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Overlapping rivalries: the two Germanys, Israel and the Cold War

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ABSTRACT

The case of early German-Israeli relations offers unique insight into the dynamics of the German Cold War. As this article shows, the two Germanys were ideologically and geopolitically antithetical, but vis-a-vis the question of relations with Israel East and West German representatives faced a situation that was uniquely related to the German past and to the German Cold War competition.

KEYWORDS

Federal Republic of Germany; German Democratic Republic; Israel; Middle East; Suez Crisis; Arab League

It was already almost half past seven in the morning when the representatives of the international press each received a telephone call in their hotel rooms with the request to be in front of the High Commission building in Luxembourg by no later than quarter to eight. There, Chancellor Adenauer's chief spokesman, Felix von Eckardt, stood waiting for them. Next to him were two cars, with their respective chauffeurs. The journalists got into the cars without knowing why they had been called, or where they were going to. After a short drive, they reached the Luxembourg City Hall.¹ The atmosphere, according to a *Der Spiegel* journalist, was 'gloomy'.² West German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer and Israeli Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett were about to sign a document that their negotiating teams had worked hard to conclude: the reparations agreement.³ It was 10 September 1952. On that same day, in Cairo, the member states of the Arab League gathered to discuss what countermeasures they would take to prevent the agreement from ever being ratified.⁴ And, in East Berlin, East German policy-makers soon began thinking about how to best exploit this delicate political situation.

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¹Dan Diner's monograph on the topic offers a touching description of the event. Dan Diner, *Rituelle Distanz: Israels deutsche Frage* (Munich: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2015), esp. 11–34.

²*Der Spiegel*, 'Israel-Abkommen: ohne Händedruck', 13/1952, 5.

³The use of the term 'reparations' is contested in the literature. Although aware of the problematic implications of this term, in this article I employ 'reparations' and 'restitutions' interchangeably because doing so conveys the language of contemporaries. *Wiedergutmachung* was the German term employed at the time (and has been since), and *Shilumim* the Hebrew equivalent. These two terms, however, are not synonymous, as explained by Axel Frohn, "Introduction: The Origins of Shilumim" in *Holocaust and Shilumim. The Policy of Wiedergutmachung in the Early 1950s*, ed. Axel Frohn (German Historical Institute Washington, Occasional Paper No. 2, 1991), 2.

⁴*British Legation (Beirut) to Foreign Office (London)*, 4 September 1952, Reprinted in: 'The Arab League: British Documentary Sources', Anita L.P. Burdett, 7 (Slough: Cambridge Archive Editions, 1995).

The historiography examining the overlap between the Cold War and the Arab-Israeli conflict generally takes 1955 as its starting point.⁵ Unbeknown to the United States, in 1955 Nasser finalised an arms deal with Communist Czechoslovakia, hoping to tilt the military balance in the Middle East in favour of Egypt.⁶ Viewed from Israel, whose existence had been assured by a Czechoslovak airlift of weapons during the 1948–1949 war between Israel and a military coalition of Arab states, the agreement had horrifying implications. Israel's main arms supplier during that war would now be providing weapons to one of its bitterest enemies, Egypt. Viewed from Washington, Nasser's triumphant announcement of the arms deal signalled that the Soviets had begun their geostrategic penetration of the Middle East, now turned Cold War battlefield. 'Considering her announced purpose of Communizing the world, it is easy to understand [the Soviet Union's] hope of dominating the Middle East', United States President Dwight D. Eisenhower would later comment announcing his very own doctrine on the region to Congress.⁷

Studies on the two Germanys in the Middle East have also long focused on the period following 1955.⁸ In that year, the West German government announced that Bonn was to be considered the sole representative for the whole of Germany, and that the recognition of East Germany would be considered an 'unfriendly act'.⁹ This stance would come to be known as the Hallstein Doctrine. In its wake, the global confrontation between the two Germanys intensified. However, when looking at the two Germanys' involvement in the Middle East, the inclusion of the time period before 1955 is crucial. In this article, I argue that it is possible, and indeed fruitful, to study the overlap between the Cold War and the Middle East conflict by focusing on actors *other* than the two superpowers and a time period that preceded 1955.¹⁰ Existing studies on the West German-Israeli agreement and its consequences either focus on the later blossoming bilateral relationship

⁵Fawaz A. Gerges, *The Superpowers and the Middle East: Regional and International Politics, 1955–1967* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994); Avi Shlaim, and Yezid Sayigh, eds., *The Cold War and the Middle East* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997); Galia Golan, "The Cold War and Soviet Attitudes towards the Arab-Israeli Conflict," in *The Cold War in the Middle East: Regional Conflict and the Superpowers, 1967–1973*, ed. Nigel J. Ashton (London: Routledge, 2007), 60.

⁶Guy Laron, "Cutting the Gordian Knot: The Post-WWII Egyptian Quest for Arms and the 1955 Czechoslovak Arms Deal" (CWIHP Working Paper No. 55, 2007).

⁷Which would later be known as the 'Eisenhower Doctrine'. The full text is available at: <http://millercenter.org/president/eisenhower/speeches/speech-3360> [Last accessed 31 December 2016].

⁸Tony Smith, "New Bottles for New Wine: A Pericentric Framework for the Study of the Cold War," *Diplomatic History* 24, no. 4 (2000): 567–591. Hope Harrison, in particular, has demonstrated how fruitful this approach can be when employed for understanding German political history: Hope Harrison, *Driving the Soviets Up the Wall: Soviet-East German Relations, 1953–1961* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003).

⁹See for example Massimiliano Trentin, "Tough negotiations: The two Germanys in Syria and Iraq, 1963–1974" *Cold War History* 8, no. 3 (2008): 353–380 as well as the relevant contributions in the volume edited by same author in collaboration with Matteo Gerlini, *The Middle East and the Cold War: Between Security and Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012); Miriam M. Müller, *A Spectre is Haunting Arabia: How the Germans Brought their Communism to Yemen* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2015).

¹⁰*Bullettin der Presse- und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung* (Bonn) 'Jede Anerkennung der 'DDR' ein unfreundlicher Akt', 13 December 1955, 1. See William Glenn Gray, *Germany's Cold War: The Global Campaign to Isolate East Germany, 1949–1969* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

between Bonn and Jerusalem, or on the ‘destroyed’ relationship between East Germany and Israel.¹¹ While the early history of German relations with Israel might appear to be, essentially, a divided history, this article will show that the history of both Germanys’ relations with Israel is also, crucially, a history of German-German relations and of their peculiar Cold War rivalry.

By analysing the overlap between the German Cold War and the Arab-Israeli conflict, in this article I make three main points. First, I show that the interplay between Cold War tensions, Arab-Israeli hatreds and intra-Arab tensions started in the *first* half of the 1950s. Second, that European actors too, sometimes willingly, mostly inadvertently, played a crucial role in polarising the Arab-Israeli conflict along East-West lines, and that, vice versa, Middle Eastern actors fuelled bipolar rivalries, including their European versions.¹² Third, the two Germanys belonged to opposite blocs, and were ideologically and geopolitically antithetical. But vis-à-vis the issue of relations with Israel, East and West German representatives faced a situation that was uniquely related to the German-German past, and the intra-German Cold War competition.

West Germany, between Jerusalem and Cairo

Negotiations between the West German and Israeli delegations began in a small Dutch coastal town, Wassenaar, in early 1952. Their encounter had been spurred by Adenauer’s statement, made on the day of the Jewish New Year (*Rosh HaShana*) of 1951, that ‘as a first, direct sign’ of Bonn’s intention to ‘make good for the injustice inflicted by the Nazis to the Jews’, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) would pay reparations of up to DM 10 million to the State of Israel.¹³ Earlier that year, the Israeli Foreign Ministry had contacted Germany’s former occupying powers, the United States, the United Kingdom, France, and the Soviet Union, with a formal request for compensation from Germany.¹⁴ While the Soviet Union proved not to be forthcoming, the Western powers suggested that the Israeli authorities contact the West Germans directly. Nahum Goldmann, one of the main figures of the World Zionist Organisation and leader of the Conference on Jewish Claims against Germany (JCC), met with the Chancellor shortly thereafter. In an ‘exceptionally friendly atmosphere’, as Adenauer’s aides later described it, Goldmann persuaded the Chancellor to put on paper the West German commitment to enter into direct negotiations with Israeli

¹¹On West German-Israeli relations see, for example, Yeshayahu Jelinek, *Deutschland und Israel: Ein neurotisches Verhältnis* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1995); Niels Hansen, *Aus dem Schatten der Katastrophe. Die deutsch-israelischen Beziehungen in der Ära Konrad Adenauer und David Ben Gurion. Ein dokumentierter Bericht* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 2002); Dan Diner, *Ritueller Distanz: Israels deutsche Frage* (Munich: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2015); Michael Wolffsohn, *Ewige Schuld? 40 Jahre deutsch-jüdisch-israelische Beziehungen* (Munich: Piper, 1991) later translated into English and published as *Eternal Guilt? Forty Years of German-Israeli Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995); Lily Gardner Feldman, *The Special Relationship between West Germany and Israel* (Boston, MA: Allen & Unwin, 1984). On East German-Israeli relations see Timm, A. *Hammer, Zirkel, Davidstern. Das gestörte Verhältnis der DDR zu Zionismus und Staat Israel* (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 1997). A partial exception to this is: Jeffrey Herf, *Undeclared Wars with Israel: East Germany and the West German Far Left, 1967–1989* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

¹²I am grateful to one anonymous referee for alerting me to this dynamics, for it is crucial if one intends to “re-assess and re-emphasise the place of Europe in the Cold War” and “in particular, to demarcate Germany’s place and role in it”, Federico Romero, “Cold War Historiography at the Crossroads,” *Cold War History* 14, no. 4 (2014): 697.

¹³*Akten zur Auswärtigen Politik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (hereafter AAPD) 1949/1950, Doc. 30: Bundesminister Erhard an Bundeskanzler Adenauer, 75, fn. 3.

¹⁴On this document and its origins, dating back to the 1940s, see Nana Sagi, *German Reparations. A History of the Negotiations* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 1980).

and Jewish representatives on the basis of the claims contained in the Israeli note of March 1951.¹⁵ At Wassenaar, the West Germans would be negotiating simultaneously with both JCC and Israeli representatives. The former would discuss questions relating to heirless and unclaimed Jewish property, while the Israeli claim related to ‘the expenditure in connection with the resettlement of the Jewish immigrants from the countries formerly under Nazi control, and the costs borne by Israel for absorbing Jewish refugees.’¹⁶

Arab representatives fought intensively against the prospect of Israel getting compensation from Germany. Even before the negotiations started, the Syrian government reached out to Cairo, urging Egypt to join it in a combined effort against the German-Israeli talks. On 3 March 1952, Syrian Foreign Minister Jamal Farra brought up the issue with the United States representative in Syria, aiming to receive Washington’s support for the ‘just and humane’ plan to direct the reparations for the Jewish victims of Nazi crimes to ‘Arab Palestinian refugees whose homes have been demolished and whose property has been confiscated for the benefit of Jews’ during the 1948–1949 war.¹⁷ Egyptian, Lebanese, Yemeni, Iraqi, and Jordanian representatives made similar points in their talks and correspondence with American, British, French and West German representatives. In it, they linked the question of the reparations that they expected Israel to pay to dispossessed Palestinians, as referred to in United Nations Resolution 194, to the issue of German compensation to Israel. And although United States Secretary of State Dean Acheson hoped that the link between West German-Israeli negotiations and Arab claims against Israel in the wake of the first Arab-Israeli war could be ‘scotched promptly’ – given that the two matters, as he saw it, were essentially ‘not related’ – his hope was to encounter strong resistance.¹⁸ Three days after the beginning of the negotiations, Arab League Envoy Mohamend Ali Sadek Bey paid a visit to the West German ambassador at The Hague to inform him of the Arab intention to be partial recipients of the *Wiedergutmachung* payments.¹⁹ Meanwhile, in West Germany, Syrian General Consul Ibrahim al-Istwani emphasised that the ‘Israeli demand for reparations from Germany [stood] in opposition to the moral claim of the Arab Palestinian refugees’ who had fled their homes in the wake of the first Arab-Israeli war.²⁰ The Syrian representative insisted that the FRG pay the compensation not directly to Israel, but rather to a supranational body such as the United Nations, which would grant the Jewish State the requested compensation once Israel had agreed to compensate the Palestinian refugees.

Furthermore, it was not just Arab representatives who were working against the agreement. Indeed, former officials of the Third Reich, including some of those hired as military advisers in Egypt, shared the antagonism of many Arab representatives towards Bonn’s negotiations with Israel.²¹ For example, in 1952 and early 1953, the West German ambassador to Indonesia, Werner Otto von Hentig, held a series of private meetings with representatives of

¹⁵AAPD 1951, Doc. 204: Ministerialdirektor Blankenhorn an Generalkonsul I. Klasse Krekeler, Washington, 14 December 1951.

¹⁶Reprinted in *New Encyclopaedia of Zionism and Israel* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1994). Given the scope of this article I will focus on the negotiations between the West German and Israeli delegations.

¹⁷FRUS 1952–1954, Vol. IX, Part 1, Doc. 408: The Minister in Syria (Cannon) to the Department of State, 3 March 1952.

¹⁸FRUS 1952–1954, Vol. IX, Part 1, Doc. 417: The Secretary of State to the Legation in Syria, 12 March 1952.

¹⁹AAPD 1952, Doc. 84: Botschafter Du Mont, Den Haag, an das Auswärtiges Amt, 24 March 1952.

²⁰AAPD 1952, Doc. 136: Aufzeichnung des Botschaftsrats a.D. Kordt, 15 May 1952.

²¹In early 1953 an AA representative noted that the Arab states would never have managed to campaign so effectively against the West German-Israeli talks had not a “whole series of powers” not come together to galvanise it: AAPD 1953, Doc. 74: Aufzeichnung des Vortragenden Legationsrat Allardt, 20 February 1953.

the Arab League to discuss the question of Bonn's reparations to Israel.²² In a communication to the Egyptian envoy in Jakarta in late 1952, Hentig expressed his disdain for the 'fabulous sum' that Adenauer had agreed to devolve to the Israeli claimants, which 'in now [sic] way corresponded to the actual expenses Israel could have had for its people' and which, Hentig explained, was agreed upon by West Germany 'notwithstanding the fact that all individual demands [on behalf of Jewish victims of Nazi persecution] had [by now] already been fully compensated'. This was a 'grotesque' misrepresentation of facts, as Abraham Frowein, one of the negotiators of the Luxembourg Agreement, was later to describe it.²³ Hentig went even further and, without informing the Foreign Ministry, he worked hard to 'complicate the ratification of the agreement', for example by travelling to the region without informing his superiors to meet with a representative of the Arab League, Professor Alim Idris.^{24,25} The acquaintance between the two dated back to the final years of the Third Reich, as Idris had trained the SS Head Office in Islamic studies, and Hentig at the time was working in the Foreign Ministry of Nazi Germany.²⁶

The Arab protests continued after the agreement between West Germany and Israel was signed. In October 1952, a delegation from Arab League states was dispatched to West Germany to try and impede the ratification of the agreement in the *Bundestag*. Meanwhile, the German Democratic Republic (GDR) began receiving direct input from Middle East-based German businessmen emphasising that 'now would be the very best moment' to push for economic ties between Cairo and East Berlin.²⁷ Moreover, Czechoslovak Deputy Foreign Minister Vlasta Borek, in Prague, noted that the GDR was in a unique position to exploit Nasser's opening towards the 'peace camp' (the Soviet Bloc) given the Bonn-Cairo skirmishes following the signing of the agreement with Israel.²⁸ The Arab delegation's note to the Federal Government stressed that 'the question of German reparations to Israel is not ... a bilateral matter between Germany and Israel'.²⁹ The West German reparations, the delegation representatives feared, would upset the balance in the Middle East by strengthening Israel, which in turn with all likelihood would attack the Arab states. FRG State Secretary Walter Hallstein promised that he would examine the possibility of having the UN supervise the West German transfers to Israel. He guaranteed that, in any case, Bonn's material transfers would not enhance Israel's military capability, and requested the delegates from Syria, Lebanon, Egypt and Iraq to stop spreading 'propaganda against the defined policy

²²See Conze et al., *Das Amt*, 581.

²³The two quotes in the text are, respectively, from: Political Archives of the Foreign Ministry of the Federal Republic of Germany [PA AA Personalakte Werner Otto von Hentig 49856, Hentig, 27 September 1952, and PA AA Personalakte Werner Otto von Hentig 49856, Abschrift. Frowein, 6 April 1955.

²⁴PA AA Personalakte Werner Otto von Hentig 49856, Abschrift. Frowein, 6 April 1955.

²⁵*Ibid.*, Notiz. Bauer, 24 March 1955.

²⁶Conze et al., *Das Amt*, 580. See also Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World*. On this topic, contrast W.G. Schwanitz, and M.G. Rubin, *Nazis, Islamists and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), with Motadel, D. *Islam and Nazi Germany's War* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014).

²⁷PA AA: Mf AA A 9287 Privatunternehmer Friedrich Geyer zum Bericht der Firma Emil Heinrich & Co. aus Kairo über die Marktlage im Vorderen Orient. Lessing, 10 December 1952. Quoted in Schwanitz, *Deutsche im Nahost 1946–1965*, 171, fn. 43. See also Abediseid, *Die deutsch-arabischen Beziehungen*, 97–98.

²⁸PA AA: MfAA A 9286 Vizeaußenminister Borek zu Ägypten-DDR. Bringmann, 18 December 1952.

²⁹BAK B126 51545, Memorandum der Delegation der Arabischen Staaten Ägypten, Irak, Jemen, Jordanien, Libanon, Saudi-Arabien und Syrien an die Regierung der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 31 October 1952. See also Memorandum of Conversation with Foreign Minister Zafer Rifai of Syria; United Nations Ambassador Farid Zeineddine of Syria; Minister Rafik Asha of Syria; Henry Byroade; and Edwin A. Plitt, 14 November 1952, Truman Library, Dean Acheson Papers, Secretary of State Files, available at: https://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/achesonmemos/view.php?documentVersion=original&documentYear=1952&documentid=71-3_24 [Last accessed 15 February 2017].

of the Federal government'.³⁰ This attitude, and Hallstein's attempt to limit the Arab delegation's room for manoeuvre in the FRG, sparked outrage in Egypt, as the newly-arrived West German ambassador in Cairo, Günther Pawelke, was soon to find out. The Egyptian Prime Minister chilled Pawelke by stressing that he felt that the Arab delegation in Bonn had not been treated respectfully, that the 'honour' of his country was at stake and therefore 'he would have to consult his Cabinet before deciding whether it was possible to continue relations with Western Germany'.³¹ Egypt had been the first country in the Middle East to establish diplomatic relations with the FRG, and it was important not to let the issue of *Wiedergutmachung* obstruct the strengthening of the West German ties with a country that represented both an economic and foreign political asset for Bonn.³² State Secretary Hallstein thus encouraged Pawelke to reassure the Egyptians: the goods transferred from Bonn could in no way strengthen Israel's military potential. What might be strengthened, Hallstein acknowledged, was the Israeli economy – yet in this respect the FRG was willing to offer Egypt compensation (*Ausgleich*) via a balancing intensification of economic relations between Bonn and Cairo. Ambassador Pawelke confirmed the Egyptian interest in receiving a West German delegation, possibly comprising representatives of the iron and steel industries, as well as of the mechanical engineering, and electrical and construction industries, under the guidance of an authoritative representative of the Federal Government.³³

State Secretary Ludger Westrick of the Federal Economics Ministry thus arrived in Cairo on 1 February 1953, accompanied by Hallstein's best wishes for a 'successful outcome of your certainly not easy task'.³⁴ In Cairo, Westrick and his aides would be dealing mainly, though not exclusively, with the Egyptians. Representatives from Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and Iraq were also present and willing to engage with the West Germans about a settlement of their dispute.³⁵ The initial cables sent by the Bonn delegation were cautiously optimistic and showed an understanding of the main issues that were putting pressure on their Egyptian counterparts – mainly the need to appear strong in front of their domestic audience and the inter-Arab difficulties in coming up with a united negotiating position.

Yet the talks quickly came to a halt less than two weeks after they had started, when an East German trade delegation landed in Cairo. Both General Naguib and the Egyptian Foreign Minister apologised to Westrick, explaining that the arrival of the East Germans was due to a 'technical mistake' made by their diplomatic mission in Czechoslovakia.³⁶ However, given the particular topic of the negotiations between Bonn and Cairo, and that

³⁰AAPD 1952, Doc. 222: Gespräch des Staatssekretär Hallstein mit einer arabischen Delegation, 28 October 1952.

³¹TNA: PRO: FO 371/97860 Stevenson (British Embassy, Cairo) to Kirckpatrick, 1 November 1952.

³²The Federal Republic's Embassy was not even two weeks old when this happened, as it had opened on 16 October 1952. The economic exchange between the Federal Republic and the Arab countries in 1951 amounted to over DM 420 million. Berggötz, *Nahostpolitik in der Ära Adenauer*, 290 and 133, respectively. See also the older, though still valuable, Mohammad Abediseid, *Die deutsch-arabischen Beziehungen – Problemen und Krisen* (Stuttgart: Seewald, 1976), and T.W. Kramer, *Deutsch-ägyptische Beziehungen in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart* (Tübingen: Erdmann, 1974).

³³AAPD 1953, Vol. 1, Doc. 2: Botschafter Pawelke, Kairo, an das Auswärtige Amt, 4 January 1953.

³⁴AAPD 1953, Vol. 1, Doc. 41: Staatssekretär Hallstein an Staatssekretär Westrick, Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft, 29 January 1953. Adenauer, too, very much hoped it would succeed: Doc. 307: Adenauer an den Vorsitzenden der VDU/CSU-Fraktion des Deutschen Bundestages, Dr. Heinrich von Brentano, 23 December 1952, in: *Briefe 1951–1953* edited by Hans Peter Mensig (Berlin: Siedler, 1987). The negotiations started two days later, on 3 February and lasted until 15 February.

³⁵AAPD 1953, Vol. 1, Doc. 50: Vortragender Legationsrat Allardt, z.Zt. Kairo, an Ministerialdirektor Blankenhorn, 5 February 1953. A full list of the participants is in the annex to Allardt's letter to Blankenhorn, in the following folder: PA AA B150/183.

³⁶PA AA B10/1686 Pawelke and Westrick to Hallstein, 11 February 1953. See also AAPD 1953, Vol. 1, Doc. 56: Staatssekretär Hallstein an Staatssekretär Westrick, Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft, z.Z. Kairo, und Botschafter Pawelke, Kairo, 10 February 1953.

rumours about this move had appeared in the press in December 1952, it really seemed that the Egyptians were attempting – and rather openly, too – to play off the two Germans against one another.³⁷ Indeed, they seemed to be using the West German feelings towards the idea of Egyptian–East German dealings to mediate their own regarding the prospect of West German compensation to Israel.

‘Egypt’s artist in the balance between East and West, General Naguib, trained last week with the lightest piece of equipment: East vs West Germany’, wrote *Der Spiegel* sarcastically.³⁸ Hallstein cabled from Bonn that the FRG was ‘profoundly shocked’ at the news of the arrival of the East German commercial mission. The West German delegation decided to leave Egypt sooner than initially planned, and the West German government formally withdrew any offer of credit.³⁹ Westrick, upon returning to Bonn early, encouraged the Chancellor to ignore the Arab threats and to proceed with the ratification of the reparations agreement with Israel without further ado.⁴⁰ The head of the East German commercial mission, Fritz Koch, was thus left to negotiate with the Egyptians undisturbed and sitting on the ‘still warm’ chair vacated by Ludger Westrick.⁴¹ On 7 March 1953, the GDR and Egypt concluded their first economic agreement. The *Bundestag* ratified the agreement with Israel a few days after that – albeit not without difficulties. Not even half of the coalition government’s members voted in favour of the ratification, which succeeded only thanks to the votes of the members of the Socialist Party (SPD).⁴²

Following the ratification of the Israel agreement, the Egyptian attempt to exploit the German–German rivalry to gain concessions from Bonn, and undermine the West German–Israeli entente, seemed to have miscarried. This, however, was not necessarily the case. Representatives from the West German banking sector, industrialists and others, kept visiting Egypt throughout 1953 in an attempt to cement relations between Bonn and Cairo. So much so, that Iraqi and Syrian representatives began to consider that Bonn could easily buy Cairo’s acquiescence to Israel’s getting the reparations payments, deepening internal rifts within the Arab League.⁴³ Indeed, Cairo’s pushing for concessions from the West German financial and commercial sectors ended up intensifying that inter-Arab friction and rivalry which during Nasser’s era would escalate into an ‘Arab Cold War’, but that was in fact beginning to unfold already in the early 1950s.⁴⁴ However, the Arab initiatives against the agreement had another, crucial effect – that of intensifying the Cold War rivalry between East and West Germany. As shown by the simultaneous presence in Cairo of West German negotiator Westrick and East German delegate Koch, Naguib’s Egypt – before any other

³⁷AAPD 1952, Doc. 253: Botschafter Pawelke an Auswärtiges Amt, 30 December 1952.

³⁸*Der Spiegel*, ‘Kanonen nach Kairo’, 18 February 1953, 15.

³⁹AAPD 1953, Vol. 1, Doc. 56: Staatssekretär Hallstein an Staatssekretär Westrick, Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft, z.Z. Kairo, und Botschafter Pawelke, Kairo, 10 February 1953, and AAPD 1953, Vol. 1, Doc. 57: Staatssekretär Westrick, Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft, z.Z. Kairo, an Staatssekretär Hallstein, 10 February 1953. See also Shinnar, *Bericht eines Beauftragten*, 61. For an account of initial Egyptian–West German economic exchanges see Berggötz, S.O. *Nahostpolitik in der Ära Adenauer*, 338ff.

⁴⁰William Glenn Gray, *Germany’s Cold War*, 20.

⁴¹*Der Spiegel*, ‘Kanonen nach Kairo’, 18 February 1953, p.15.

⁴²Only 104 of the 214 members of the *Bundestag* (MdBs) of the coalition parties voted in favour of the ratification, as noted by I. Deutschkron, ‘Die politischen Beziehungen zwischen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und Israel – eine Bilanz,’ in *Deutschland und Israel: Solidarität in der Bewährung*, ed. Ralph Giordano (Gerlingen: Bleicher Verlag, 1992), 57.

⁴³Sir T Rapp, British Middle East Office, Political Division, to Sir J. Bowker, Foreign Office, 30 March 1953 in *Israel: Boundary Disputes with Arab Neighbours 1946–1964*, Vol. 6, edited by Patricia Toye and Angela Seay (Slough: Cambridge Archive Editions, 1995).

⁴⁴M. Kerr, *The Arab Cold War, 1958–1964: A Study of Ideology in Politics* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965).

regional player – understood that it could be extremely profitable for regional actors to play the two Germanys against each other. This followed the West German (eventual) acquiescence to paying reparations to Israel, which had nothing to do with the Arab-Israeli conflict, as many observers in West Germany and the United States clearly recognised at the time. However, the mere fact that a country belonging to the Western bloc had agreed to transfer large amounts of compensations in kind to Israel for the next 12 years fed into the Arab-Israeli rivalry. This was something that the East German establishment understood, and attempted to exploit, in its attempt at gaining international recognition.

East Germany's propaganda and the Arab world

On 25 November 1952, Rudolf Herrnstadt, editor in chief of the East German ruling party's mouthpiece, *Neues Deutschland*, published an editorial commentary on the agreement between Bonn and Israel, titled: 'Reparations, for whom?'⁴⁵ The article set the *leitmotifs* of East German propaganda on the matter, identifying two groups of 'victims' of the agreement: the West German and Arab populations, respectively. Bonn's taxpayers were pitied, yet the agreement, in East Berlin's view, would also allow the leading capitalists in Israel to obtain new sources of profit, which in turn would accelerate the development of war-related business thus endangering peace in the Near East.⁴⁶ A few weeks earlier, the Egyptian Foreign Minister had stressed to the newly appointed West German Ambassador Pawelke that *Wiedergutmachung* was, as he saw it, 'a stab in the back of the Arab world', and the East German piece echoed several of the Arab arguments against the West German-Israeli agreement.⁴⁷ Furthermore, Herrnstadt's article came out more than two months after Adenauer and Sharett had signed the Luxembourg Agreement, yet just three days after excerpts from the indictment in the Slánský show trial were translated into German and published in *Neues Deutschland*.⁴⁸ On 20 November, Rudolf Slánský, number two of the Czechoslovak Communist party, and 13 other party members, most of them of Jewish origin, were indicted for being Zionist agents. Ten people, including Slánský, were eventually executed, while the others were condemned to life imprisonment. The show trial represented one of the main expressions of the wave of anti-Semitism that flooded the Soviet Union and its satellites in the early 1950s.⁴⁹ The subsequent cosmopolitan purges which took place in the GDR left very important marks – also crucially affecting the question of East Berlin's relations with Israel. As Herf highlighted in a number of his writings, a minority group of East German communists had in fact understood the importance that the racial persecution of the Jews held within the Nazi political project, the leading representative of this historical memory tradition being Paul Merker.⁵⁰ The *Stasi* arrested him in the wake of the Slánský trial; leading representatives of the East German Jewish communities, as well as over one quarter of the

⁴⁵R. Herrnstadt, "'Wiedergutmachung' - für wen?," *Neues Deutschland*, 25 November 1952, 1.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*

⁴⁷AAPD 1952, Doc. 216: Botschafter Pawelke, Kairo, an das Auswärtiges Amt, 14 October 1952.

⁴⁸A. Timm, "The Image of Jews," in *Jews, Muslims and Mass Media*, ed. Parfitt and Egorova, 125.

⁴⁹See, for example, K. Kaplan, *Report on the Murder of the General Secretary* (London: Tauris, 1990); M. Kotik, *The Prague Trial: The First Anti-Zionist Show Trial in the Communist Bloc* (New York: Herzl Press/Cornwell Books, 1987).

⁵⁰See J. Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), esp. 40–68 and 113–122; Herf, J. "Dokumentation: Antisemitismus in der SED: Geheime Dokumente zum Fall Paul Merker aus SED- und MFS-Archiven," *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 42, no. 4 (1994), 635–667; J. Herf, "East German Communists and the Jewish Question: The Case of Paul Merker," *Journal of Contemporary History* 29, no. 4 (1994), 627–662.

remaining Jewish population in the GDR, fled to the West as the political climate for Jews in East Germany soured⁵¹; and the party press became increasingly more negatively disposed towards, and critical of, the State of Israel, embroidering anti-Semitic remarks within its anti-Israeli anti-Zionist rhetoric.⁵² This hostility towards the Jewish state went hand in hand with the East German official line on the Nazi past. Indeed, the discourse of the East German ruling party (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*, SED) read Hitler's rise to power as a natural evolution of the capitalist economy, rendering the GDR official memory of the past 'relatively guilt-free' for East German citizens.⁵³ By refusing to acknowledge the unique character of the Nazi persecution of the Jews, East Berlin failed to identify, in the atrocities inflicted on the Jews by the Nazis, the crucial hallmark of the Hitler dictatorship.⁵⁴ The East German depiction of the agreement between West Germany and Israel was in line with the GDR's stance on the Nazi past – yet it also echoed the protests of the Arab representatives. Indeed, the copy of the diplomatic memorandum that the Syrian government had delivered to Bonn in November 1952, which Moscow had obtained and forwarded to East Berlin, shows that *Ministerpräsident* Otto Grotewohl had grasped the significance of several key passages of the Arab stance on the matter, which he underlined with his pencil. First, for example, that Damascus considered the West German compensation to Israel to be a 'subvention of the Israeli war efforts against the Arab states'.⁵⁵ Second, that Zionism's main goal was the subjugation of the Arab peoples. Third, that Bonn's payments could 'affect relations between the German Federal Republic and the Arab states'.⁵⁶ GDR agitprop would endorse the first two themes for decades to come, and the third point provided an ideal laboratory for the GDR in which to experiment with such propagandistic claims and gauge their global potential for decades to come.

East German representatives, in their exchanges with officials from Egypt, Syria (and, after 1958, the United Arab Republic, UAR), Iraq, India, and beyond, often pushed their conversations in the direction of the different stances that each German state had with Israel. Indeed, it seemed that the issue of the relations that each Germany had with the Jewish state might prove instrumental in pushing Third World nations to side with one Germany or the other, at a time when the Third World was increasingly drawn into the dynamics of the bipolar confrontation. The lack of relations between East Germany and Israel, and the contrast between the East German refusal to pay restitutions to the Jewish state and the West German commitment to *Wiedergutmachung*, was widely publicised by East Berlin. Far from relating only to the specifics of East German-Israeli relations, the issue was mobilised within the broader foreign political strategic framework employed to fight the East German battle for recognition and international legitimacy.

For example, in the wake of the Suez Crisis, Grotewohl addressed the East German *Volkskammer* stressing how different the two German states were; on the one hand, East

⁵¹See, e.g. A. Weigelt, and Hermann Simon, eds., *Zwischen Bleiben und Gehen: Juden in Ostdeutschland 1945 bis 1956, zehn Biographien* (Berlin: Text, 2008), esp. 111ff.

⁵²On the overlap of anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism in history see Jeffrey Herf, ed., *Anti-Semitism and Anti-Zionism in Historical Perspective: Convergence and Divergence* (London: Routledge, 2007), and especially Angelika Timm's contribution on the GDR, 186–205.

⁵³M. Fulbrook, *German National Identity after the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), 35.

⁵⁴Herf, *Divided Memory*; Fulbrook, *German National Identity*; Jon Berndt Olsen, *Tailoring Truth: Politicising the past and negotiating memory in East Germany, 1945–1989* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015).

⁵⁵Reprinted in: Schwanitz, "Judenargwohn?," 656–659.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*

Germany supported the people of Egypt and its ‘struggle for national independence and self-determination’, while ‘colonial’ West Germany ‘grants the aggressive circles of Israel more than three thousand million German marks of so-called reparation payments which are used by Israel in her fight against the national independence movement of the peoples of the Near East.’⁵⁷ In December 1956, the East German trade mission in Egypt articulated a series of policy recommendations for the Foreign Ministry so as to improve the East German position in the region. Diminishing West German influence, ‘for example through further political declarations of the GDR concerning the relationship between West Germany and Israel’, was amongst the top three.⁵⁸ The different attitudes of the two German states were included as one of the main arguments suggested by the Foreign Ministry dossier for the visit of Deputy Chairman of the East German Council of Ministers, Paul Scholz, to the UAR in May 1957.⁵⁹ And the Deputy Minister for Foreign and Intra-German Trade, Gerhard Weiss, during a press conference held in Baghdad in 1958, stressed the different attitudes that the two German states had towards Israel, condemning the ‘essential contribution to Israel’s material and moral strength’ of the ‘so-called reparation payments’ of the FRG to the Jewish State.⁶⁰ The East German contrasting of the East and West German attitudes towards Israel for the benefit of Arab representatives was not only used with the aim of improving the GDR’s stance in the Middle East – but within international organisations, too. After the conclusion of the Luxembourg Agreement, the East German regime adopted many of the Arab points against the West German-Israeli entente. For example, during a meeting with the Head of the Economics Division of the League of Arab States, Minister Schwab emphasised that the two German states should be treated equally in the international arena – and in particular within the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, where the GDR was trying to attain the same status as the FRG.⁶¹ Schwab again pushed the Arab League representative on the issue of the West German transfers to Israel which, as West German diplomats understood, made Bonn vulnerable to recriminations on the part of the Arab world.

The German Cold War and the Arab-Israeli conflict

Bonn’s first diplomatic conference abroad, held from 3 to 7 April 1956, was specifically organised to discuss the Middle East. Bonn’s position in the region, the conference participants agreed, presented both a positive and a negative side. On the one hand, the lack of a German colonial legacy in the Middle East, as well as the fruitful contacts established by German diplomats in the Arab Middle East before 1945, constituted an asset for the FRG, which could even end up playing a mediating role ‘between the Arabs and the West.’⁶² On

⁵⁷MfAA A 9286/12, Erklärung des ministers für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten zum Abzug der englischen und französischen Truppen aus Ägypten, n.d. MfAA A 9351/16, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, n.d. See also *Neues Deutschland* (Berlin) “DDR verurteilt Aggression in Nahost,” 7 November 1956, 1.

⁵⁸PA AA: MfAA A 9286/3, Handelsvertretung DDR Ägypten. Vorläufige Einschätzung zur Ableitung einer außenpolitischen Linie Ägyptens, 17 December 1956, Stude.

⁵⁹Relevant documents can be found in PA AA: MfAA A 9318, Reise des stellv. Ministerpräsidenten Paul Scholz 1957 in die VAR.

⁶⁰“Erklärung des Leiters der Handelsdelegation der Regierung der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, Gerhard Weiß, vor der Presse in Bagdad am 27. Oktober 1958,” *Dokumente zur Außenpolitik der Regierung der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik*, Vol. VI (Berlin: Rütten & Loening, 1959), 317.

⁶¹BAL-SAPMO, DY 30 IV 2 / 20 / 373 22, Simons, Vermerk. July 1960.

⁶²*Ibid.* See also Conze et al. *Das Amt und die Vergangenheit*, 626.

the other hand, however, the East Germans enjoyed the same, ‘German,’ reputation – and the question of the GDR’s potential successes in the region, Bonn’s diplomats recognised, was a specifically West German Cold War concern. Two days after the beginning of the conference, on 5 April 1956, the first secretary at the West German Embassy in Cairo cabled to Bonn and Istanbul the news that Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser had declared that: ‘If West Germany recognises Israel and establishes diplomatic relations with it [sic] Egypt will recognise East Germany and establish diplomatic relations’ with East Berlin.⁶³ Nasser stressed that, while Cairo had thus far refrained from recognising the GDR in the belief that ‘reunification (of the) divided German people would greatly contribute to ... peace (in the) world’; nonetheless ‘recognition (of) Israel would remove our inhibitions (to recognise the GDR) as it would constitute an act unfriendly to (the) Arab nations.’⁶⁴ The note also emphasised that ‘other well-informed sources’ had hinted that Syria, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Lebanon, ‘perhaps even Irak [sic] would follow Egypt in recognizing (the) East German People[’s] Republic.’⁶⁵ This was disturbing news, which seemed to confirm the analysis that Bonn’s ambassador in Cairo, Walther Becker, was presenting to his colleagues at the conference.

Indeed, Becker noted that the relations with Israel constituted the only negative mark (*der einzigen Schatten*) on Bonn’s reputation in Egypt. He highlighted that, while for the moment he foresaw no alteration in the status of East German-Egyptians relations, this could change easily as a consequence of an alteration in West German-Israeli relations.⁶⁶ And he was not the only diplomat to emphasise this issue. The head of the Middle East Department of Bonn’s Foreign Ministry, Hermann Voigt, too, spoke of a specifically West German dilemma in the region: having to choose between relations with Israel on the one hand and Arab recognition of the GDR on the other.⁶⁷ The diplomats stationed in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Lebanon, Turkey, Syria, and Egypt all agreed that, as far as the countries they were stationed in were concerned, the reactions to the formalisation of ties between Bonn and the Jewish state would be, in one form or another, to turn against the FRG and in favour of the GDR.⁶⁸ Voigt’s predecessor at the Middle East Department, Wilhelm Melchers, even predicted that the lives of (West) Germans stationed in Jordan would be at risk after an exchange of ambassadors between Bonn and Israel. With the exception of two of them, the other *Arabisten* (orientalists) who took part in the discussion had all been active in the Foreign Service during the Nazi era – and their knowledge of, and links with, the Middle East dated back to a time in which anti-Semitic policies and propaganda formed much of Nazi Germany’s entente with the countries of the region.^{69,70} Bonn’s reinstated diplomats justified their stance

⁶³Original text in English. See PA AA B12 89, Telegramm. Schirmer (Kairo) an AA, 5 April 1956.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*

⁶⁵*Ibid.*

⁶⁶PA AA B2 94/150 Botschafter Becker: Politisches Referat über Ägypten, n.d.

⁶⁷PA AA B2 94/208 Generalkonsul Voigt: Politisches Generalreferat über den Nahen Osten sowie Das Israel-Problem, n.d.

⁶⁸Franz Quiring, Hans Podeyn, Herbert Nöhrling, Kurt-Fritz von Graevenitz, Hansjoachim von der Esch and Walther Becker, respectively.

⁶⁹Which they had entered in 1920, 1929, 1922, 1921 and 1925, respectively. See, e.g. Auswärtiges Amt, *Biographisches Handbuch des deutschen Auswärtigen Dienstes 1871–1945* Vols. 1–4 (Munich: Padenborn, 2000, 2005, 2008, 2012).

⁷⁰See J. Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009); B.M. Rubin and W.G. Schwanitz, *Nazis, Islamists, and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014) and D. Motadel, *Islam and Nazi Germany’s War* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014); Indeed, Bonn’s experienced *Arabisten* (orientalists) had become so also because they had remained on duty in the Auswärtiges Amt (Foreign Ministry) until well after the Third Reich was established (and most of them stayed until the bitter end). See Conze et al. *Das Amt*.

against closer ties with Israel in terms of the backlash of possible GDR recognition in the Arab world and on the basis of the German-German Cold War competition for legitimacy and international recognition. Yet their stance might also have embodied the disturbing influences of the Nazi past in shaping Bonn's Cold War *Israelpolitik*. At a time in which the FRG's foreign political doctrine aspired to widen Bonn's diplomatic network to the detriment of the GDR's, West German officials were recommending to refrain from exchanging ambassadors with a country that did not (and had no intention to) recognise the GDR. From the mid-1950s onwards, Israel's attempts to establish diplomatic relations with Bonn were continuously rebuffed. From the perspective of Israeli Prime Minister David Ben Gurion, this was not a big deal – especially if postponing the exchange of ambassadors could favour the blossoming of covert ties between the two countries. Many of his diplomats, however, found Bonn's continuous procrastination on the matter harder to accept.⁷¹ For example, Felix Shinnar, who headed the Israeli mission in Cologne, characterised the West German stance on the issue as 'completely illogical'.⁷² In response to Israeli representatives pressing for formalisation of the ties, Chancellor Konrad Adenauer and, until 1965, his successor Ludwig Erhard, repeatedly stressed that the establishment of diplomatic relations between West Germany and Israel would certainly take place one day, but that it was crucial to choose the right time to do so. In this way, Bonn would postpone, for a decade, the exchange of ambassadors with Israel. Given Israel's further loss of popularity in the Arab world in the aftermath of the Suez campaign, Bonn had very good reasons, strategically speaking, for wanting to limit its ties with the Jewish state – at least in public. And while on the one hand, West German representatives rebuffed Israeli requests to establish official relations, on the other hand, covertly, security and military cooperation began to blossom.

In the context of this bifurcation of Bonn's *Israelpolitik* into two distinct (overt and covert) dimensions, the existence of the East German state proved, to a certain extent, to be an asset. West German officials could use the Arab threat to recognise the GDR as a way of resisting Israeli pressure to exchange ambassadors. Meanwhile, covert security ties could develop more or less undisturbed, as the rumours about them were dismissed as East Berlin's propaganda by West German diplomats in the region who, just like the majority of West German cabinet members, in most cases were genuinely not informed about the covert ties between Bonn and the State of Israel.⁷³

For example, in the winter of 1957, news that the Israeli Chief of General Staff was to have a meeting with West German Defence Minister Franz Josef Strauss caused consternation

⁷¹R. Stauber, "Realpolitik and the Burden of the Past: Israeli Diplomacy and the 'Other Germany,'" *Israel Studies* 8, no. 3 (2003): 100–122; F. Shinnar, *Bericht eines Beauftragten: die deutsch-israelische Beziehungen 1951–1966* (Tübingen: Wunderlich, 1967).

⁷²"Aufzeichnung über den Besuch des israelischen F.E. Gesandten, Shinnar im Auswärtigen Amt vom 27.1.1956," n.d. in Yeshayahu Jelinek, *Zwischen Moral und Realpolitik: deutsch-israelische Beziehungen 1945–1965: eine Dokumentsammlung* (Gerlingen: Bleicher, 1997), 359. The Israeli quest for diplomatic relations would continue into the 1960s, although the topic was not even mentioned when Ben Gurion and Adenauer met for the first time in New York in 1960s. See, e.g. *Documents on the Foreign Policy of Israel 1960*, Comp. Vol. 14, Doc. 204: G. Rafael (Brussels) to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, 26 January 1960.

⁷³Only a few members of the West German cabinet knew about them. The Foreign Ministry was not informed until 1964 – see AAPD, 1964 (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1995), as well as Niels. Hansen, "Geheimvorhaben" Frank/Kol'. Zur deutsch-israelischen Rüstungszusammenarbeit 1957 bis 1965," *Historisch-Politische Mitteilungen, Archiv für Christlich-Demokratische Politik* 6 (1999): 229–264.

amongst many West German diplomats.⁷⁴ From Washington, the West German ambassador remarked that Ben Gurion ‘must know that he cannot get weapons from Germany’.

In particular, noted Ambassador Heinz Krekeler, ‘because of the problem of recognition of the so-called GDR by the Arab states, [Bonn] needs to be much more cautious than any other NATO member state.’⁷⁵ A spokesperson for the East German Foreign Ministry, in an interview with the East German news agency ADN, declared that the fact that West Germany supplied Israel with military hardware ‘both through direct shipments and by paying for deliveries from third countries’ was no news, and that the Ministry had been aware of this ‘for quite some time’ thanks to the work of certain ‘reliable sources’.⁷⁶ Just a few days earlier a small group of Israeli officials had driven through the snowy roads between France and Germany to reach the holiday home of Defence Minister Strauss in Rott am Inn, in Bavaria.⁷⁷ But while the meeting did lay the ground for future arms transfers between Germany and Israel (via third countries), these in fact did not begin until 1959.⁷⁸ And while Colonel Avigdor Tal of the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) had been stationed in Cologne since 1956 with the task of monitoring orders of raw materials from West Germany, in 1957 the security and military cooperation had not yet got into full swing.⁷⁹ The West German embassy in Cairo rebuffed rumours of nascent West German-Israeli security ties as ‘ridiculous nonsense’ (*törichter Unsinn*); a display of East Germany’s efforts to turn the Arab countries against the FRG in the hope of gaining ground in the Middle East.⁸⁰ The West German personnel in Damascus agreed, and the rumours were labelled as ‘mere propaganda from the Eastern zone’ (*reine Ostzonenpropaganda*).⁸¹

Yet the lack of credible East German propaganda in the Middle East was not necessarily considered to be an obstacle in East Berlin. Because just as the West German *Israelpolitik* bifurcated after 1955 into an overt and a covert strand – where the public reticence to establish diplomatic relations was coupled with a series of covert understandings related to security cooperation – so did the East German *Israelpolitik* or, more accurately, the rhetoric about it, evolve into two main strands. On the one hand, in front of Arab audiences, East German representatives would emphasise the GDR’s refusal to pay reparations to Israel and the strength of the existing, expanding links between Bonn and the State of Israel. On the other hand, in front of Israeli audiences, East German representatives would emphasise the resurgent (possibly never defeated) anti-Semitism which they alleged characterised the FRG, cautioning the Israelis to weigh very carefully the possible consequences of their process of reconciliation with Adenauer’s Germany. Indeed, while East Berlin deemed Arab audiences to be interested in the GDR’s vociferous antagonism against Israel, in turn it was clear that the Israeli audience would be sensitive to some other key themes of East German propaganda – such as the GDR’s insistence on the scandalous number of former Nazi supporters who

⁷⁴Although in fact Moshe Dayan did not take part in the meeting.

⁷⁵PA AA B12 1045, Fernschreiben (verschüsselt) aus Washington an AA, 27 December 1957, Kessel.

⁷⁶Neues Deutschland, *Bonn der Lüge überführt*, 29 December 1957, 7.

⁷⁷At the wheel of the car was Asher Ben Natan, future first ambassador to (West) Germany. Author’s Interview with Asher Ben Natan (Ramat HaSharon, Israel: 20 January 2014); Asher Ben Natan, *The Audacity to Live* (Jerusalem: Mazo Publishers, 2007): 120–121.

⁷⁸Shlomo Shpiro, ‘Shadowy Interests. West German-Israeli Intelligence and Military Cooperation, 1957–1982,’ in *Israel’s Clandestine Diplomacies*, ed. Clive Jones and Tore T. Petersen (London: Hirst, 2013): 171–189.

⁷⁹See Shlomo Shpiro, ‘Friends in the dark: The First Decade of German-Israeli Intelligence Cooperation,’ in *Die deutsch-israelischen Sicherheitsbeziehungen. Vergangenheit, Gegenwart, Zukunft*, ed. Milena Uhlmann (Berlin; Berliner Wissenschaftsverlag, 2008): 76–89.

⁸⁰PA AA B12 1045, Telegramm 31 December 1957, Welck.

⁸¹PAA B12 1045, Diplogerma Damaksus, 4 January 1958, Knoke.

were now active within Bonn's key institutions. East German representatives thus decided to play it both ways – targeting each side of the Arab-Israeli conflict in an attempt to turn them in favour of the East German side of the Cold War battle against Bonn by capitalising on their respective political nightmares: the spectre of an aggressive and strong State of Israel and the resurgence of Nazism, respectively. Showing sympathy to Israeli citizens and representatives, however, also entailed its risks, as Dr Seydewitz, East German consul in Prague, would soon find out.

On 15 January 1960, Horst Seydewitz, met with Jehuda Raveh, his Israeli counterpart. Seydewitz had arranged the meeting following the death of an Israeli journalist, who had passed away following a car crash near Magdeburg in East Germany in November 1959. He wanted to return the journalist's passport and other personal belongings to the Israeli authorities but the meeting lasted over two hours, as the two diplomats turned to discussing the delicate topic of relations between East Germany and Israel. The East German consul optimistically predicted that the time would come when the GDR and Israel would have 'normal relations'; his Israeli colleague commented that, in fact, from a variety of points of view, the GDR was much more appealing (*sympatischer*) than West Germany. Seydewitz then replied that it was difficult for him to understand 'why Israel would have official relations with the Federal Republic'.⁸² Three days after the meeting, Seydewitz forwarded a report of the meeting to the East German ambassador in Prague, and the embassy then forwarded the document to the Foreign Ministry. Sending the documents to East Berlin, the Second Secretary of the Embassy, Bernhard Neugebauer, characterised some of Seydewitz's statements as 'not thought through enough, politically speaking'.⁸³ His colleagues in the Foreign Ministry agreed.⁸⁴ 'Dr. Seydewitz's mistake', the GDR Foreign Ministry personnel of Berlin stressed, consisted in the fact that:

He let the [conversation] end on a note that suggests that Israel has official relations with West Germany. The matter should be construed from the outset *either* as if we were against the relations of any state with West Germany, *or* as if we were interested in maintaining the same kind of relations with the state in question.⁸⁵

Thus, when condemning the 'mistake' that Seydewitz had made in Prague, the head of the Department for the Affairs of the Near and Middle East of the GDR Foreign Ministry did not focus on the specifics of East German-Israeli relations. Rather, he identified as a key problem the way in which the East German consul had portrayed the relations between Israel and West Germany, and indirectly therefore between the two Germanys, when dealing with his Israeli colleague. A few months after the meeting with the Israeli consul, the course of Horst Seydewitz's career altered. He was recalled from his post in Prague to the GDR. He was put to work in the archives of the Foreign Ministry, and there he remained until his retirement. Increasingly, East German representatives viewed conflicts whose origins had very little to do with the Cold War (such as the Arab-Israeli conflict, or the question of German-Jewish relations) through the monocle of their own, specifically German Cold

⁸²MfAA/A 13777/5, Konsularabteilung Prag. Aufzeichnung über eine am 15.1.1960 stattgefundene Unterredung mit dem israelitischen [*sic*] Konsul in Prag, Herrn Raveh. 18 January 1960, Seydewitz.

⁸³MfAA/A 13777/3, Botschaft DDR Prag. Unterredung des Genossen Dr. Seydewitz mit dem israelitischen Konsul in Prag. 21 January 1960, Neugebauer.

⁸⁴MfAA/A 13777/1, 3.AEA, Unterredung Dr. Seydewitz mit israelischen Vertreter. 2 February 1960, Simons.

⁸⁵My italics. MfAA/A 13777/1, 3.AEA, Unterredung Dr. Seydewitz mit israelischen Vertreter. 2 February 1960, Simons.

War. Those who did not appreciate the nuances of this peculiar situation were penalised. Dr Seydewitz was one of them, and that was his ‘mistake’.

Conclusion

In the early 1950s, the West German decision to pay Holocaust compensations to Israel, followed by Arab attempts to revert it, produced ripple effects that affected both the Middle East conflict and the German Cold War. In the Middle East, the Arab states – or chose to interpret the West German-Israeli agreement as a sign of the West’s support for the Jewish state. Naguib’s Egypt retaliated against Bonn by showing that Cairo, too, could choose to side with one or the other party within the German-German Cold War. The simultaneous presence of Westrick and Koch in Egypt in 1953, and the signing of the Egyptian-East German trade deal shortly thereafter, made sure that this message was received clearly in Bonn. In the following decades, the FRG invested heavily in Egypt, and became one of its leading trading partners, constantly outspending its East German rival.⁸⁶ In this sense, a local player, aiming at attaining regional hegemony, did manage to play the German bipolar rivalry to its own advantage. As Shlaim and Sayigh, Gerges, Ashton and others have argued, Middle Eastern regional players played a role in influencing and intensifying the Cold War rivalry.⁸⁷ And, as this article has shown, this was not just the case after 1955, and did not just apply to the two superpowers’ rivalry; the initial overlap between Cold War and Middle Eastern conflicts took place in the early 1950s, and two Germanys played leading roles in transposing the East-West confrontation onto the Levant. Did they, in turn, also manage to fuel the Arab-Israeli confrontation? On the one hand, East Germany attempted to do so, displaying its pro-Arab and anti-Israeli stance in the hope to break away from its international isolation, and expand its strategic network in the Middle East. The East German propaganda machine adopted much of the Arab stance on the issue of West German-Israeli relations, attempting to woo Arab audiences by showcasing their anti-Israeli and anti-Zionist rhetoric in bilateral conversations and international fora. East Berlin’s efforts, however, for the most part remained unsuccessful. Several East German representatives found that parroting Arab propaganda to Arab audiences only brought them so far. As was clear to many at the time, the GDR needed to strengthen its economic prowess if it wanted to attract Middle Eastern partners.⁸⁸ In contrast, Adenauer’s West Germany had no intention to get dragged into the intricacies of the Arab-Israeli conflict and attempted to appease Arab requests, as the swift visit of the West German State Secretary Westrick in Egypt demonstrated. However, by the time West Germany and Israel signed the compensation agreement in 1952, Israel was – and had been for years – at an impasse in the armistice (not peace) agreements with the neighbouring states that had attacked it just a few hours after its unilateral declaration of independence in 1948. Thus, although the two matters – German-German Cold War and Arab-Israeli conflict – were substantially unrelated, it was perhaps inevitable that the West German decision to transfer contingent reparations to Israel over the following years

⁸⁶William Glenn Gray, *Germany’s Cold War*.

⁸⁷E.g. Fawaz A Gerges, *The Superpowers and the Middle East*; Avi. Shlaim and Yezid. Sayigh, eds., *The Cold War and the Middle East*; Ashton, ed., *The Cold War in the Middle East*; Massimiliano. Trentin, ed., *The Middle East and the Cold War*, among others.

⁸⁸SAPMO-BArch DY 30/11348 Botschafterkonferenz des SED in Berlin am 1. bis 2. Februar 1956, 1 February 1956.

would draw Bonn and with it, by degrees, the whole German-German Cold War complex, to clash with the Arab-Israeli conflict, for decades to come.

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