in Geltow near Potsdam.⁷

Former colleagues who worked with Kahl in the CDU/CSU parliamentary group describe him as knowledgeable, hard-working, and well connected, but also a bit reserved and self-effacing.⁸ As a member of Schäuble's inner leadership circle, Kahl reportedly demonstrated qualities of confidentiality, discretion, and loyalty that should serve him well as BND president.⁹

Among the challenges facing Kahl are adapting the BND to changing global security challenges, in particular the growing cybersecurity threat; implementing a major reorganization and relocation effort that includes moving some 2,000 personnel from the BND's Pullach facility in southern Bavaria to the new BND offices in central Berlin; and accommodating new legal and political restrictions on the agency's activities that are likely to result from the Bundestag's investigation of past intelligence abuses.¹⁰

The German daily *Tagesspiegel* reported that the government's decision to replace Schindler with Kahl at this time was taken in order to keep the naming of a new BND president out of the coalition negotiations for a new government following next year's Bundestag election, and in particular to

prevent the Greens from playing a role in that process. A “high-ranking insider” reportedly expressed concern that the Greens might have pushed for one of their own in the post, citing as possible candidates Konstantin von Notz, the senior Greens member on the committee investigating NSA activities, and Bundestag vice president Claudia Roth, who has pushed for greater transparency with regard to the BND’s activities and its cooperation with the NSA.¹¹ Kahl, at age 53, is young enough to remain at the head of the BND throughout the term of the next government.

Professional Career

- 1995-1996 – Advisor (*Referent*) in the Federal Chancellery
- 1996-2005 – Office Director for CDU/CSU Parliamentary Group Chairman/Deputy Chairman
Dr. Wolfgang Schäuble
- 2005 – Office Director and Spokesman for Interior Minister Dr. Wolfgang Schäuble
- 2006-2009 – Chief of Planning Staff, Ministry of Interior
- 2010-2011 – Chief of Planning Staff, Ministry of Finance
- 2011-2016 – Department Director (*Abteilung VIII*), Ministry of Finance
- Since 1 July 2016 – President of the Federal Intelligence Service (*Bundesnachrichtendienst – BND*)

Education: Bruno Kahl completed his Abitur at the Kardinal-Frings-Gymnasium in Bonn-Beuel, a Catholic school operated by the Archbishopric of Cologne. He studied law at the Universities of Bonn and Lausanne from 1983 to 1988. Following his first legal exam, he served his legal internship (*Referendarzeit*) from 1991 to 1994 in Bonn, Speyer, and Sydney. He completed his second legal exam at the higher regional court (*Oberlandesgericht*) in Cologne.¹²

Military Service: Kahl entered the Bundeswehr after completing his Abitur and has been a reserve officer for 35 years.¹³ According to Wikipedia, he currently holds the rank of Lieutenant Colonel (Oberstleutnant) in the reserve.

Political Affiliation/Leanings: Kahl is a member of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU).¹⁴

Personal Information: Bruno Kahl was born 12 July 1962 in Essen, Germany. He is widowed and the father of two daughters.¹⁵ Kahl is a devout Roman Catholic whose 2008 Ph.D. dissertation addressed *Elemente katholischen Denkens in säkularer Staatslehre zum Frühwerk Carl Schmitts*. When he can find time, Kahl enjoys rowing.¹⁶

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¹ Frank Jansen, “Was will Bruno Kahl beim BND?” *Tagesspiegel*, 10 May 2016, <http://www.tagesspiegel.de/themen/agenda/wechsel-an-der-geheimdienstspitze-was-will-bruno-kahl-beim-bnd/13570626.html>.

² Bundesnachrichtendienst, Aufgaben, http://www.bnd.bund.de/DE/Auftrag/Aufgaben/aufgaben_node.html.

Gunter Hartwig, "BND-Präsident Gerhard Schindler muss seinen Dienst quittieren," *Südwest Presse*, 28 Apr 2016, <http://www.swp.de/ulm/nachrichten/politik/BND-Praesident-Gerhard-Schindler-muss-seinen-Dienst-quittieren;art4306,3808967>.

³ Bundeskanzleramt, Die Staatsminister - Karl-Dieter Fritsche, <https://www.bundesregierung.de/Content/DE/StatischeSeiten/Breg/element-die-staatsminister.html?nn=391346#doc132446bodyText4>.

⁴ Eva Quadbeck, "Bruno Kahl – Schäubles Mann," *RP-Online (Rheinische Post)*, 27 Apr 2016, <http://www.rp-online.de/politik/deutschland/bruno-kahl-folgt-auf-gerhard-schindler-wolfgang-schaeubles-mann-aid-1.5936608>.
Martin Ferber, "Bruno Kahl: Dieser Mann soll den Auslands-Geheimdienst reformieren," *Augsburger Allgemeine*, 3 May 2016, <http://www.augsburger-allgemeine.de/politik/Bruno-Kahl-Dieser-Mann-soll-den-Auslands-Geheimdienst-reformieren-id37663102.html>.
Thomas Kröter, "Der neue Unbekannte beim BND," *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 28 Apr 2016, <http://www.fr-online.de/politik/geheimdienst-der-neue-unbekannte-beim-bnd,1472596,34158540.html>.

⁵ Eva Quadbeck, "Bruno Kahl – Schäubles Mann," *RP-Online (Rheinische Post)*, 27 Apr 2016, <http://www.rp-online.de/politik/deutschland/bruno-kahl-folgt-auf-gerhard-schindler-wolfgang-schaeubles-mann-aid-1.5936608>.
Martin Ferber, "Bruno Kahl: Dieser Mann soll den Auslands-Geheimdienst reformieren." *Augsburger Allgemeine*, 3 May 2016, <http://www.augsburger-allgemeine.de/politik/Bruno-Kahl-Dieser-Mann-soll-den-Auslands-Geheimdienst-reformieren-id37663102.html>.

⁶ Katharina Schuler, "Der Schäuble-Vertrauter," *Die Zeit*, 27 Apr 2016, <http://www.zeit.de/politik/deutschland/2016-04/bnd-bruno-kahl/komplettansicht>.

⁷ Gunter Hartwig, "BND-Präsident Gerhard Schindler muss seinen Dienst quittieren," *Südwest Presse*, 28 Apr 2016, <http://www.swp.de/ulm/nachrichten/politik/BND-Praesident-Gerhard-Schindler-muss-seinen-Dienst-quittieren;art4306,3808967>.
Frank Jansen and Claudia Cohnen-Beck, "Bruno Kahl als neuer BND-Chef vorgestellt," *Tagesspiegel*, 27 Apr 2016, <http://www.tagesspiegel.de/politik/nachfolger-von-gerhard-schindler-bruno-kahl-als-neuer-bnd-chef-vorgestellt/13506600.html>.

⁸ Katharina Schuler, "Der Schäuble-Vertrauter," *Die Zeit*, 27 Apr 2016, <http://www.zeit.de/politik/deutschland/2016-04/bnd-bruno-kahl/komplettansicht>

⁹ Martin Ferber, "Bruno Kahl: Dieser Mann soll den Auslands-Geheimdienst reformieren," *Augsburger Allgemeine*, 3 May 2016, <http://www.augsburger-allgemeine.de/politik/Bruno-Kahl-Dieser-Mann-soll-den-Auslands-Geheimdienst-reformieren-id37663102.html>.

¹⁰ Martin Ferber, "Bruno Kahl: Dieser Mann soll den Auslands-Geheimdienst reformieren," *Augsburger Allgemeine*, 3 May 2016, <http://www.augsburger-allgemeine.de/politik/Bruno-Kahl-Dieser-Mann-soll-den-Auslands-Geheimdienst-reformieren-id37663102.html>.
Gunter Hartwig, "BND-Präsident Gerhard Schindler muss seinen Dienst quittieren," *Südwest Presse*, 28 Apr 2016, <http://www.swp.de/ulm/nachrichten/politik/BND-Praesident-Gerhard-Schindler-muss-seinen-Dienst-quittieren;art4306,3808967>

¹¹ Frank Jansen, "Was will Bruno Kahl beim BND?" *Tagesspiegel*, 10 May 2016, <http://www.tagesspiegel.de/themen/agenda/wechsel-an-der-geheimdienstspitze-was-will-bruno-kahl-beim-bnd/13570626.html>.
Frank Jansen, "Bruno Kahl," *Tagesspiegel*, 30 Jun 2016, <http://www.tagesspiegel.de/politik/bnd-bruno-kahl/13813906.html>.

Stefan Stark, "Roth: Böses Spiel in der BND-Affäre" (interview with Claudia Roth), *Mittelbayerische Zeitung*, 8 May 2015, <http://www.mittelbayerische.de/politik-nachrichten/roth-boeses-spiel-in-der-bnd-affaere-21771-art1231104.html>.

¹² Thomas Kröter, "Der neue Unbekannte beim BND," *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 28 Apr 2016, <http://www.fr-online.de/politik/geheimdienst-der-neue-unbekannte-beim-bnd,1472596,34158540.html>.

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¹³ Frank Jansen and Claudia Cohnen-Beck, "Bruno Kahl als neuer BND-Chef vorgestellt," *Tagesspiegel*, 27 Apr 2016, <http://www.tagesspiegel.de/politik/nachfolger-von-gerhard-schindler-bruno-kahl-als-neuer-bnd-chef-vorgestellt/13506600.html>.

¹⁴ Martin Ferber, "Bruno Kahl: Dieser Mann soll den Auslands-Geheimdienst reformieren," *Augsburger Allgemeine*, 3 May 2016, <http://www.augsburger-allgemeine.de/politik/Bruno-Kahl-Dieser-Mann-soll-den-Auslands-Geheimdienst-reformieren-id37663102.html>.

¹⁵ Katharina Schuler, "Der Schäuble-Vertrauter," *Die Zeit*, 27 Apr 2016, <http://www.zeit.de/politik/deutschland/2016-04/bnd-bruno-kahl/komplettansicht>.

¹⁶ Thomas Kröter, "Der neue Unbekannte beim BND," *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 28 Apr 2016, <http://www.fr-online.de/politik/geheimdienst-der-neue-unbekannte-beim-bnd,1472596,34158540.html>.