

**Israeli-German Relations in the Years 2000-2006:
A Special Relationship Revisited**

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To my mother and Joe

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Abbreviations

ADL	Anti Defamation League
BND	German Federal Intelligence Service
CDU/CSU	Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union of Bavaria
DIG	German-Israeli Association
DVU	German People's Union
FDP	Free Democratic Party
FES	Friedrich Ebert Foundation
Green Party	Alliance 90/The Greens
KAS	Konrad Adenauer Foundation
Left Party	Left Party/PDS
NPD	National Democratic Party of Germany
PORI	Institute of Public Opinion & Marketing Research of Israel
REP	Republicans
SPD	Social Democratic Party

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	iii
Abbreviations	iv
1. Introduction	1
1.1 Summary Framework	1
1.2 Introducing Relations	3
2. Political Relations	8
2.1 Antisemitism and Supporting Israel's Right to Exist	13
2.2 Institutional Support	18
2.3 Soviet Jewish Immigration	26
2.4 German Diplomatic Support	27
2.4.1 Germany in the EU	30
2.4.2 Germany in the UN	35
2.4.3 Iranian Nuclear Armament	37
2.5 Security Cooperation	39
2.6 Military Cooperation	42
2.7 Political Dissenting Voices	48
2.8 Perceptions of External Actors	54
3. Public Opinion	57
3.1 Sources	57
3.2 Introduction to Findings	61
3.3 Israeli Public Opinion	62
3.3.1 Growing Distinction Between Modern Germany and Nazi Germany	62
3.3.2 PORI Findings	63
3.3.3 Reconciliation	65
3.3.4 Israel's New Priorities and Indifference	68
3.3.5 Media Coverage	70
3.4 German Public Opinion	73
3.4.1 The Fading Memory of the Second World War	73
3.4.2 A Discourse of Victimisation	73
3.4.3 The Israeli-Arab Conflict	77
3.4.4 Media Coverage	81
3.4.5 Antisemitism	83
3.4.5.1 Traditional and Secondary Antisemitism	83
3.4.5.2 Politicians and Antisemitism	85
3.4.5.3 Right Wing Criminality	88
3.4.5.4 Extremism in State Institutions	89
3.4.5.5 Rise of the NPD	90
4. Conclusion	92
4.1 Major Findings	92
4.2 Government Responses	99
Bibliography	103

1. Introduction

1.1 Summary Framework

This thesis will discuss the problem of a growing discrepancy between political relations and public opinion in Israeli-German relations. Divided into two sections, the thesis will begin by analysing Israeli-German relations on the political level outlining the reasons behind the depth and strength of the relations. The first section will show that Germany's recognition of its past has provided the context for a deep and trusted partnership with Israel. Germany's dealing with its past sets it apart from other countries that cooperated with Nazi Germany. This includes tackling Antisemitism and taking a tough stance against groups denying Israel's right to exist. Different institutions have provided important support in recent years to foster the political relationship. Examples of Germany's diplomatic support to Israel, both unilaterally and within the EU and the UN, will further illuminate that Germany puts aside significant interests and is willing to put its weight behind proposals which defend Israeli interests. The strong relationship is further evidenced on the level of military and security cooperation. German political support should also be seen against the backdrop of political dissenting voices in the government and among opposition parties. The section will conclude by bringing in perceptions of external actors, who by either criticising Germany's support for Israel or commending it, reinforce that the relationship can be termed 'special'.

The second section will deal with public opinion in Israel and Germany. Public opinion has impacted on the political decision making process as was evident in Chancellor Schröder's decision to categorically rule out German participation in the Iraq

War, which secured him victory in the 2002 elections.¹ In the context of Israeli-German relations looking at public opinion is crucial as, due to Germany's historic responsibility for Israel, Germany has provided Israel with substantial diplomatic and military support amidst years of conflict, which at times has put German government actions in a diametrically opposed position to German public opinion. This was evident when the government helped block EU sanctions against Israel following Operation Defensive Shield or when it decided to send German troops to the Middle East as part of the UNIFIL mission.

An analysis of Israeli public opinion shows that in recent years Israeli opposition to normalising relations with Germany has significantly decreased. Further, changed priorities amongst Israelis explain a certain indifference to issues related to Germany, which is also reflected in media coverage on Germany. In contrast, research into German public opinion reveals that Germans are no longer willing to accept historic responsibility due to factors such as the fading memory of the Second World War and a discourse of victimisation, which casts Germans as victims of the war. An analysis of German public opinion of the Israeli-Arab conflict further demonstrates that the conflict has galvanised a negative opinion of Israel, which has been reinforced by media coverage. Furthermore, a discussion on German public opinion cannot omit the fact that some Germans harbour strong Secondary Antisemitic views, where Jews are seen as exploiting the Shoah for financial gain. Particularly worrisome, as the examples of two parliamentarians in the Bundestag will show, mainstream politicians have been willing to exploit, and have at times embraced, latent Antisemitic currents in recent years. The discussion of public

¹ For a discussion of the impact of public opinion on foreign-policy making see for instance Boekle, Henning et al (2001).

opinion will end by pointing to the fact that despite government measures, Antisemitic attacks are on the rise and support for the right-wing extremist NPD increases.

1.2 Introducing Relations

At no point in the history of Israeli-German relations, have political relations been ‘warmer’ and ‘closer’ than today.² The strength of the political relationship during the past six years has qualified this relationship to be termed as ‘special’. For instance, journalists accompanying German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert on mutual state visits have commented on the personal chemistry, which extends to the two Foreign Ministers Frank-Walter Steinmeier (SPD) and Tzipi Livni (Kadima). “Livni smiles like a little girl when she sees Frank-Walter”, one German correspondent told me.³

Since taking office, Merkel and Olmert have exchanged three state visits.⁴ Notably, Merkel visited Israel just over two months after the coalition agreement between the CDU/CSU and the SPD had been signed in mid-November 2005. This approach appears to contrast with former Chancellor Gerhard Schröder’s round trips to the Middle East, which conspicuously left out Israel except on one occasion in October/November 2000 when he met with then Prime Minister Ehud Barak as part of a five day round trip to the Middle East.⁵ However, despite Schröder’s rhetoric of the ‘German way’ and the ‘German

² Interview with Jonathan Miller. The German Foreign Ministry website describes relations as warm and friendly.

³ Interview with Gisela Dachs.

⁴ Merkel was in Israel 29-30 January 2006 and on 1 April 2007, and Olmert travelled to Germany 12-13 December 2006.

⁵ Schröder’s behaviour is strikingly reminiscent of his political mentor Helmut Schmidt who famously rejected political tourism to Israel during his tenure as German Chancellor (1974-1982). On Helmut Schmidt’s relations to Israel see for instance the account by former Israeli Ambassador Yohanan Meroz in Ben-Natan (2005), 100.

nation'⁶, his business trips to different Arab states⁷, and his decision not to come to Israel personally to attend official events marking 40 years of diplomatic relations between Israel and Germany⁸, somewhat causing irritation in Israel, in the affairs of states, as the publisher of the German weekly *Die Zeit* Josef Joffe pointed out, "pay less attention to words and more to actions".⁹ Thus, while no word is found in Schröder's hastily produced memoirs on special relations with Israel or anything that would suggest such a relationship exists, "practically in the last hours [of his tenure as chancellor], Schröder signed a deal that will give Israel two state-of-the-art submarines at subsidised interest rates".¹⁰ Schröder's trusted Foreign Minister for eight years, Joschka Fischer (Green Party), to whom he entrusted affairs pertaining to Israel and the Israeli-Arab conflict was so outspoken in his support for Israel that some sarcastically asked whether he would promote Israeli or German interests. Similarly, Schröder's Interior Minister Otto Schily (SPD) was criticised in public for being too forthcoming with Israel when he, for instance, stated in an interview with the German radio station *Deutschlandfunk* that Israel was at the forefront of a wider battle against global terrorism and needed the 'fence' to defend itself against terrorists.¹¹

As far as the Schröder-Sharon relations were concerned, 'the post-war child' of the SPD and the 'fighter' of Likud had little in common. Reciprocating Schröder's abstinence from state visits, Sharon came to Germany only once in July 2001, where he was told by

⁶ Schröder used these catch phrases in the run up to the 2002 election campaign. For discussions on Schröder's use of these terms see for instance Schöllgen (2004), 10 and Hellmann (2004), 32.

⁷ Schröder's close ties with the Arab states led to his appointment as honorary chairman of the German Near and Middle East Association in May 2006.

⁸ Wolffsohn (2007), 516.

⁹ Joffe (2006), 139.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 141.

¹¹ Otto Schily, Interview with *Deutschlandfunk*, 13 September 2004.

Schröder to reconsider his settlement policy.¹² But still, when Ernst Uhrlau of the BND successfully mediated the exchange of the bodies of three Israeli soldiers and the civilian Elhanan Tannenbaum for 435 Palestinian and Lebanese prisoners in January 2004, Sharon summoned Uhrlau together with the former German Ambassador to Israel, Rudolf Dreßler, to his office and reportedly said: “You might not understand what you have seen today [the Israeli ceremony upon arrival of the three soldiers].[...] The State of Israel is deeply indebted to Germany.” Indirectly, this was also a ‘thank you’ to Chancellor Schröder, who had authorised the German mediating efforts.¹³ In an interview Olmert gave to the German daily newspaper Die Süddeutsche Zeitung in August 2006, seemingly another taboo was broken when Olmert publicly declared: “I would like German soldiers in the Lebanon”, pointing out that “no nation these days is friendlier to Israel than Germany”.¹⁴ In the wake of the Israeli-Lebanese conflict, Foreign Minister Livni asked Ernst Uhrlau to once more mediate, this time on the release of two Israeli soldiers captured by Hizbollah at the onset of the conflict, which is a further reflection of the extent Germany has come to be a trusted friend of Israel.

Israeli public opinion towards Germany in part corresponds to the warmth on the level of political relations. Germany ranks third (67 percent) after the US (85 percent) and Britain (80 percent) on the question whether Israelis view it favourably or unfavourably, positioning Germany far ahead of other European countries.¹⁵ Three generations after the Shoah a majority of the Israeli public is willing to reconcile with the Germans and to normalise relations with Germany. For instance, 82.3 percent of the Israeli public believe

¹² Hans Monath, “Sharon in Berlin”, Der Tagesspiegel, 5 July 2001.

¹³ Matthew Gutman, “Cabinet to Discuss Prisoner Exchange with Hizbollah”, Jerusalem Post, 24 January 2004.

¹⁴ Olmert, Interview with the Die Süddeutsche Zeitung, 4 August 2006.

¹⁵ KAS Survey (2007), 9.

that relations between Israel and Germany are ‘normal relations’.¹⁶ To some extent, Israeli attitudes have also been marked by indifference to aspects of the relationship, given that regional issues are considered far more pressing.¹⁷ For instance, news of an Antisemitic speech by a member of the Bundestag did not make it into the headlines.¹⁸ Equally, the debate over whether Germany can send troops to the Middle East was of little relevance in Israeli public discourse.

In contrast, in line with other European countries, the German public expresses an overall ‘cold’ and ‘unfavourable’ view of Israel on account of the Israeli-Arab conflict.¹⁹ At a deeper level, however, Germany’s positioning vis-à-vis Israel is part of a ‘Neujustierung [der] Geschichtsverhältnisse’ (‘re-adjustment of historical consciousness’) in which German collective memory is no longer infused and kept in balance by the personalised historical experience of the witnesses of the Shoah.²⁰ Less than half of the German public (49 percent) still believe that Germany has a ‘special responsibility’ to the Jews, whereas 47 percent decline any special responsibility towards the Jews on account of Germany’s history. The picture becomes even clearer when looking at German relations vis-à-vis the State of Israel. A total of 78 percent sees Israel as ‘any other state’, while only 20 percent think that Germany cannot treat Israel as any other state.²¹ Arguably, this kind of normalisation, where Germans no longer derive conclusions from the past for defining relations with Israel, is the biggest challenge to the special relationship. From an Israeli perspective, relations with Germany are so harmonious because Germany stands out

¹⁶ PORI polls were kindly provided by Moshe Zimmermann.

¹⁷ Interview with Natan Sznajder.

¹⁸ Rudolf Dreßler in Ben-Natan (2005), 255.

¹⁹ Transatlantic Trends 2006: Topline Data, 18.

²⁰ Frei (2005), 8. See also inside cover.

²¹ Germans and Jews, Bertelsmann Survey (2007), 24.

among other European countries as having tackled its history and having drawn the right conclusions.

2. Political Relations

The special relationship between Israel and Germany has its origins in the complicated historical intertwining created by a long history of a Jewish presence in the German lands and the ‘civilisation rupture’ caused by twelve years of Nazi rule during 1933-1945 and the murder of six million Jews in the Shoah.²² The agreement for reparation payments on 10 September 1952 and the formal establishment of diplomatic relations on 12 May 1965 set the foundation for what has become an increasingly strong relationship which has gradually extended into the cultural, scientific and economic spheres.²³

Following in the footsteps of Konrad Adenauer, the Schröder and Merkel governments, and key figures within these governments, have continued to emphasise and promote the special relationship. As Merkel described, “for us, relations with Israel are a precious treasure that we must preserve. We, and the coming generations, must therefore be aware of our history and the responsibility it entails”.²⁴ State visits, reparation payments and an acknowledgement of Nazi crimes have helped to foster special relations. The significance of these factors is illuminated when contrasted to how, for instance, Austria has dealt with its past.

Despite there being no legal requirement for coalition governments to acknowledge the special relationship, in recent times the Red-Green governments (1998-2002 and 2002-2005) as well as the Grand Coalition government (2005-) have entrenched the special relationship in their coalition agreements. The first coalition agreement between the SPD and the Green Party of 1998 stated in its foreign policy agenda that “Germany continues to

²² Term coined by the historian Dan Diner (1988), 9. For a theoretical account on special relations see Gardner-Feldman (1984), especially pages 261-272.

²³ For different accounts and documents on the early period of the relationship see Ben-Natan (2005), Hansen (2004), Lavy (1996), Jelinek (2004), and Vogel (1969).

²⁴ Merkel as cited in Adar Primor, “Unifying Force”, *Ha’aretz*, 16 September 2005.

have a special responsibility for Israel. The new government will work with all means to guarantee the security of the Israeli state [...].”²⁵ The Grand Coalition of CDU/CSU and SPD preserved the continuity of special relations, being even more explicit in its coalition agreement of November 2005: “On account of its history Germany has a special responsibility towards Israel. We endorse Israel’s right to exist and the right of its citizens to live free of fear, terror and violence.”²⁶

The work of Joschka Fischer provides a strong example of an individual minister, who has helped shape the special relations. As his colleagues have asserted he did not regard the customary wreath laying ceremonies at Yad Vashem a mere ritual, but in fact held a deeply entrenched conviction that Germans can never “evade responsibility for Auschwitz and the Shoah”.²⁷ This rationale informed other spheres of his foreign policy such as when, in the run-up to what was to be Germany’s first participation in a war after the Second World War, he argued that the lessons of Auschwitz demanded that Germany take action against the attempted massacres in Kosovo.²⁸

On the domestic level, much to the aggravation of many diplomats in the Foreign Ministry, who were affected by this decision, Fischer ordered an internal magazine to stop publishing obituaries of former diplomats with a Nazi past and established a five member panel investigating their role during the Nazi period.²⁹

Disregarding the ritualism involved, state visits and ceremonies such as those to commemorate 40 years of diplomatic relations between Israel and Germany in 2005

²⁵ Coalition Agreement (1998), 48.

²⁶ Coalition Agreement (2005), 134-135.

²⁷ Interview with Mordechai Lewy. Fischer as cited in an interview with the journal Tribüne (2005), 24.

²⁸ For different accounts of Fischer’s Kosovo policy see Geis (2002), 17 and Sznajder (2006), 167.

²⁹ The panel has continued its work after the change of government in 2005. It includes the historians Moshe Zimmermann, Norbert Frei, Eckart Conze, Klaus Hildebrand and Henry A Turner. Email correspondence with Moshe Zimmermann.

provided a context in which German governments underlined their sincerity to acknowledge responsibility for Nazi crimes. When German President Horst Köhler gave a speech to the Knesset on the occasion of the 40 years anniversary, it was evident to his 71 listeners that he was deeply moved.³⁰ His predecessor Johannes Rau, who was the first German head of state to address the Knesset and the first German president to speak in German to the Knesset on account of his close relations to Israel, likewise left a deep impact on listeners in the Knesset when he stated in his speech: “I bow my head in humility before those who were murdered, those who have no graves at which I could ask their forgiveness”.³¹ As a reaction to the speech, Chairman of the Likud, Ariel Sharon honoured Rau’s efforts “to achieve conciliation between the two nations.”³²

Through the Field of Stelae monument in the centre of Berlin, the Bundestag has left a lasting symbol commemorating the Shoah.³³ Former President of the Bundestag Wolfgang Thierse (SPD), who had been involved in the planning since the Bundestag had approved the building and financing of the monument on 25 June 1999, explained the significance as follows: “What today is described with great forcefulness by the witnesses, has to be taken up by museums and arts in the future.”³⁴ The inauguration of the monument was symbolically timed to culminate with 40 years of diplomatic relations to underline that the tragic origins of the special relationship provide a fruitful basis for partnership.

³⁰ Köhler’s voice broke down at one point of the speech. Former head of the Central Council of Jews Paul Spiegel who attended the speech commented that Köhler barely held back his tears.

³¹ Rau Speech (2000).

³² Sharon as cited in Gideon Alon, “German Leader Asks for Forgiveness”, *Ha’aretz*, 17 February 2000.

³³ Former Israeli Ambassador to Germany Avi Primor remarked: “You build monuments for the glorification of heroes [...] but commemorating one’s own crime? Who has ever done that?” See Avi Primor in Ben-Natan (2005), 233.

³⁴ Thierse as cited in “Mahnmal Eröffnung”, *FAZ*, 10 May 2005.

Efforts of the Schröder and Merkel governments also have to be seen in contrast to other European countries who, during the Second World War, cooperated with Nazi Germany.³⁵ For example, in contrast to the German government, which continues to take on financial responsibility, Austria, which formed part of Hitler's 'Greater German Reich' and brought forth some of the Nazi regime's most vicious leaders, has been reluctant to take on similar responsibility and rejects special relations with Israel on grounds of having been a 'victim' rather than perpetrator, a status it entrenched in the republic's founding document of 1945.³⁶

The Israeli writer Amoz Oz who lost several relatives in the Shoah expressed this view very clearly: "This German debate [with the past], which was accompanied by a striking internal struggle for the reshaping of a future based on the ashes of the past, evoked respect in me. [It was a debate] which Austria, compared to West Germany, almost completely evaded."³⁷ As an example, the contrast could not have been sharper when in Germany Schröder was committing his government to pay half of the compensation due to forced labourers exploited by German companies in the Second World War, in Austria Jörg Haider's far-right Freedom Party had entered into a coalition with the centre-right Austrian People's Party under Wolfgang Schüssel. Following Haider's election Schröder pressured the EU to sanction Austria, an action that Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak praised.³⁸ Throughout the years, the German government has continued its commitment to

³⁵ This point has been repeatedly raised by Israeli political elites. See for instance in-depth interviews in Israelis and Germans. The Ambivalence of Normality, 12 and the account by former Israeli Ambassador Avi Primor in Ben-Natan (2005), 233.

³⁶ For a discussion on the German and Austrian stance on reparation payments see Wolffsohn (1993), 68-69. In addition to paying towards the pensions of Holocaust survivors, the German government pays about €200 million to the Israeli government to provide for the needs of Holocaust survivors living in Israel. Larry Derfner, "Never Again?", Jerusalem Post, 15 February 2007 and Pelinka (2007), 149.

³⁷ Oz (2005), 32.

³⁸ Gideon Alon, "German Leader Asks Forgiveness", Ha'aretz, 17 February 2000.

financially compensate those who suffered under the Nazi regime during the war, extending payments to ghetto workers and Jewish survivors who had been interned in labour camps set up by the Nazi-allied Vichy regime in North Africa.³⁹ As a sign of recognition of Germany's efforts to seek reconciliation, in 2003, for the first time, former German Ambassador to Israel Rudolf Dreßler participated in Israel's official Shoah commemoration service held annually at Yad Vashem.⁴⁰

The special commitment further extends to the German Jewish community, whose representatives in the Central Council of Jews are regularly invited to different official events and meet with government representatives to raise issues of concern.⁴¹ At festive occasions, which are of crucial symbolic significance to both the community and the state, such as the inauguration of Munich's new synagogue in November 2006, different high level state representatives join in the festivities.⁴²

The German government and the federal states support the Jewish community financially. By means of a state treaty between the Central Council of Jews and the German government in 2003, the government agreed to triple its support for the Jewish community, providing annually €3 million to help the communities in their efforts to integrate the growing number of Jews from the former Soviet Union.⁴³ As stated in the Preamble of the State Treaty of 27 January 2003, the commitment derives from the "special historic responsibility of the German people to Jewish life in Germany" and the

³⁹ Amiram Barkat, "Germany to Pay Shoah Restitution to North African Survivors", Ha'aretz, 19 May 2005 and Claudia von Salzen, "Entschädigung für Arbeiter in NS-Ghettos", 5 February 2007.

⁴⁰ Dressler in Ben-Natan (2005), 255.

⁴¹ Merkel, for instance, met with the head of the Central Council of Jews Charlotte Knobloch to calm tension following remarks of one cabinet minister criticising the use of cluster bombs by Israel during the Israeli-Lebanese conflict. See "Merkel Soothes Jewish Ire After Minister's Cluster Bomb Remark", Deutsche Welle, 31 August 2006.

⁴² Petr Jerabek, "Bewegende Eröffnung der Neuen Hauptsynagoge", DDP, 9 November 2006.

⁴³ Christian Böhme, "Mit Geld und Guten Worten", Tagesspiegel, 15 November 2002.

“wish to rebuild Jewish life in Germany and to deepen friendly relations with the Jewish community.”⁴⁴ Furthermore, the Treaty, which former Deputy Chairman of the Central Council of Jews Michel Friedman praised as a “milestone in the relationship between Jews and non-Jews in Germany”, was a gesture of good will to the Central Council of Jews in light of the growth of Antisemitism in Germany.

2.1 Antisemitism and Supporting Israel’s Right to Exist

Germany’s acknowledgement of the past has obligated it to take firmer action against Antisemitism than other countries. Traditionally, German governments had been concerned to protect the Jewish communities, which became a token for Germany having become a ‘new’ Germany.⁴⁵ Germany is seen in Israel as having a better record in combating Antisemitism than other European countries, which have seen sharp rises in Antisemitism in recent years. For example, the French government’s efforts have been viewed as particularly lax. In 2004 Sharon famously described Antisemitism in France as “the wildest Antisemitism”, calling on Jews to leave France.⁴⁶ President Moshe Katzav commended German efforts stating: “I believe that Germany’s political leadership recognises the danger [of Antisemitism]. They feel that their educational system needs to teach the younger generation higher values. They dedicate themselves to this goal because they are aware of Germany’s responsibility to the Jewish people and the State of Israel.”⁴⁷ During Merkel’s visit in January 2006, Olmert reiterated Katzav’s praise: “We see with great satisfaction that Germany is committed towards fighting Antisemitism.”⁴⁸

⁴⁴ State Treaty, 27 January 2003.

⁴⁵ Interview with Ruth Herz. Schröder also referred to this concern in his autobiography. See Schröder (2006), 257.

⁴⁶ “Sharon in Antisemitism Row with France”, AFP, 19 July 2004.

⁴⁷ Katzav, Interview with Tribüne (2005), 11.

⁴⁸ Olmert as cited in “ Hamas Muss auf Gewalt Verzichten”, DPA, 29 January 2006.

As a show of solidarity with the German-Jewish community high level government officials have visited sights of Antisemitic attacks, meeting with members of the Jewish community.⁴⁹ For instance, in the wake of an attack on a Jewish kindergarten in Berlin, State Minister Hildegard Müller (CDU) and Interior Minister Wolfgang Schäuble (CDU) took part in a solidarity prayer, while Merkel sent a letter stating: “Every attack on a Jewish institution is an attack on our democracy.”⁵⁰

In the wake of a series of attacks against Jewish institutions and commemorative sights, which reached a climax in the attempted arson of a synagogue in Dusseldorf in October 2000, Schröder took seriously the concern of former head of the Central Council of Jews Paul Spiegel who demanded more government involvement in guaranteeing the safety of the Jewish communities.⁵¹ Subsequently, the government provided an additional €75 million for educational programmes to fight right-wing extremism.⁵²

Schröder further pushed for legislation banning the right-wing NPD, backing efforts by Interior Minister Otto Schily to work out a proposal together with the Interior Ministers of Lower Saxony and Bavaria, Heiner Bartling (SPD) and Günther Beckstein (CSU). The legislation was opposed by the FDP and members of the SPD, CDU/CSU and the Green Party.⁵³ As many had expected, the ban fell through in the Federal Constitutional Court.⁵⁴ Despite the disappointment, unofficially Israeli embassy officials commended the government’s efforts.⁵⁵

⁴⁹ “Kanzlerin Verurteilt Anschlag auf Jüdischen Kindergarten”, *DPA*, 1 March 2007.

⁵⁰ Merkel as cited in *Ibid*.

⁵¹ See Spiegel Speech (2000).

⁵² Schröder (2006), 260.

⁵³ *Ibid*; and Staud (2005), 65.

⁵⁴ As the NPD is heavily infiltrated by the German security service the court found it impossible to differentiate which actions were motivated by the agents and which by the party’s members.

⁵⁵ Interview with Mordechai Lewy.

Despite constitutional restrictions, which prevented banning the NPD, German ministers have worked creatively to restrict NPD activism. Following an announcement on right-wing websites of a proposed march around Berlin, Justice Minister Brigitte Zypries (SPD) and Interior Minister Schily, realising that a total ban on the march would violate Germany's law of assembly, instead banned marches past Holocaust memorials. Zypries also proposed widening legislation so as to prevent the glorification of National Socialism.⁵⁶ Since 2001 the German police has also begun collecting data on right-wing crimes with an Antisemitic background.⁵⁷

The Schröder government has not been afraid to take firmer action against Holocaust denial. Against the background of a Bundestag debate in December 2004 and warnings by Germany's law enforcement agencies, Schily prohibited the Yeni Akit publishing house, which published the European edition of the Turkish language daily newspaper Anadolu Vakit, on grounds of the paper's Antisemitic content, including Holocaust denial.⁵⁸

Merkel's approach so far has been to make Antisemitism a greater concern in the European Union, which culminated in calls for common EU legislation against Holocaust denial. In the wake of a Holocaust denial conference hosted by Iran, the Bundestag President Norbert Lammert (CDU) wrote a letter to Iranian President Mohammed Ahmedinejad condemning "every attempt to offer Antisemitic propaganda a public forum under the guise of scientific freedom and objectivity."⁵⁹ Merkel also stated her support

⁵⁶ Zypries Speech (2005).

⁵⁷ EUMC Antisemitism Report (2006), 10.

⁵⁸ Following the ban, Anadolu Vakit depicted Schily and Schröder as Nazis, which was followed by death threats to member of the Bundestag Kristina Köhler (CDU) who had raised the issue of the newspaper's Holocaust denial during a plenary session. For further information on the ban see Protection of the Constitution Report 2005, 231.

⁵⁹ Lammert as cited in "Konferenz in Iran", DPA, 11 December 2006.

for increasing Israeli-German youth exchange programmes as a means to combat Antisemitism, arguing that “sometimes people are not sufficiently aware of Antisemitic tendencies. Therefore, we intend to treat education and training as a very important component.”⁶⁰

Further, German governments have promoted measures within Germany which, although not targeting Antisemitism, demonstrate their commitment to good Israeli-German relations and their continued support for Israel, for example, through the use anti-terrorism legislation instigated after 9/11. Schily banned Islamist organisations denying Israel’s right to exist, for which the new laws, revoking privileges of religious groupings, provided the legal basis. In 2003 Schily banned the German offshoot of the Freedom Party (Hizb alTahrir) on the grounds of having called for the destruction of Israel in flyers distributed in German universities and for having propagated the killing of Jews in the quarterly publication *Explicit*.⁶¹ Similarly, the Turkish Islamist organisation Caliphate State and its 36 sub-organisations were prohibited in 2001/2002 for having called for the eradication of laicism as well as for agitation against the Israeli and Turkish states.⁶² The German government further exerted pressure on France to ban Hizbollah TV channel Al-Manar, which until December 2004 had been available from the French satellite provider Eutelsat.⁶³

The German courts have played a key role in enforcing legislation and reinforcing the strong government position against Antisemitism. After the Second World War, Germany made provisions in its penal code against forms of ‘incitement of the people’

⁶⁰ Merkel as cited in Adar Primor, “Elections in Germany”, *Ha’aretz*, 14 September 2005.

⁶¹ *Protection of the Constitution Report 2005*, 210.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 223.

⁶³ *Bundestag Printed Paper 16/158*, 11.

(‘Volksverhetzung’). Henceforth, inciting against parts of society and violating another person’s dignity became punishable by law. Sentences range from three months to five years depending on the severity of the case.⁶⁴ In an important verdict setting a precedent for future cases, on 13 May 1994, the Federal Constitutional Court ruled that Holocaust denial does not enjoy protection by the Basic Law’s right to freedom of expression.⁶⁵ Subsequently, the Bundestag approved a new subsection §130 (3): “A sentence of up to five years or a fine can be imposed on those who harm public peace by publicly denying or trivialising an action perpetrated by the National Socialist regime.”⁶⁶

Despite protests against Holocaust denial legislation, on the grounds of curbing free speech, German courts have in recent years made full use of the §130 and its 1994 amendment. This also includes the depiction in public of Nazi symbols such as the Swastika.⁶⁷ Further, the courts convicted Germany’s two most notorious Neo-Nazi activists. In 2005 a Berlin court convicted Horst Mahler to nine months imprisonment for incitement of the people after having distributed an Antisemitic pamphlet during an NPD event.⁶⁸ More recently, a Mannheim court convicted Ernst Zündel to the maximum sentence of five years imprisonment for Holocaust denial and incitement of the people. The Central Council of Jews has welcomed the verdict as a “victory of justice”.⁶⁹ Further, five youths who participated in the public burning of a copy of Anne Frank’s diary were each given a nine month sentence and a fine. Judge Bruns stated in his verdict: “German history

⁶⁴ §130 of the German Penal Code.

⁶⁵ Stumm (2001), 22.

⁶⁶ German Penal Code.

⁶⁷ A controversial verdict by a Stuttgart court in 2006, banning anti-fascist stickers depicting a crossed out Swastika, was overturned in March 2007 by the Federal Court of Justice. It was seen by many legislators as an overly tight interpretation of the ban of Nazi symbols in public.

⁶⁸ “Haftstrafe für Ex-NPD Anwalt Mahler”, Spiegel, 12 January 2005.

⁶⁹ Central Council of Jews Press Release: Verdict on Ernst Zündel, 23 February 2007.

will not be rewritten. [...] The diary of Anne Frank was deliberately chosen as a symbol of the fate of the Jewish people in the Third Reich [...] This was a barbaric act”.⁷⁰

German courts have interpreted the law restrictively with regards to Islamic groups denying Israel’s right to exist. A decision by the Federal Administrative Court of 2006 upheld the ban by the German Interior Ministry against Hizb alTahrir on grounds that verbal expressions of denying Israel’s right to exist and calls on Palestinians for armed struggle against Israel evoke Article 9(2) of Germany’s Basic Law, which stipulates that organisations must not go against the spirit of ‘Völkerverständigung’ (‘mutual understanding of peoples’), allowing such groups to be banned.⁷¹ Similarly, in January 2005 a Dusseldorf court upheld the decision of the Immigration Department not to renew the residency permit of a Lebanese citizen found to be member of Hizbollah. According to the ruling, extradition was justified on the basis that Hizbollah is an organisation postulating struggle against Israel with ‘inhuman brutality’ including attacks against Jewish civilian institutions in different parts of the world. The court further noted that Hizbollah’s absence from the EU terrorism list, did not prevent the court from making judgement against him.⁷²

2.2 Institutional Support

The special relationship is further fostered by the work of a number of political foundations, parliamentary friendship groups and policy groups. Whilst these organisations have used different methods they all strive to further the special relationship. The parliamentary friendship groups are composed of representatives from both the Bundestag

⁷⁰ Bruns as cited in “Strafe für Akt der Kulturellen Barbarei”, *AP*, 8 March 2007.

⁷¹ *Protection of the Constitution Report 2005*, 211.

⁷² *Dusseldorf Administrative Court Press Release*, 4 January 2005.

and the Knesset and enhance relations through visits, lobbying and joint action. The political foundations who work in Israel have begun to safeguard the future of the special relationship by addressing the younger generation and focussing on EU-Israeli relations. The German-Israeli Association (DIG) supports the work by providing information about Israel, organising youth exchanges, and lobbying.

Within the Bundestag about one sixth (111 out of 614) of the parliamentarians are members of the German-Israeli friendship group. Working “towards friendly relations with Israel”, the German-Israeli friendship group takes an active role in shaping German foreign policy.⁷³ Its members, as stated by former head of the German-Israeli friendship group Hildegard Müller (2003-2005), share a commitment that “relations to Israel will always be marked by the singularity of the Shoah” and emphasise the need to “carry the special relationship into future generations”.⁷⁴ In addition, many join the German-Israeli friendship group on account of having previously established close relations with Israel, either through work or personal contacts.⁷⁵ Founded in 1978, it is the second largest lobbying group in the Bundestag after the German-American friendship group and twice the size of the German-Arab friendship group, which counts 58 members.⁷⁶ It closely cooperates with its Israeli counterpart in the Knesset⁷⁷, particularly on the level of its two current executives Jerzy Montag (Green Party) and Colette Avital (Labour-Meimad).⁷⁸

As a lobbying group, the German-Israeli friendship group works towards balancing views on Israel amongst parliamentarians, while helping to avert political tensions in the

⁷³ Interview with Hildegard Müller.

⁷⁴ Müller (2006), 311.

⁷⁵ Robbe, Interview with ‘Deutschlandradio’, 23 October 2003.

⁷⁶ Interview with Hildegard Müller; Telephone correspondence with the office of member of the Bundestag Joachim Hörster (CDU), who runs the German-Arab friendship group.

⁷⁷ The Knesset parliamentary friendship group currently counts 10 members.

⁷⁸ Interview with Colette Avital.

bilateral relations such as arose when the judges, including the German judge, ruled the security barrier to be illegal in an ICJ advisory opinion.⁷⁹ Together with its Israeli counterpart it further develops a common agenda for deepening bilateral relations. A recently planned programme, for instance, will allow Israeli parliamentarians to send their parliamentary assistants to work for half a year in the Bundestag.⁸⁰ Both the Israeli and German friendship groups further formulate common positions on different issues including, for instance, a joint condemnation of the Holocaust denial conference in Iran.⁸¹ The executive committee of the German-Israeli friendship group undertakes regular visits to Israel and helps to organise visits of Israeli politicians to Germany.

Individual members of the German-Israeli friendship group such as Reinhold Robbe (SPD) have kept close contact with the Jewish community.⁸² During the Israeli-Lebanese conflict of 2006, the German-Israeli friendship group organised a solidarity trip to Israel, which, as its current head Jerzy Montag stated, aimed “to show to our Israeli friends [...] that we are by their side when they are threatened and attacked and even if public opinion in Europe turns away from Israel.”⁸³ On the economic level, the German-Israeli friendship group has been crucial in establishing business contacts between Israeli and German firms.⁸⁴ While some see its role as marginal, stemming from the work largely being conducted away from public attention, it is an important body in shaping government policy. Hildegard Müller, who has become State Minister in the Chancellery in the 2005

⁷⁹ Müller, Interview with ‘Jerusalem Centre for Public Affairs’, January 2005.

⁸⁰ Interview with Colette Avital.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Robbe, Interview with ‘Deutschlandradio’, 23 October 2003.

⁸³ Montag as cited in Joint DIG and German-Israeli Friendship Group Press Release: German-Israeli Friendship Group Visits Israel, 21 July 2006.

⁸⁴ Interview with Hildegard Müller.

government⁸⁵, for instance, can be credited with lobbying Merkel on a number of occasions on issues pertaining to Israel.⁸⁶

Its work is flanked by the DIG. Founded in 1966, the DIG works through its 49 local branches in Germany, counting 4545 members, for the deepening of Israeli-German bilateral relations.⁸⁷ Creating a strong bond with German policy makers, its executive committee comprises members of four parties in the Bundestag.⁸⁸ Some executive committee members such as Hildegard Müller and Reinhold Robbe are also members of the German-Israeli friendship group, while Anke Eymer (CDU) is also Treasurer of the Jerusalem Foundation. The DIG works closely with members of the German-Israeli friendship group, conducting joint trips to Israel and participating in meetings with Israeli guests.⁸⁹ As a self-declared aim, the DIG has raised issues of concern to the government such as when it repeated calls to the government to take action against the Hizbollah channel Al-Manar, which is broadcasted in Germany via Arab satellite networks.⁹⁰

At the grass-roots level, the DIG has set itself the goal of improving the image of Israel in Germany and fighting Antisemitism. With the help of its local branches, the DIG organises lectures and seminars in many parts of Germany. As part of its educational programme, the DIG has, for instance, invited Holocaust survivors to speak at German universities and organised study strips to Israel, in which German groups have the chance to get to know the country, while meeting with Israeli public figures who have been

⁸⁵ Müller asked for her position as State Minister to rest between October 2006 and December 2007 due to pregnancy.

⁸⁶ Interview with Hildegard Müller.

⁸⁷ Information on membership was kindly provided by Diana Gürtler of the DIG.

⁸⁸ Current members of the Bundestag in the executive committee include Marieluise Beck (Green Party), Anke Eymer (CDU/CSU), Dirk Niebel (FDP), Hildegard Müller (CDU) and Reinhold Robbe (SPD).

⁸⁹ Four executive members of the different branches of the DIG, for instance, participated in the solidarity trip to Israel during the Israeli-Lebanese conflict.

⁹⁰ DIG Press Release on the Holocaust Memorial Day, 27 January 2007.

involved in aspects of Israeli-German relations. In the past, personal encounters also included gatherings with members of the IDG⁹¹, however, this organisation is in gradual decline as no new members have joined and many members have reached advanced age.⁹²

The DIG is supplemented by a youth forum for those aged between 16 and 35. The German youth forum works together with its partner organisation in Tel Aviv to set up annual exchange visits, in which various trips and talks are organised to foster a better understanding of culture and society. As preserving special relations fundamentally depends on the younger generation, the DIG's new president Johannes Gerster, who previously was head of the KAS in Israel (1997-2006), has put increased focus on helping younger people join the DIG. The DIG no longer charges members up to 25 years old membership fees in the first year. Gerster has further signalled that he wants to widen the pool of professional young helpers such as students who had been in Israel for study or volunteers in the Action Reconciliation Service, a German volunteer service organisation working closely with Holocaust survivors.⁹³

Entrenching the special relations has also been the primary goal of several German political foundations operating in Israel. With the exception to the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, which is affiliated to the Left Party, all German political parties represented in the Bundestag have offices of their respective political party foundations in Israel.⁹⁴ They play a crucial role in fostering relations between German and Israeli policy makers, intellectuals and academics. When party or Bundestag committee delegations arrive from Germany, the political foundations help bring the delegations together with local

⁹¹ The IDG is the counterpart of the DIG in Israel.

⁹² Interview with Marianne Karmon.

⁹³ Gerster as cited in Jürgen Hoeren, "Johannes Gerster", B5 Aktuelles am Abend, 12 November 2006.

⁹⁴ The Rosa Luxemburg Foundation plans to set up an office in the near future. Interview with Hermann Bünz.

politicians of the respective political camp.⁹⁵ Many German visitors present talks, some of them geared towards matters of public interest and others addressed to a selected audience. The foundations have further established themselves as a crucial source of funding for Israeli universities and NGOs, contributing towards costs of conferences and projects, making them widely known throughout Israel.⁹⁶

While relatively diverse in their goals, reflecting party affiliation, the political foundations see Israeli-German dialogue as one of their principle goals. These foundations have worked in various ways to achieve the goals, as was evident during the celebrations of 40 years of diplomatic relations in 2005, when all the institutions organised different special events.⁹⁷

As a further aspect of their work, the political foundations want to contribute to Israeli-Arab dialogue. This includes bringing together Israelis and Arabs in different workshops and conferences and providing track-two venues in which both can meet outside the public limelight.⁹⁸ Throughout the years, the KAS, affiliated to the CDU, and the FES, affiliated to the SPD, have been able to operate most widely as state funding is allocated on the basis of the political representation in the Bundestag.⁹⁹

Having been the first political foundation to have established an office in Israel, one of the ways in which the FES has fostered Israeli-German relations is through support of youth exchange programmes. This includes workshops in which young Israelis and

⁹⁵ Interviews with Hermann Bünz und Rolf Behrens.

⁹⁶ Interview with Natan Sznaider.

⁹⁷ The Heinrich Böll Foundation, for instance, set up a symposium of German and Israeli authors, whilst the Friedrich Naumann Foundation together with the Stephen Roth Institute for the Study of Contemporary Antisemitism initiated an international conference 'In the Wake of the Holocaust – Marking 40 Years of Relations between Israel and Germany'.

⁹⁸ Gerster (2005), 70-71.

⁹⁹ Renvert (ca. 2005), 10.

Germans are brought together to discuss ways of fostering relations.¹⁰⁰ Traditionally close to the German trade unions, the FES has also been a go-between for German trade union officials and members of the Israeli Histadrut.¹⁰¹ On a more high-profile level, the FES has been funding the so-called Strategic Dialogue set up between the Jaffa Centre for Strategic Studies and the German Institute for International and Security Affairs, both of which are important advisory institutions on foreign policy to their respective governments. Since the establishment of the dialogue in 1999 the two foreign policy institutes have conducted a total of seven meetings.¹⁰² Moreover, the FES has in the past contributed funds to the Herzeliya Conference, which has established itself as Israel's most important annual conference on strategic affairs.¹⁰³

Against the backdrop of the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Israeli-European Action Plan, the FES further increased efforts to foster Israeli-European dialogue, which, given the EU's economic importance to Israel, is seen as an important contribution to the special relationship. The FES, for instance, has given financial and institutional support to the so-called Israeli European Policy Network (IEPN). Bringing together a mixed group of EU officials and academics from Europe and Israel the IEPN has sought to define areas of Israeli-European cooperation. The results of these meetings have been published in two readers, which are distributed by the FES to policy makers both within Israel and in Europe.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ One such example was an event held in February 2007 to commemorate the late Johannes Rau.

¹⁰¹ Interview with Hermann Bünz.

¹⁰² JCSS Bulletin, No. 31, September 2005.

¹⁰³ Information provided on the FES Israel office website.

¹⁰⁴ My gratitude goes to Hermann Bünz who allowed me to participate in one of the group's closed meetings in December 2006.

The KAS, as the second major political foundation, was established in order to foster Israeli-German relations and this continues to be its fundamental concern.¹⁰⁵ Largely due to the personal efforts of its former head Johannes Gerster, the KAS has developed very good relations with the Jecke community, many of whom have regularly come to seminars and lectures.¹⁰⁶ The strong link between the KAS and the Jeckes, as Gerster himself had noted, was of great symbolic significance as, despite having been betrayed by their state and having lost family and relatives in the Shoah, after the war the Jeckes were open to restoring relations with Germany.¹⁰⁷ Since the arrival of Lars Hänsel as the new head of KAS, it has put increasing focus on the younger generation, reflecting concerns that relations can only be fostered in the long term if the younger generation feels committed to the special relations. For this purpose, the KAS has, for instance, organised a number of seminars on Germany for Israeli journalists and members of the Knesset. On another occasion the KAS brought together members of the CDU's Young Union and political youth groups in Israel.¹⁰⁸

Similarly to the FES, the KAS also has increased its efforts to foster relations between Israel and the European Union. For instance, prior to the German EU Presidency in 2007 it hosted a conference on Israeli-European relations, in which Israeli Foreign Ministry officials and EU officials discussed aspects and shared views on EU-Israeli relations.¹⁰⁹ More recently, the KAS invited EU Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner to talk about Israeli-European relations.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁵ Strengthening Israeli-German relations is entrenched in an internal document outlining broadly the foundation's targets for the coming years.

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Rolf Behrens.

¹⁰⁷ Gerster (2005), 117.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Rolf Behrens.

¹⁰⁹ With kind permission from KAS, I was able to participate in the closed part of the conference.

¹¹⁰ Information provided on the KAS Israel office website.

2.3 Soviet Jewish Immigration

Germany has recently provided support to Israel on the sensitive issue of immigration. Historically, Germany allowed immigration of Jews from the former Soviet Union. As 'Kontingentflüchtlinge' ('refugees'), Soviet Jews coming to Germany were automatically entitled to German welfare benefits. Since these were higher in Germany than Israel, within just ten years the Jewish community had swelled from 29,000 to about 107,000 comprising mainly elderly members, many of whom were dependent on social benefits.¹¹¹ In light of different demographic studies showing that Israel's Jewish majority was facing serious decline, since 2001 Israeli Prime Minister Sharon intensified calls for Jewish immigration to Israel, which was part of his optimistic plan to bring another one million Jews to the country.¹¹² For Sharon this policy seemingly conflicted with the immigration of Soviet Jews to Germany. Sharon, together with the Jewish Agency, reiterated previous Israeli governments' demands to have Jewish immigration from the former Soviet Union to Germany restricted. In the past, former Chancellor Helmut Kohl had rejected demands for immigration restrictions as he feared the international reactions to such a move. Moreover, he was interested in seeing the Jewish community in Germany grow.¹¹³

Under the Schröder government, in light of improving Israeli-German relations, Germany, the government and more particularly Fischer, who had followed the Israeli demographic debate with great interest, reassessed the immigration issue.¹¹⁴ Following a meeting between former Israeli Ambassador to Germany Benjamin Navon, Fischer and

¹¹¹ These are conservative statistics including only the registered community members. Unofficial sources state the number as high as 200,000. Official statistics were kindly provided by Heike von Bassewitz at the Central Welfare Board of Jewish Communities in Germany.

¹¹² Emma Brockes, "Sharon Wants One Million New Jews For Israel", *Guardian*, 7 November 2001.

¹¹³ Navon in Ben-Natan (2005), 190.

¹¹⁴ Fischer Speech (2003).

Israeli Ambassador Shimon Stein in October 2004, which had taken place upon Sharon's request, a respective decision was made in June 2005 at the Interior Ministers' Conference to have Jewish immigration tied to specific requirements such as knowledge of the German language and professional skills.¹¹⁵

2.4 German Diplomatic Support

In recent years Germany has provided Israel with strong diplomatic support, both unilaterally and within the EU and UN, particularly in the wake of the outbreak of the Second Intifada. This support has been driven collectively by the German government, but also by strong personal input of individual government members. In fact, Israeli government officials reflecting on this period have been surprised by Germany's Interior Minister Otto Schily's and Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer's outspoken support for Israel, which has been even greater than that of any previous interior or foreign minister.¹¹⁶

Fischer's and Schily's involvement has been strongly felt. Fischer's personal understanding of Israel has given him respect amongst Israeli politicians, and that respect has allowed him to play a greater role in the Israeli-Arab conflict than other European politicians. Israeli Ambassador Shimon Stein, for instance, commended Fischer for his 'balanced view', noting that "while Fischer points out that Israel has made mistakes, he also states the mistakes of the Palestinians"¹¹⁷, a view which was also shared by the

¹¹⁵ Navon in Ben-Natan (2005), 191; and Decision by the Permanent Conference of State Interior Ministers and Senators on the Integration of Refugees, 66-69.

¹¹⁶ Interview with Mordechai Lewy.

¹¹⁷ Stein, Interview with 'Spiegel', 15 April 2002.

Central Council of Jews in Germany, who during his tenure as foreign minister called on Fischer to continue his involvement in the region.¹¹⁸

Fischer achieved this respect through numerous visits to Israel and his actions whilst there. For example, on 1 June 2001 he was in Tel Aviv on the night of the suicide bombing in the discotheque Dolphinarium, where 21 youths were killed.¹¹⁹ Following this event, Fischer appeared on Israeli television, stating “We understand the situation”, a comment the Israeli public were pleasantly astonished to hear from a European minister. In a move that had been rarely seen under Sharon, Fischer persuaded Sharon not to immediately retaliate.¹²⁰

Following Fischer’s departure from the seat of foreign minister and retirement from politics, he has continued to speak out in favour of Israel, reaffirming the depth of his views. During a visit to Tehran in August 2006, where he met members of the political opposition, Fischer sharply condemned Iranian President Ahmedinejad’s Holocaust denial comments, pointing out that “who wants peace in the Middle East will not accomplish this with a position negating Israel’s right to exist”.¹²¹ Fischer further commended steps to increase pressure on Iran and taking the issue before the UN Security Council.¹²² In the wake of the Israeli-Lebanese conflict in 2006, Fischer raised a rarely heard argument in German public debate, emphasising that Israel had responded to a hostile act in its territory and that the Lebanese government had failed to prevent the attack. He emphasised that this

¹¹⁸ Paul Spiegel stated: “Fischer should engage more as he is respected among Israelis and Palestinians”. Spiegel as cited in “Europäische Union stuft Hamas als Terrorgruppe ein”, Frankfurter Rundschau, 8 September 2003.

¹¹⁹ Fischer, Interview with ‘Der Spiegel’, 25 June 2003.

¹²⁰ Geis (2002), 199.

¹²¹ In an opinion piece for Ha’aretz Fischer, however, expressed concern over an US attack on Iran. Fischer as cited in “Fischer warnt Iran”, DPA, 2 August 2006.

¹²² Joschka Fischer, “And Now for Iran”, Ha’aretz, 4 February 2007.

was a war by proxy, in which Hizbollah was able to carry out its attacks due to support from Syria and Iran.¹²³

Schily, in contrast to his 1970s involvement as a lawyer for Red Army Faction members, has through strong domestic measures against terrorism and Antisemitism, and his verbal support for Israel proven to be a staunch ally. Schily remarked during a counter terrorism conference in Herzeliya in 2004, “the reliability of German friendship to Israel includes the obligation to support Israel in its fight against terrorism”.¹²⁴ In public, Schily demanded more understanding for Israel’s policies. He, for instance, defended the building of the security barrier as a measure to protect Israeli citizens from terrorist attacks and demanded a more balanced view of Israel in light of Israel’s withdrawal from Gaza, referring to the domestic opposition Sharon was facing.¹²⁵ With these two ministers in particular Germany has taken a range of measures to support Israeli interests. It further appears that Merkel and Steinmeier will continue where Fischer and Schily left off.

Since the Grand Coalition has been formed, Chancellor Merkel herself has been the driving force behind closer relations with Israel. In contrast to her predecessor, Merkel has been very outspoken about deepening relations with Israel. In her role as opposition leader, Merkel criticised the debate on the security barrier and the uncontrolled transfers of EU funding to the Palestinians.¹²⁶ According to her confidants in the Chancellery, Merkel considers a good working relationship with Israel a ‘Herzensangelegenheit’ (‘a matter close to the heart’), which some have attributed to her religious upbringing.¹²⁷

¹²³ Fischer, Interview with ‘Die Zeit’, 7 September 2006.

¹²⁴ Schily Speech (2004).

¹²⁵ Schily stated: “I would like to point out that the Sharon government is in a very difficult situation due to the withdrawal from Gaza.” As cited in Schily, Interview with ‘Deutschlandfunk’, 13 September 2004.

¹²⁶ Merkel, Interview with Tribüne (2005), 200.

¹²⁷ Interview with Jörg Bremer.

Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier has so far worked with Merkel to further Israeli interests. Steinmeier was at the forefront of those calling for the total disarmament of Hizbollah stating: “Hizbollah has not yet decided whether it wants to be a political force or an armed militia, over the long term it cannot be both.”¹²⁸ When international demands for a cease fire emerged, Merkel backed Olmert’s demand that the two Israeli soldiers first be returned unharmed and that Hizbollah and Hamas rocket fire stops before a cease fire is negotiated. Steinmeier backed Merkel: “What is the point of such a declaration when the main participants simply are not prepared to call a cease fire.”¹²⁹

2.4.1 Germany in the EU

On the EU level, respective German governments have provided diplomatic support to Israel in areas such as opposing sanctions, modifying EU statements and preventing EU initiatives which Israel does not support. In summary, as Merkel stated, Germany must help Israel “make its interests heard in the EU”.¹³⁰

The German government has consistently opposed attempts by other EU states at implementing or threatening EU sanctions against Israel, and such a policy of sanctions has now been rejected by the EU. In the wake of Israeli military operations during the Second Intifada trade sanctions against Israel were considered by a number of EU member states. During a meeting of the EU foreign ministers in Nyköping in May 2001, it was due to Fischer’s efforts that the Swedish government failed to have the issue of economic sanctions mentioned in a joint EU statement. At the meeting Fischer had argued that economic sanctions would only further intensify the rift between the EU and Israel,

¹²⁸ Daryl Lindsey, “Germany’s Mideast Balancing Act”, *Spiegel*, 1 August 2006.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ Merkel, Interview with *Tribüne* (2005), 200.

causing him to clash with Commissioner on Foreign Affairs Chris Patten, who was one of the foremost advocates of having Israel's Association Agreement of 2000 reassessed.¹³¹

In April 2002 the European Parliament backed calls for sanctions against Israel in a resolution calling on the EU member states to take action.¹³² The sanctions were backed by countries such as Belgium and Spain, however, the Schröder government moved to block these sanctions. In his policy statement of 25 April 2002, Schröder explained this position before the Bundestag: "The support for Israel's right to exist and its security within recognised borders is and remains the inalienable foundation of German foreign policy. [...] This also means that, given our special historic responsibility, we cannot support any embargo or boycott measures against Israel."¹³³

The EU has since abandoned its policy of sanctions, stating on its official website: "It is the EU's view that maintaining relations with Israel is an important contribution to the Middle East peace process and that suspending the Association Agreement, which is the contractual basis for EU-Israeli relations, including political dialogue, trade relations and cooperation activities, would not make the Israeli authorities more responsive to EU concerns."¹³⁴

Germany refrains from supporting EU initiatives it fears could jeopardise Israeli interests. For example, Germany opposed the so-called five point plan launched by Spain, France, and Italy in November 2006. Spain had hoped to have the initiative calling for an immediate cease fire between Israelis and Palestinians and an international monitoring force in Gaza endorsed during an upcoming EU summit meeting in December. Israel

¹³¹ Dieter Bednarz, "Fluch der Guten Tat", Spiegel, 9 July 2001.

¹³² Phil Reeves, "Europe Threatens Israel With Sanctions", Independent, 8 April 2002.

¹³³ Schröder, Policy Statement on the Situation in the Middle East, 25 April 2005.

¹³⁴ See EU official website on the Middle East Process: Frequently Asked Questions.

rejected the plan on the grounds that it would prevent the Israeli army from conducting military operations in Gaza in the future.¹³⁵ Olmert raised this concern to Merkel during his visit to Germany in early December. Merkel assured Olmert that Germany would not give its support for the initiative, preventing its endorsement in the EU Council meeting in mid-December 2006.¹³⁶

Germany has also assisted Israel in furthering its military objectives particularly by helping Israel gain time to finish its military operations by preventing cease fire calls. During Israel's conflict with Hizbollah in 2006, Foreign Minister Steinmeier worked together with his British colleague Margaret Beckett as well as his Czech and Polish counterparts to water down the wording of the EU statement.¹³⁷ Instead of calling for an immediate cease fire, as was desired by countries such as France and Finland, the final statement called for "an immediate end to hostilities to be followed by a sustainable cease fire". The stance reflected Israeli concerns that the operation needed to continue for longer. A day after the EU statement, Israeli Deputy Prime Minister Shimon Peres had raised this concern, stating: "I hope [the military operation] will be a matter of weeks, not of months."¹³⁸

Germany has also worked to oppose declarations criticising Israeli actions. Merkel summarised the rationale as follows: "I don't share one-sided criticism of Israel."¹³⁹ Following Israel's military operation in the northern Gaza town of Beit Hanun in November 2006, which led to the death of 19 Palestinian civilians, Germany, together with

¹³⁵ Akiva Eldar, "Spanish FM: Peace Plan Withheld for Fear of Israeli Rejection", Ha'aretz, 19 November 2006.

¹³⁶ The EU Council resolution instead reiterates a commitment to the Road Map. Herb Keinon, "Israel Angry over German Loans to Iran", Jerusalem Post, 10 December 2006.

¹³⁷ Merkel, Interview with Tribüne (2005), 200.

¹³⁸ Peres as cited in Colum Lynch, "Europeans, Offering Peacekeepers, Call for End of Hostilities Now", Washington Post, 1 August 2006.

¹³⁹ Merkel, Interview with Tribüne (2005), 199.

Britain and the Czech Republic blocked efforts by Ireland, Sweden and Spain to issue an EU declaration condemning Israeli actions, arguing that if such a declaration would be raised it needed to condemn the shooting of Qassam rockets as well.¹⁴⁰ Germany had previously made this point in the UN Human Rights Council when it lobbied other EU member states to vote against a Human Rights Council resolution, condemning Israeli operations in the Gaza Strip in the summer of 2006.¹⁴¹ Reflecting the German position, the EU statement on the resolution argued that it was unbalanced, lacking reference to the release of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit and to the launching of Qassam rockets from the Palestinian territories. During the hostilities between Israel and Hizbollah, Germany helped balance an EU statement, referred to above, which would have condemned Israeli operations in Lebanon so that the final text read that both parties should “do everything possible to protect populations and to refrain from actions in violation of international law”.

The German government has had a policy of opposition to Hamas, a stance that Merkel has stated will continue for as long as Hamas fails to meet the ‘three conditions’.¹⁴² Prior to Hamas’ election, on the domestic front Schily banned the Al-Aqsa organisation in 2002 as well as its successor organisation Yatim Child Support in 2005, which collected

¹⁴⁰ “EU: New PA Government Must Recognise Israel as Peace Partner”, AP, 13 November 2006.

¹⁴¹ Interview with Jonathan Miller.

¹⁴² The three conditions are recognition of the State of Israel, a renunciation of violence, and recognition of prior agreements.

money for Hamas in Germany.¹⁴³ In doing so, Schily implemented the EU Laeken Summit conclusions of December 2001 more promptly than other European states.¹⁴⁴

Following continued suicide attacks, Germany supported an EU initiative leading to Hamas' political wing being added to the EU list of terrorist groups in 2003. In the wake of Hamas being elected into power, the German government has been at the forefront of the EU's efforts to pressure the Palestinian government to accept the three conditions, a commitment Merkel reiterated during a number of meetings with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas.¹⁴⁵ Given Germany's commitment to support Israel's right to exist, the German government has been particularly concerned about the Hamas policy of non-recognition of Israel. As Foreign Minister Steinmeier explained following the election: "We accept the result of free elections. [...] But Hamas has to renounce violence and accept Israel's right to exist."¹⁴⁶ Merkel's spokesman has been even more explicit: "Israel's right to exist has to be recognised unmistakably."¹⁴⁷ Defence Minister Franz Josef Jung (CDU) further confirmed the government's steadfast stance on Hamas when he stated in a meeting with former Israeli Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz (Likud) shortly before the Israeli elections in March 2006, Germany was "completely on the side of Israel".¹⁴⁸

Since January 2006, the Merkel government has been blocking French demands to lift the economic boycott, arguing that Hamas has not come forward on meeting international demands. In contrast to other EU countries, which have held secret talks with

¹⁴³ The Bremen Support Unit pre-empted a ban by the German authorities for its fundraising activities for Hamas by dissolving itself in January 2005, whilst the Islamic Welfare Organisation managed to avoid a ban by stopping all its fundraising efforts for Palestinian projects, concentrating instead on financial aid to earthquake victims in Morocco and Sri Lanka and the building of clinics in Afghanistan. Protection of the Constitution Report 2005, 213 and Islamic Welfare Organisation: Press Release, 9 September 2005.

¹⁴⁴ "Laeken's Anti-Terror Agenda", BBC News, 12 December 2001.

¹⁴⁵ "Merkel Setzt Abbas Unter Druck", Reuters, 23 February 2007.

¹⁴⁶ Steinmeier, Interview with 'Spiegel', 30 January 2006.

¹⁴⁷ As cited in "Merkel an Hamas: Israel Anerkennen Ohne Wenn und Aber", FAZ, 27 Januar 2006.

¹⁴⁸ Jung as cited in "Germany on the Side of Israel", DPA, 8 March 2006.

Hamas officials including Britain and France, the German government, in an effort to increase pressure on Hamas, has strictly abided by a ban on communications.¹⁴⁹ Merkel confirmed her stance to Russian President Vladimir Putin, whose country had openly held talks with Hamas officials.¹⁵⁰ When the EU foreign ministers discussed a response to Palestinian plans for a unity government, Germany emphasised that the EU has to stay firm on the fulfilment of the three conditions, a view that was not shared by other countries who favoured a more lenient interpretation.

2.4.2 Germany in the UN

Germany has provided support to Israel in the UN through its principle of abstaining or lobbying against resolutions it considers prejudiced towards Israel. German support in this body is important as Israel is often singled out by the General Assembly, UN committees and specialised agencies, which is reflected in the number of UN resolutions dealing with Israel. Further, Israel is not part of the Asian group in the UN despite geographically belonging to that region. Since May 2000 Israel has been a temporary member of the Western European and Other States Group, which, however, still does not allow Israel to participate in UN bodies outside New York.¹⁵¹

In recent times, a major issue for many of the UN and EU members has been the construction of Israel's security barrier as well as its proposed route. When the UN General Assembly emergency session decided to refer the issue of the barrier to the International Court of Justice, Fischer spoke out against that move.¹⁵² In contrast to many of his EU colleagues, Fischer, like Schily, also publicly spoke in favour of the barrier, however,

¹⁴⁹ Ali Waked, "Report: Hamas Ministers Met with US, EU Officials", *Ynet*, 12 July 2006.

¹⁵⁰ "Germany on the Side of Israel", *DPA*, 8 March 2006.

¹⁵¹ Information provided on the website of the Permanent Mission of Israel to the United Nations.

¹⁵² Fischer Speech (2003).

criticising the government's proposed route.¹⁵³ In October 2003 a resolution was proposed to the UN Security Council which stated that the building "of a wall in the Occupied Territories [...] is illegal under relevant provisions of international law". Germany was amongst a number of countries abstaining from the vote.¹⁵⁴

During the UN Conference against Racism in Durban in August/September 2001, having been unsuccessful in diverting the agenda away from focussing on the Israeli-Arab conflict and Israel, the Israeli and American delegations left the conference protesting against a draft document, produced by the Arab League and a number of Third World states, in which Zionism was equalled with racism. The German delegation together with other European countries stayed on, working towards a compromise proposal, which was to prevent Israel from being singled out in the final document. Having scheduled to spend no more than a day at Durban, Fischer extended his trip for a day shortening his trip to France due to prominence the Israel issue had gained in the duration of the conference. Throughout the conference the German delegation held various negotiations with Palestinian President Yassir Arafat and the Secretary General of the Arab League Amre Mussa in order to persuade them to change their position.¹⁵⁵ Fischer was in close contact with Israeli officials on the progress of the conference, who gave him advice on how to proceed.¹⁵⁶

When the UN Security Council attempted to pass a resolution condemning Sheikh Ahmed Yassin's assassination Germany, Britain and Romania were the only three

¹⁵³ Fischer Speech (2003).

¹⁵⁴ UN Security Council Resolution S/PV 4842, 14 October 2003.

¹⁵⁵ "Das Wort Entschuldigung Durfte Nicht Fallen", DPA, 3 September 2001.

¹⁵⁶ Pallade (2005), 290.

countries to have abstained. The resolution failed in any event as the US vetoed it.¹⁵⁷

Further, Germany successfully lobbied Western states including all EU member states to oppose a UN Human Rights Council resolution of August 2006, proposed mainly by Arab states, which one-sidedly condemned Israel, but failed to mention the disarmament of Hizbollah and its involvement in the hostilities.¹⁵⁸

2.4.3 Iranian Nuclear Armament

The Iranian nuclear weapons issue is of vital strategic interest to Israel and a great concern amongst the Israeli public. Ehud Olmert has repeatedly stated “The Jewish people, on whom the scars of the Holocaust are deeply etched, cannot allow itself to again face a threat against its very existence.”¹⁵⁹ Germany sees itself as having a historic responsibility to halt the Iranian government’s plans to acquire nuclear weapons and in doing so has put aside significant economic interests. The German government has been involved in negotiations with Iran over its nuclear programme through the E3 (Germany, France, Britain), the UN and other channels. The E3 have tried since 2003 to bring about a diplomatic solution, which had showed promise up until the election of Ahmedinejad in 2005.¹⁶⁰

Germany has, for many years, been the biggest exporter in Europe of machinery and other industrial goods to Iran, accounting for an annual trade volume of €4 billion. Despite this economic interest, the Merkel government has begun cutting back export

¹⁵⁷ Shlomo Shamir, “US Vetoes UN Resolution Censuring Israel for Yassin Killing”, *Ha’aretz*, 25 March 2004.

¹⁵⁸ Interview with Jonathan Miller.

¹⁵⁹ Olmert Speech (2007).

¹⁶⁰ Ahmedinejad had the team dealing with nuclear issues exchanged, which is seen as having jeopardised successful negotiations.

guarantees from about €1.4 billion in 2005 to about €900 million in 2006.¹⁶¹ The move has been triggered by the Ahmedinejad government's refusal to cooperate with the E3 towards accomplishing a civilian use nuclear programme and due to Ahmedinejad's comments, made before a student group in Tehran in October 2005, "to wipe Israel off the map of nations".¹⁶²

The German Foreign Ministry was one of a few ministries in Europe to summon an official of the Iranian embassy to the Foreign Ministry to rebuff the government for the remarks.¹⁶³ In the UN, the German government supported a UN General Assembly resolution to condemn the denial of the Holocaust, which was another demonstration by Merkel that the comments of Ahmedinejad were intolerable.¹⁶⁴

The German government's policy of cutting back guarantees and supporting sanctions against Iran has already caused considerable tension between the government and industry, who point to the situation being used by other countries to expand their economic interests, foremost Russia and China, and the adverse effect on the domestic economy.¹⁶⁵ Nevertheless, as the first round of sanctions proved insufficient, Germany has stepped up efforts with the US, France and Britain to extend sanctions, pressuring Russia and China into cutting back loan guarantees as well.¹⁶⁶ As a country, embattled by a high unemployment rate, Germany's move is particularly striking. As Merkel has stated during a meeting with American President George W. Bush: "In view of the German history, tolerating Iran's position in regards to dealing with the Holocaust and Israel's right to exist

¹⁶¹ Mathias Brüggmann, "Wirtschaft Hofft Auf Einigung im Atomstreit", Handesblatt, 21 February 2007.

¹⁶² Ahmedinejad as cited in Gareth Smyth, "Israel Should be 'Wiped off the Map' Says Iran", Financial Times, 26 October 2005.

¹⁶³ Shirzad Bozorghmehr, "Annan: Dismay over Iranian Comments on Israel", CNN, 27 October 2005.

¹⁶⁴ "US to Present UN Resolution Condemning Holocaust Deniers" Reuters, 23 January 2007.

¹⁶⁵ Alexandra Olson, "Iran Sanctions Concern China, Russia", AP, 9 March 2007.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

is completely unacceptable.”¹⁶⁷ During a meeting with Olmert, Merkel personally assured the Israeli Prime Minister that Germany shares the Israeli government’s concerns, reiterating that “Iran must be prevented from obtaining nuclear weapons”.¹⁶⁸

2.5 Security Cooperation

The events of 9/11 and the realisation that three of the terrorists had lived and coordinated the attacks in Hamburg and other parts of Germany provided a shock to German public and the security services. Head of the Chancellery Thomas de Maizière, who coordinates the work of Germany’s foreign secret service, the BND, stated, “[9/11] presented an unprecedented intrusion of terrorism into our lives [...]. This affected in particular the security services and their work”.¹⁶⁹ As a country with whom Germany enjoyed a long history of security cooperation going back to the late 1950s, 9/11 provided a new subtext for learning from Israeli experiences. Israel provided Germany with intelligence, training and advice, highlighting the special and close relations the countries enjoy.

In a move to tighten its cooperation with other intelligence services and to improve intelligence gathering methods the BND increased cooperation with the Mossad. Mossad officials offered training to the BND and shared any information of potential terrorist attacks in Germany, for example, during the German World Cup 2006.¹⁷⁰ Sharing of information is particularly significant given that Israel tends to closely guard security information, stemming from fears of information spillage or leaks.¹⁷¹ A treaty was signed between the German Interior Ministry and the Israeli Interior Ministry at the beginning of

¹⁶⁷ Merkel as cited in Merkel-Bush Meeting: Joint Press Conference, Washington, 13 January 2006.

¹⁶⁸ “ Hamas Muss auf Gewalt Verzichten”, DPA, 29 January 2001.

¹⁶⁹ Maizière Speech (2006).

¹⁷⁰ Israeli security services reportedly warned Germany of possible attacks planned by Hizbollah member Imad Mugniyah.

¹⁷¹ Shpiro and Becher (2005), 172.

2006, obligating Israel, Germany and three other European countries to share any information on terrorism activity requested by the other side.¹⁷² The practical implementation of the deal, for instance, became evident when following news that countries in Europe might be targeted by Al-Qaida during the winter holidays of 2006, State Secretary and former head of the BND August Hanning flew to Israel to evaluate the accuracy of the reports.¹⁷³

The BND also expanded the long established practice going back to the BND's first director Reinhard Gehlen of providing passports to Israeli agents. As the Mossad was no longer able to use Canadian and New Zealand identities¹⁷⁴, German passports became more important in the operational planning of the Israeli secret service. Utilising the identities of German citizens who had not travelled outside of Europe, the Mossad has used these passports for different operations such as investigating, and according to some sources sabotaging, Iran's nuclear programme.¹⁷⁵ The use of German passports by the Mossad creates a risk for Germany should its operations become public, which may cause wide media attention and would be likely to lead to the setting up of a board of inquiry investigating the matter. Despite this risk, Germany has continued to supply passports.

Since 1996 German security officials have been involved in prisoner exchanges in Israel. Germany's contacts with Iranian government officials and Hizbollah have supplied Israel with an indirect communication channel, which is significant given Israel's hostility towards both Iran and Hizbollah. Germany has built a trusted relationship with Israel in

¹⁷² Grayeff, Yigal. "Ezra: Israel to Share Intelligence with Four European Countries", Jerusalem Post, 16 February 2006.

¹⁷³ Martin Lutz, "Anschlag in Frankfurt Scheiterte Nur am Geld", Berliner Morgenpost, 21 November 2006.

¹⁷⁴ The unauthorised use of Canadian passports by the Mossad was revealed following a botched attempt by Mossad agents to assassinate Khaled Mashal in 1997. In 2004 Mossad agents tried to illegally obtain passports in New Zealand, which was revealed after a passport officer recognised the foreign accents.

¹⁷⁵ "Mossad Arbeitet mit Deutschen Pässen", Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger, 13 January 2006.

these types of situations, which has added to the special relationship. In 1996 former Secret Services Coordinator in the Chancellery Bernd Schmidbauer negotiated the return of the bodies of two Israeli soldiers killed in 1986 and 17 SLA fighters in return for the release of 40 Lebanese prisoners and 123 bodies of Hizbollah fighters.¹⁷⁶ The success of this negotiation facilitated two further negotiations in 2004 and 2006. In 2004 Germany made use of previous contacts including Iranian officials.¹⁷⁷ As Hizbollah's financial and military supporter, the deal only materialised due to the sanctioning of the Iranian leadership, with whom the Germans were in close contact during the negotiations.¹⁷⁸ Following the Israeli-Lebanese conflict of 2006, head of the BND Ernst Uhrlau was asked by Israel to mediate a deal with Hizbollah for the release of the abducted soldiers Eldad Regev and Ehud Goldwasser.¹⁷⁹ The 2004 exchange has been seen in Germany as one of the BND's most successful operations in recent years. In Israel, former German Ambassador Rudolf Dreßler recalls the warm reception the embassy staff received from the Israeli public.¹⁸⁰

However, in spite of closer cooperation in the wake of 9/11, German-Israeli security cooperation has clear limitations. Despite Israeli requests to ban the German branch of Hizbollah, the German Interior Ministry has so far refrained from doing so. While talks in this direction have been held between current Interior Minister Wolfgang Schäuble and his Israeli counterpart Gideon Ezra, Germany pointed out that Hizbollah's around 900 members have kept a low profile in Germany following 9/11, making it

¹⁷⁶ SLA stands for South Lebanese Army. "Deutsche Vermittlungsübungen im Nahen Osten", Welt, 28 August 2006.

¹⁷⁷ Uhrlau later commented on the deal: "I was deeply moved to experience what it means to Israel to bring its soldiers home." See Uhrlau as cited in Martin Klingst. "Der Schweiger", Die Zeit, 1 December 2005.

¹⁷⁸ "Deutsche Vermittlungsübungen im Nahen Osten", Welt, 28 August 2006.

¹⁷⁹ "BND-Chef Soll im Libanon Vermitteln", DPA, 31 August 2006.

¹⁸⁰ Dressler in Ben-Natan (2005), 255.

difficult to ban the organisation.¹⁸¹ In addition, as Hizbollah is not part of the EU terrorism list, and due to objections by Britain, France and Spain, Hizbollah's addition to the list remains unlikely, Germany prefers not to go ahead alone. However, Germany's position as a mediator for prisoner exchanges between Israel and Hizbollah would be compromised by adding Hizbollah to the list of terrorist organisations.

2.6 Military Cooperation

Germany and Israel have a long history of military cooperation dating back to a meeting between David Ben-Gurion and Konrad Adenauer on 14 March 1960 in the hotel Waldorf Astoria, where both leaders agreed that in addition to economic aid Germany would also support the Jewish state militarily.¹⁸² German political leaders have emphasised that close defence relations are a fundamental part of the special relationship and neither Schröder nor Merkel have deviated from this position. For instance, privately Schröder reportedly assured newly elected US President George W. Bush that Germany “makes a significant contribution to Israel's military stabilisation without dragging this into the public”.¹⁸³ State Secretary of Defence Peter Eickenboom (SPD), who had overseen the present submarine deal, stated on German radio that “the foremost reason [for the deal] consists in the special responsibility of Germany towards maintaining the existence of the State of Israel.”¹⁸⁴

The US remains the major supplier of arms to Israel, however, Germany, the only other major supplier, provides an important contribution both quantitatively and strategically. The US between 1995-2005 accounted for 83 percent of the military supplies,

¹⁸¹ Grayeff, Yigal. “Ezra: Israel to Share Intelligence with Four European Countries”, *Jerusalem Post*, 16 February 2006.

¹⁸² Wolffsohn (2007), 508.

¹⁸³ Schröder as cited in Alexander Szandar, “Geheimnisse mit Tradition”, *Spiegel*, 9 December 2002.

¹⁸⁴ Eickenboom as cited in Silke Hasselmann, “Berlin Hält an U-Boot Deal mit Israel Fest”, *Tagesschau*, 30 January 2006.

whilst Germany supplied 17 percent, deriving mainly from the delivery of three Dolphin-type submarines in the late 1990s.¹⁸⁵ Between 2000 and 2005, German military supplies to Israel accounted for \$US 577 million.¹⁸⁶ Following the outbreak of the Second Intifada Israel's increased demand for ammunition, armoured vehicles, upgraded computer systems and engines for its Merkava tanks, is reflected in the balance sheet of German weapons exports to Israel in the period from 2001 onwards.¹⁸⁷ Omitting the year 2003¹⁸⁸, German weapons exports to Israel in the years between 2001 and 2005 were more than five times the value of the period between 1995 and 1998.¹⁸⁹ As the Second Intifada calmed down in 2004 and 2005 so did the value of military equipment delivered to Israel.¹⁹⁰

The intensity of military relations suggests that despite public pressure which was particularly strong during April 2002 following Israel's Operation Defensive Shield the German government has in the long term not reduced or cut sales of military equipment, but has met Israeli demand. This is reflected in a policy statement of April 2002, referred to above, in which Schröder stated that "Israel gets what it needs to maintain its security, and it receives this when it needs it".¹⁹¹

Germany is currently producing two Dolphin-type submarines. The strategic importance of these is illustrated by Defence Spokesman for the SPD Rainer Arnold who pointed out: "A little country like Israel needs to have a possibility to strike from the sea as

¹⁸⁵ Imported Weapons to Israel in 1995-2005, SIPRI. For an explanation of SIPRI figures see www.sipri.org.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ Merkava tanks use the same canons and hardware as the German Leopard II tank. In 2004 different German defence companies supplied parts for Israel's Merkava 3 tank such as the canon (Rheinmetall De Tec), a night vision system (Extel Systems Wedel), and the gear box (Renk AG). The Merkava 4 tank uses a German diesel engine produced by MTU Friedrichshafen.

¹⁸⁸ 1999, 2000 and 2003 have been omitted due to extraordinary weapons deliveries: In 1999 and 2000 Germany delivered three Dolphin submarines granted to Israel in the early 1990s, whilst in 2003 Israel borrowed and later bought two Patriot missile batteries from Germany.

¹⁸⁹ SIPRI valued the weapons deliveries for 2001, 2002, 2004, and 2005 at \$99 million compared to \$14 million worth of equipment in the years 1995, 1996, 1997 and 1998.

¹⁹⁰ Imported Weapons to Israel in 1995-2005, SIPRI.

¹⁹¹ Schröder, Policy Statement on the Situation in the Middle East, 25 April 2005.

it lacks this possibility on the ground.”¹⁹² Difficult to detect, the submarines are the least vulnerable weapons platform for attacks. Equipped with diesel-electric propulsion systems, the two submarines will be able to remain submerged for much longer periods of time than the three nuclear-arms capable submarines delivered by Germany in the late 1990s.¹⁹³ The submarine deal, however, is also significant in other respects, underlining that the special relationship is not just a verbal commitment. Estimated at over half a billion each, Germany agreed to make a contribution of one third of the costs or a maximum of €333 million. However, Germany does have an economic interest in that the deal will help the embattled submarine industry in Kiel, securing an estimated 150 jobs.¹⁹⁴ Moreover, the deal gave Germany’s Howaldtswerke Deutsche Werft GmbH (HDW), which is producing the submarines, a stronger voice in the European joint venture ThyssenKrupp Marine Systems, which merged with HDW in January 2005, further making ThyssenKrupp Marine Systems the world market leader.¹⁹⁵

Approval in the Federal Security Council¹⁹⁶ on 21 November 2005 only succeeded because the Grand Coalition under Chancellor Angela Merkel was willing to go ahead with the deal under whose government payment falls.¹⁹⁷ Furthermore, the government avoided asking Israel for any guarantees that the submarines would not be modified for nuclear capability as some members of the Green Party had demanded. According to the German Defence Ministry, HDW will build nuclear capable 650 millimetre torpedo tubes in

¹⁹² Arnold as cited in Lukas Wallraff, “Protest gegen U-Boot Lieferung an Israel”, *Tageszeitung*, 25 August 2006.

¹⁹³ Ramit Plushnick-Masti, “Israel Buys 2 Nuclear-Capable Submarines”, *Washington Post*, 25 August 2006.

¹⁹⁴ Interview with Mordechai Lewy.

¹⁹⁵ Silke Hasselmann, “Berlin Hält an U-Boot Deal mit Israel Fest”, *Tagesschau*, 30 January 2006.

¹⁹⁶ The Federal Security Council approves important German armaments sales. It is composed of the Chancellor, the Head of the Chancellery and six cabinet members.

¹⁹⁷ As stated in the budget law of 2006, payment of the first €163 million will be split in three instalments. Primor Adar. “Would be German Chancellor Promises to Fight Anti-Semitism”, *Ha’aretz*, 14 September 2005.

addition to the 533 millimetre tubes, indicating that Germany is fully aware of Israel's proposed use of these submarines as a means of nuclear deterrence.¹⁹⁸

Under the Merkel government, the Federal Security Council has further approved providing Israel with a test model of the Dingo II troop transport vehicle. Israel has shown interest in the purchase of over 100 such vehicles, which is the German army's standard vehicle in UN and NATO missions abroad. Easily transportable by air, armoured and mine-proof, the Dingo can transport up to eight persons and adapts to any type of terrain. Crucially, the political sensitivity to this arms deal derives from the fact that these vehicles can be used in the Palestinian territories during Israeli military operations. Since the Merkel government has approved the delivery of a test model, it has indicated its willingness to go ahead with the deal in spite of the above concerns.¹⁹⁹

This is particularly striking against the backdrop of the set of armament guidelines, which the German government adopted in 2000 following demands by the Green Party. The guidelines set forth a restrictive armament sales policy, making particular provisions for rejecting requests by countries involved in conflict or with problematic human rights records. Referring to Germany's special responsibility to Israel, the government valued this obligation higher than its self-imposed policy guidelines as was evident in the actions of the Federal Security Council.²⁰⁰

The intensity of relations is further understood if seen in light of the tensions between Germany and the United States over Schröder's categorical 'no' to participation in

¹⁹⁸ Silke Hasselmann, "Berlin Hält an U-Boot Deal mit Israel Fest", Tagesschau, 30 January 2006.

¹⁹⁹ Hans-Jürgen Leersch, "Bundeswehr-Transporter Geht als Testfahrzeug nach Israel", Die Welt, 3 July 2006.

²⁰⁰ Out of 70 Israeli requests for military equipment to the Federal Security Council, only three requests were turned down by the Federal Security Council between 1998 and 2002. Policy Principles for the Export of War Weapons and Other Military Equipment, Federal Republic of Germany, 19 January 2000.

the Iraq War, which had secured him re-election in September 2002. Despite Germany's decision not to participate in the war and the decision of the Federal Security Council to defer decisions on military supplies for several months after Operation Defensive Shield, supplies were resumed in December 2002 when Israel began making preparations in case of renewed Scud missile attacks as a result of the impending Iraq War. In response to Israel's concerns about such attacks, Germany lent Israel two Patriot missile batteries.²⁰¹ Unofficially, Germany reassured Israel that it would back Israel if attacked.²⁰² As a further indication that the German government was interested in maintaining close relations regardless of differences over Iraq, after a three year pause it resumed the so-called strategic dialogue with Israel at the state-secretary level in 2003.²⁰³

Defence relations were continued on the multilateral level. The German Navy as part of the NATO naval forces takes part in joint exercises with the Israeli Navy. These relations were followed by an invitation in May 2005 from the Israeli Navy to the German Navy to celebrate 40 years of diplomatic relations.²⁰⁴

As a further dimension to the defence relations, cooperation among Israeli and German defence companies intensified. In November 2003 Tadiran Communications announced that it had acquired 75 percent of the German firm EADS Racoms, which produces communication systems used by the German army.²⁰⁵ In June 2004 the Israeli state-owned company Rafael announced that it signed an agreement to establish a new German-based company, EuroSpike GmbH, with two of Germany's biggest defence firms,

²⁰¹ Stein, Interview with 'Tagesspiegel', 8 December 2002.

²⁰² Interview with Mordechai Lewy.

²⁰³ After ministers state secretaries are the second highest-ranking civil servants in Germany, and as part of the strategic dialogue they discuss military issues. Dreßler in Ben-Natan (2005), 257.

²⁰⁴ Dreßler in Ben-Natan (2005), 256-257; and IDF official website.

²⁰⁵ Tadiran Communications Press Release: New Majority Shareholder in EADS Racoms, 18 November 2003.

Rheinmetall Defence Electronics GmbH and Diehl Munitionssysteme GmbH.²⁰⁶ Also in 2004 Rafael acquired the German company Dynamit Nobel Dynamics.²⁰⁷ Another Israeli state-owned company, Israel Aircraft Industries, announced in June 2004 that it had signed a cooperation agreement with Rheinmetall Defence Electronics GmbH to jointly offer an upgrade kit for Germany's battle tank Leopard.²⁰⁸

Following the Israeli-Lebanese conflict of 2006, Germany agreed to contribute to the UNIFIL mission with a contingent of up to 2,400 men, responsible for monitoring the sea traffic to Lebanon.²⁰⁹ This was remarkable given that both Israeli and German officials expressed concerns over the participation of German troops in the Middle East in 2002. In his policy statement of April 2002, Schröder stated that if there would ever be a German military participation in the Middle East, which he ruled out in 2002, it would have “to take into consideration historical sensibilities”.²¹⁰ Bavarian Minister President Edmund Stoiber, Schröder's competitor in the 2002 elections, stated during a plenary session in the Bundestag following Schröder's policy statement: “Against the background of our history, there cannot be a mission containing German soldiers in the Middle East conflict, even if a UN mandate [for such a mission] exists”.²¹¹ Israeli Ambassador Shimon Stein confirmed this view when he noted: “The time for these kinds of discussions is not ripe yet. German soldiers could evoke certain memories in some parts of Israeli society.”²¹²

²⁰⁶ Rafael Press Release: Eurospike GmbH Launched at EuroSatory, 15 June 2004.

²⁰⁷ Sadeh (2006), 1.

²⁰⁸ Rheinmetall AG Press Release: Rheinmetall Defence Electronics and IAI Sign Principles of Cooperation for Leopard, 16 June 2004.

²⁰⁹ UNIFIL stands for United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon. Created on the basis of Security Council resolutions 425 and 426 of the year 1978, its mandate was extended on the basis of Security Council resolution 1701 of 11 August 2006.

²¹⁰ Schröder, Policy Statement on the Situation in the Middle East, 25 April 2005.

²¹¹ Stoiber as cited in Bundestag Parliamentary Protocols 14/233, 16.

²¹² Stein, Interview with ‘Spiegel’, 15 April 2002.

The expanded UNIFIL mission brought German troops close to Israeli territory, something unprecedented in the sphere of the special relationship. Although in 1996 Prime Minister Shimon Peres, having hoped to strike a peace agreement with Syria, told Chancellor Helmut Kohl in private conversation that he would welcome German troops in the Golan Heights to oversee a future agreement²¹³, Olmert's public embrace of the presence of German soldiers remains unparalleled.²¹⁴

2.7 Political Dissenting Voices

Despite the strong level of government support, there have been dissenting voices both within ruling parties in the coalition and the opposition in the Bundestag. Within the SPD not all party members, including at times government ministers, have been supportive of the government line. Opposition became particularly evident during the Israeli-Lebanese conflict. Against the background of German government restraint, a group of SPD politicians known as the Seeheimer circle released a statement calling on Israel to "stop the disproportionate use of military force against the Lebanese civilian population."²¹⁵ SPD foreign policy expert Niels Annen called Israel's bombardment of Lebanese infrastructure 'purely insane', adding that it would be "adventurous to believe that one could eliminate Hizbollah in that manner."²¹⁶ During her visit to Lebanon Development Minister Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul (SPD) condemned Israel's use of cluster bombs. Subsequently, Merkel distanced herself from Wieczorek-Zeul stating that Wieczorek-Zeul expressed a private opinion, which does not reflect the government stance. In the SPD

²¹³ Joseph Fitchett, "German Presence in Golan is Seen as a Likely Peace Ploy", International Herald Tribune, 24 January 1996.

²¹⁴ Israeli Ambassador Shimon Stein called Olmert's remarks 'a novum' and a 'new precedent'. See Stein as cited in Oliver Bradley, "Olmert Praises Germany in Lebanon Crisis", EJP, 7 August 2006.

²¹⁵ Seeheimer Circle Press Statement on the Middle East: The Suffering and Death Has to End, 25 July 2006.

²¹⁶ Annen as cited in Daryl Lindsey, "Germany's Mideast Balancing Act", Spiegel, 1 August 2006.

executive committee several members demanded that the party release an official statement calling for an immediate cease fire, which, however, fell through as Steinmeier and General Secretary Hubertus Heil opposed such a move. Others in the party protested against Steinmeier's call for the disarmament of Hizbollah. Some left wing parliamentarians of the SPD such as Michael Müller even suggested that tensions over Germany's positioning in the war "could spell the end of the Grand Coalition government".²¹⁷

The CDU/CSU has been relatively restrained in its criticism of Israel while in opposition between 1998 and 2005. However, as evident from a motion put forward by the party on 24 April 2002, it went much further in its criticism of Israeli policy than the Schröder government in the government policy statement of 25 April 2002.²¹⁸ Individual party members have been calling for economic sanctions against Israel in the aftermath of Operation Defensive Shield. Karl Lamers (CDU), the party's foreign policy spokesman until 2005, clashed with Fischer over his policy of restraint towards Israel.²¹⁹ In an interview Lamers had argued that Israel's military incursions furthered Palestinian terrorism.²²⁰ Several parliamentarians, including the head of the German-Arab parliamentary friendship group, Joachim Hörster (CDU), further queried the government on Germany's customs policy towards Israeli products.²²¹ Other CDU/CSU parliamentarians queried the government's financial support for Israeli institutions such as

²¹⁷ Müller as cited in Daryl Lindsey, "Germany's Mideast Balancing Act", Spiegel, 1 August 2006.

²¹⁸ Bundestag Printed Paper 14/8862, 1-3.

²¹⁹ Lamers called Fischer a 'lackey' of Israel.

²²⁰ Lamers, Interview with 'Tageszeitung', 9 July 2002.

²²¹ Bundestag Printed Paper 15/1474, 12.

Yad Vashem and the Yitzhak Rabin Centre or took issue with the government's planned contribution to the 2005 submarine deal.²²²

The Green Party, which was part of two Schröder coalitions and which now forms part of the opposition, despite acknowledging the special relationship, has provided opposition on a range of issues relating to Israel.²²³ This is despite the fact that Joschka Fischer, a member of the Green Party, has had such a strong influence in supporting Israel. The Green Party clashed with Joschka Fischer on grounds of him having shown considerable restraint on a number of issues such as Israel's policy of targeted killings, the building of the separation barrier, as well as for having called involvement of the ICJ as inappropriate.²²⁴ Traditionally, the Green Party has been concerned with human rights issues, and this has been demonstrated in its reaction to Israel's military operations. Party statements, for instance, cautioned against the massive use of force in Lebanon and the killing of 19 civilians in Beit Hanun.²²⁵

The Green Party has expressed its criticism of weapons exports to Israel, as this goes against the Green Party's general policy, as set out in the party programme, of non-violence.²²⁶ Green Party opposition to arms sales relates to a number of countries and should not be seen as singling out Israel. Once the Green Party took government responsibility in 1998, the Green Party members either altered their stance or left the party, accepting the use of 'defensive' weapons. Despite this, the party has continued to call for a

²²² Bundestag Printed Paper 14/9306, 17; and Ibid. 16/158.

²²³ As the Green Party's Defence Spokesman, Winfried Nachtwei, for instance, stated on Israeli operations in the Palestinian territories: "Our solidarity with the Israeli people and the Israeli state cannot mean that we wholeheartedly support every measure to fight terrorism." Nachtwei, Interview with 'Jungle World', 11 December 2002.

²²⁴ Interview with Jörn Böhme.

²²⁵ Green Party Press Release: Olmert Has to Turn Around, 9 November 2006.

²²⁶ Alliance 90/The Green Party Programme, 15 and Humphreys (2004), 411.

restrictive armaments policy while in coalition with the SPD, leading the government to adopt respective guidelines in 2000.²²⁷

The Green Party was opposed to the delivery of Fuchs Armed Personnel Carrier (APC) vehicles requested by Israel in 2002. As the Green Party's Defence Spokesman Winfried Nachtwei argued: "These vehicles may not only be used for Israeli defence purposes, but also in Palestinian residential areas. Since the legitimate fight against terrorism has also led to disproportionate actions of the Israeli army including human rights violations, we cannot permit the delivery of these transporters."²²⁸ It turned out that the Fuchs vehicles were never delivered.

Protests resurfaced in the debate about the delivery of two additional submarines to Israel, which had previously been an issue of concern when Germany delivered submarines in the 1990s. The Green Party demanded a guarantee from Israel that the submarines would not be armed with nuclear weapons. The Green Party in the budget committee proposed to have the delivery cancelled if the submarines were outfitted to possess nuclear strike capability, but the proposal was turned down by the SPD, CDU/CSU and the FDP against the votes of the Green Party and the Left Party.²²⁹

Traditionally, the FDP has been reserved in its criticism of Israel, however, during 2002 the FDP party executive committee endorsed a call for sanctions in its party policy programme. Several parliamentary party members spoke out against Israeli military operations and criticised the government for having prevented sanctions in the EU.²³⁰

²²⁷ The Green Party exerted pressure on its coalition partner after it had emerged that Germany delivered an ammunition factory and the test model of a Leopard tank to Turkey.

²²⁸ Nachtwei, Interview with 'Jungle World', 11 December 2002.

²²⁹ Bundestag Printed Papers 16/1326, 37.

²³⁰ Marianne Heuwagen, "Gebremster Turbo", Süddeutsche Zeitung, 12 April 2002.

Among the parties represented in the Bundestag, the Left Party, who has succeeded the Socialist Unity Party of the former GDR, has traditionally been the most critical of Israel. Its party members have opposed military operations of Israel and have questioned Israel's human rights record.²³¹ Further, the party objected to the supply of Patriot missile batteries as they objected to proliferation of arms, despite the fact that such a move was supported by all other parties in the Bundestag.²³² Its policy of non-proliferation has caused the party to criticise Israel's possession of nuclear weapons. The two current heads Oskar Lafontaine and Gregor Gysi and Foreign Policy Spokesman Norman Paech have come out with statements arguing that whilst Iran has to be prevented from obtaining nuclear weapons, India, Pakistan and Israel would have to disarm as well.²³³

More recently, the Left Party has stated that the Israeli-Lebanese conflict constituted a violation of international law on the part of Israel. Further, Oskar Lafontaine called for Israel's disarmament as a parallel move to any disarmament of Hizbollah, whilst demanding that UNIFIL troops should also be stationed within Israel.²³⁴ The Left Party was also the most outspoken in its demands to recognise and negotiate with Hamas. To publicise their point they invited Hamas' spokesman Rhazi Hamad to speak at a party conference in Berlin in November 2006, knowing that the government would not allow him an entry visa. Left party parliamentarian Wolfgang Gehrcke explained the purpose of the conference as having "been the Left Party's attempt at influencing the government in its policy formulation regarding conflict resolution measures at ending the Israeli-Palestinian conflict."²³⁵ On the submarine deal approved by Schröder in 2005, the Left

²³¹ Robin Alexander, "Linksfraktion Fiebert Schon", TAZ, 5 September 2005.

²³² "SPD und Grüne Signalisieren Bereitschaft zur Patriot Lieferung", AFP, 26 November 2002.

²³³ Left Party Newsletter: Non-Military Solution to Iran Conflict, February 2006.

²³⁴ "In Gefährlicher Mission. Deutsche Soldaten für Israel?" Berlin Mitte ZDF, 17 August 2006.

²³⁵ Oliver Bradley, "Hamas and the German Party of the Left", EJP, 6 November 2006.

Party was the only party to propose cancelling Germany's financial commitment in the budget committee.²³⁶ Despite the above, deputy head Katja Kipping has been anxious to recognise Israel's right to exist, stating that "the historic responsibility constitutes the reason to defend Israel's right to exist, including in left discourse."²³⁷

In recent years, there have also been dissenting voices, however few, among Israeli politicians. This opposition mainly focuses on certain aspects of the cultural normalisation process. Having lost extended family in the Shoah, members of the Knesset such as Chemi Doron (Shinui) or Gila Finkelstein (National Religious Party), for instance, were opposed to President Köhler speaking in German in the Knesset. Chemi Doron and Danny Naveh (Likud), children of survivors of the Shoah, publicly stated that they oppose buying German products and visiting Germany on account of having lost relatives in the Shoah.²³⁸ Opposition had also emerged prior to President Rau speaking in the Knesset in German, causing different members of the Knesset, including Shmuel Halpert (United Torah Judaism), Roni Milo (Centre Party), and Danny Naveh to boycott the speech.²³⁹

When the Israeli cabinet discussed the content of an Israeli government declaration on the 40 years anniversary of diplomatic relations, Health Minister Danny Naveh demanded a reference that "there is no forgive-and-forget regarding the Holocaust" to be included in the final statement in commemoration of the survivors of the Shoah.²⁴⁰ At times, opposition also reflected public pressure, for instance, when Danny Naveh unsuccessfully tried to prevent the printing of a commemoration stamp marking 40 years

²³⁶ Bundestag Printed Papers 16/1326, 37.

²³⁷ Katja Kipping, "Jenseits der Konfrontationslogik", TAZ, 12 December 2006.

²³⁸ Naveh's mother, for instance, was a survivor of the concentration camp in Bergen-Belsen. "German Not Wanted in Israel", Deutsche Welle, 18 January 2005.

²³⁹ Gideon Alon, "German Leader Asks Forgiveness", Ha'aretz, 17 February 2000.

²⁴⁰ For the statement see Israeli Cabinet Communiqué, 15 May 2005; and Herb Keinon, "Israel and Germany Mark 40 Years of Ties", Jerusalem Post, 16 May 2005.

of diplomatic relations. Although he had initially approved the stamp as head of the Ministerial Committee on Ceremonies and Symbols, he came under pressure from a group of Holocaust survivors to incorporate references to the Shoah.²⁴¹ While there are personal factors involved, stronger opposition among the centre-right and religious political camp has to be seen in light of the more critical stance of conservative and religious groups to normalising relations with Germany.

2.8 Perceptions of External Actors

The special relations between Israel and Germany have also been clearly registered, either positively or negatively, by different external actors or voices. US President Bush praised Merkel's efforts in bringing about sanctions against Iran, whilst others in the US government pointed out Germany's role in preventing an unconditional cease fire during the Israeli-Lebanese conflict.²⁴² In contrast, amongst European actors as well as among actors in the Middle East, Germany's support for Israel is seen with mixed feelings.²⁴³ Whilst the British government under Tony Blair alongside Germany has been amongst the European countries extending diplomatic support to Israel in the EU, other countries in the EU have taken issue with German support, leading, for instance, to Germany being sidelined by Spain, Italy and France when it launched its Middle East initiative of November 2006.

Palestinian policy makers have pointed out that Germany's support for Israel has somewhat disqualified it as a mediator in the Israeli-Arab conflict. As former Palestinian negotiator Ahmad Khalidi stated, Germany due to historical reasons cannot be regarded as

²⁴¹ Judy Siegel, "Survivors Upset by German-Israeli Stamp", *Jerusalem Post*, 22 December 2006.

²⁴² Oliver Bradley, "Olmert Praises Germany in Lebanon Crisis", *EJP*, 7 August 2006.

²⁴³ Interview with Peter Fischer.

an impartial mediator in the Israeli-Arab conflict, however, it can make a contribution on 'technical issues' such as facilitating prisoner exchanges.²⁴⁴ Germany's support for the security barrier, particularly in the outspoken manner of Otto Schily, amongst other issues drew public protest by the Palestinian government.²⁴⁵ Since Hamas' electoral victory and the formation of the Palestinian Unity government, criticism particularly focussed on Germany's role in the EU boycott.²⁴⁶ Palestinian negotiators have expressed unease with Chancellor Merkel. During visits, Merkel angered the Palestinian government by refusing to meet with the families of Palestinian prisoners. She has also refrained from meeting Christian leaders and representatives of Palestinian civil society and declined an invitation by Mahmoud Abbas to be taken to those parts of the separation barrier, which consist of concrete wall.²⁴⁷

Merkel's comments that she sees German participation in the UNIFIL mission as a contribution to guaranteeing Israel's right to exist and her calls for Hizbollah's disarmament have also drawn public opposition by Hizbollah head Hassan Nasrallah, who during a mass rally in Beirut on 22 September 2006 announced: "She [Merkel] says it is her aim to defend Israel, but I tell her, even if they [UNIFIL troops] control the sea, the air and the land, our movement will not be weakened."²⁴⁸ UNIFIL spokesman Alexander Ivanko has commented that for weeks his troops were busy explaining to the Lebanese population that the expansion of the mandate also served Lebanese interests.²⁴⁹ The German embassy in Beirut has meanwhile issued a warning that Germany's military

²⁴⁴ Senior associate member of St. Antony's College Ahmed Khalidi kindly answered my question following his lecture at Wadham College on 19 May 2006.

²⁴⁵ "Palestinians Ask Germany to Explain Minister's Pro-Fence Remark", BBC News, 14 September 2004.

²⁴⁶ Steven Erlanger, "Hamas Fighters Appear to Tighten Hold in Gaza", New York Times, 3 February 2007.

²⁴⁷ Khaled Abu Toameh, "PA Upset over Merkel's Pro-Israel Stance", Jerusalem Post, 4 April 2007.

²⁴⁸ Merkel, Interview with 'Welt am Sonntag', 20 August 2006 and "Nasrallah Kritisiert Merkel", NTV, 22 September 2006.

²⁴⁹ Ulrike Putz, "Schlimmster Feind Ist die Langeweile", Spiegel, 30 October 2006.

engagement may lead to “hostility and even attacks against Germans in Lebanon”.²⁵⁰ Some media reports have further suggested that Germany’s participation in UNIFIL would jeopardise its role as a future mediator between Hizbollah and Israel.²⁵¹

²⁵⁰ “Warnung vor Racheakten an Deutschen im Libanon”, Spiegel, 6 January 2007.

²⁵¹ Daryl Lindsey, “Germany’s Mideast Balancing Act”, Spiegel, 1 August 2006.

3. Public Opinion

3.1 Sources

Prior to discussing findings on Israeli-German relations on the public opinion level, introductory remarks shall explain some of the survey data analysis used hereafter such as the Bertelsmann survey and opinion polls conducted by Israeli research and polling institutes such as PORI, the Israeli Institute for Economic & Social Research and Keevoon.

The most systematic and methodologically sound survey on Israeli-German relations in recent times was carried out by the German Bertelsmann Foundation in February 2007, which was part of the Bertelsmann Foundation's efforts to foster Israeli-German and Jewish-German relations.²⁵² The survey covers mutual perceptions of Germans, Israelis, and American Jews, dealing with Israeli-German-American Jewish relations against the background of Germany's Nazi past.²⁵³ It further includes opinions on issues related to the Middle East such as Germany's military participation in UNIFIL and threat perceptions on Iran's nuclear programme. On some questions such as those related to 'guilt' and 'closure' the survey provides comparative results of a similar survey conducted in the year 1991. The number of interviewees amounted to 1,004 German participants, 1,115 Jewish participants in Israel and 500 Jewish participants in the US. Participants were surveyed by means of telephone interviews between 21 January and 25 January 2007 by institutes belonging to Gallup International Association. The median

²⁵² For instance, since 1992 the Bertelsmann Foundation has been running the so-called German-Jewish dialogue, a discussion forum for German and Jewish elites. In 2000 the German-Jewish Dialogue programme was supplemented by the German-Israeli Young Leaders Exchange programme.

²⁵³ The survey is available online in both English and German under www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de. The unpublished tables, containing all breakdowns, were kindly provided by the Director of the German-Jewish Dialogue programme Stephan Vopel. Perceptions of American Jews are not included in the following discussion, but it can be briefly noted that a positive attitude to Germany, evident in findings on Israeli perceptions to Germany, has also been found amongst this group.

margin of error lies at +/-3.1 percent (n=1000) and +/-4.3 percent (n=500). Crucially, apart from sex, education, marital status, and age, the survey provides additional breakdowns according to geographic location (West and East Germany), income and party affiliation on the part of German participants and additional information on the level of religiosity and ethnicity among Israeli participants.²⁵⁴

In addition to the Bertelsmann Foundation, the KAS and the FES, given those institutions' concern for monitoring Israeli-German relations, have also initiated surveys. Commissioned by the FES, the Israeli Institute for Economic & Social Research, in 2000, published a study of in-depth interviews with Jewish Israeli elites, supplemented by a survey conducted in 1999 among 512 Jewish participants in Israel on various questions related to Israeli-German relations.²⁵⁵ In 2004 the FES commissioned a further study on Israeli youth attitudes to aspects of national identity, which included surveys on perceptions of Germany. The study was a follow-up to a FES survey conducted among Israeli youth in 1998.²⁵⁶

In February 2007 the KAS followed with its own survey, conducted by Israeli marketing institute Keevoon among 511 Israeli participants (442 Jews and 69 Israeli Arabs). In contrast to the Bertelsmann survey, published shortly before, the KAS survey supplemented questions on Israeli-German relations with a set of questions on Israeli-European relations. The margin of error lies at +/-4.5 percent.²⁵⁷ The study, however, is methodologically flawed in some respects. Breakdowns in terms of age, ethnicity and sex are only sporadically provided and are not available on differences between Israeli Arabs

²⁵⁴ Germans and Jews, Bertelsmann Survey (2007), 4-7.

²⁵⁵ Israelis and Germans. The Ambivalence of Normality (2000), 28.

²⁵⁶ The Change of Israel Youth's Attitudes (2004).

²⁵⁷ KAS Survey (2007), 2.

and the Jewish population in Israel. This is particularly striking as one can expect clear differences on questions such as “[a]fter the Madrid and London terror attacks [...], do you think that Europeans understand Israel’s security needs more or less?” Moreover, a number of the statistics are largely irrelevant. For instance, the survey compares the popularity of the EU and the Vatican amongst the Israeli population.²⁵⁸ Still, bearing these limitations in mind, the benefit of the study lies in covering aspects that have not previously been dealt with by other surveys such as the impact of personal visits to Germany on perception.²⁵⁹

In addition, over the years the Israeli marketing institute PORI has conducted a number of opinion polls measuring Israeli attitudes towards Germany, which were devised and commissioned by Moshe Zimmermann, Director of the Richard Koebner Minerva Centre for German History at the Hebrew University. Besides questions related to specific events such as the screening of the Israeli movie ‘Walking on Waters’ (‘LaLehet Al HaMayim’) of 2004 or attitudes to the World Cup 2006, the Koebner Minerva Centre has over the years monitored Israeli opinion on the specific question whether the “Germany of today is a different Germany from Nazi Germany”. The annual poll contains percentage breakdowns according to age groups, religion, ethnicity, origin (immigrant or second generation), and education.²⁶⁰

Against the background of the 40 years anniversary of diplomatic relations, a small survey of five questions was also carried out in 2005 by the Israeli Institute for Economic & Social Research on behalf of the Swiss magazine Die Weltwoche.²⁶¹ The survey was conducted among 550 Jewish Israelis and included questions on attitudes towards

²⁵⁸ KAS Survey (2007), 11.

²⁵⁹ KAS Survey (2007), 8 and Germans and Jews, Bertelsmann Survey (2007), 57.

²⁶⁰ PORI polls were kindly provided by Professor Moshe Zimmermann.

²⁶¹ Pierre Heumann, “Das Gestern Stirbt Nie”, Weltwoche, 19 May 2005.

Germany against the background of the Shoah as well as perceptions on German policy towards Israel and German Antisemitism in contrast to other European countries.²⁶²

In terms of German public opinion of Israel, a number of polls, conducted by the German polling institutes Forsa and Emnid on behalf of German print media or TV, have covered specific questions such as Germany's participation in the UNIFIL mission or the provision of Fuchs vehicles. In addition, the so-called Transatlantic Trends survey, set up in 2002 by the German Marshall Fund and the Compagnia di San Paolo, has provided an annual sympathy barometer for the years 2002 to 2006, in which German participants were asked to rate their feeling towards Israel on a scale 0-100, 100 being a very positive and 0 being very negative.²⁶³ Since 2003 the survey has also included the Palestinians in the sympathy rating. Further, in 2003, the Eurobarometer ran a famous poll on threat perceptions among European countries.²⁶⁴

On perceptions of the Second World War, the Austrian IMAS marketing institute together with its sub-branches and a number of partner institutes have run two surveys in 1995 and 2005, comparing the views of a number of countries such as Russia, Poland, Ukraine, Austria, Czech Republic, Hungary and Germany. In Germany the pool of people interviewed amounted to 2,013 people above the age of 16. Interviews were conducted face to face.²⁶⁵ The German institute Media Tenor, which observes German media coverage on a range of issues, has further conducted a qualitative and quantitative survey

²⁶² The survey in Hebrew was kindly provided by Roby Nathanson. See Israeli Public Perception Regarding Different Questions to Germany and the Germans (2005).

²⁶³ Transatlantic Trends 2006: Topline Data, 18.

²⁶⁴ Eurobarometer (2003), 82.

²⁶⁵ IMAS International Report (2005), 12.

of German media coverage of Israel by the news programmes of ARD and ZDF throughout the past six years.²⁶⁶

Whilst Antisemitism has been dealt with in the Bertelsmann survey, there have been two further recent surveys of importance on Antisemitism in Germany, and one study on Antisemitic views in Europe. As part of a wider survey, in 2004, the Institute for Interdisciplinary Research on Conflict and Violence at Bielefeld University under the supervision of sociologist Wilhelm Heitmeyer conducted a poll amongst 2,000 German participants, which measured the prevalence of different types of Antisemitism present in German society. The study was part of a bigger project measuring hatred towards different minority groups.²⁶⁷ Further, in 2006 the FES commissioned an extensive study examining the level of right-wing extremist views in Germany. The study drew on findings of a survey of 4,872 participants holding German nationality (3,876 West Germans and 996 East Germans).²⁶⁸ Looking at Antisemitism in a European context, in 2005 the ADL surveyed 500 participants in each of a total of 12 European countries. Respondents were asked a series of questions such as whether Jews have too much power in the business world or whether Jews are responsible for the death of Jesus. In addition to country breakdowns, the findings include breakdowns according to age and education.²⁶⁹

3.2 Introduction to Findings

While political relations have been close, and arguably better than in any other previous period in the history of Israeli-German diplomatic relations, on the public opinion level a growing asymmetry is discernable, which many Israeli government officials and academics

²⁶⁶ *Media Tenor Analysis* (2006), 13. ARD and ZDF are the two biggest German public broadcasters.

²⁶⁷ *Deutsche Zustände* (2004), 4; on the project see information under www.uni-bielefeld.de.

²⁶⁸ Decker and Brähler (2006), 29.

²⁶⁹ Participating countries included Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Italy, Germany, Holland, Spain, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, Hungary and Poland. See *ADL Survey* (2005), 3.

see as the biggest challenge to preserving the special relationship. In a recent speech, Merkel disclosed that she shares these concerns, calling for the widening of the relationship.²⁷⁰ In brief, while many Israelis are warming to the idea of positive relations with Germany, evident, for instance, in opinion polls and media coverage on Germany, German public discourse moves in the opposite direction.²⁷¹ The growing distance to the Second World War, a discourse of German victimisation, which blurs the line between victims and perpetrators, the impact of the Israeli-Arab conflict as well as the persistence of latent Antisemitism in German society, all work against preserving close and warm relations as they exist on the political level.

3.3 Israeli Public Opinion

3.3.1 Growing Distinction Between Modern Germany and Nazi Germany

Although the Shoah is deeply entrenched in Israeli collective memory, associations of Germany with Nazi Germany have been gradually disappearing. The implications of this development have been felt in several ways. Israeli visitors who come to Germany will no longer have to face the challenge of meeting the generation of the perpetrators. As Fania Oz-Salzberger in her account on the community of Israelis in Berlin put it: “The seventy and seventy-five year old Germans whom you see in cafes and restaurants, are no longer Wehrmacht soldiers or members of the NSDAP. [...] From now on every person we meet in Germany will have hands as pure as ours. Something new starts.”²⁷²

Many among the Jewish Israeli population of up to eighteen years old, who make up about a third of the Jewish Israeli population, can only relate to Nazi Germany through

²⁷⁰ Interviews with Mordechai Lewy and Jonathan Miller. Shimon Stein in Ben-Natan (2005), 274-276 and Merkel Speech (March 2007).

²⁷¹ Email correspondence with Moshe Zimmermann.

²⁷² Oz-Salzberger (2001), 71.

school education as the survivors of the Shoah gradually disappear.²⁷³ Instead of entrenching Germany as the country of the perpetrators of the Shoah, educational trips to Auschwitz foster the image of Poland as Nazi Germany's accomplice, which recently caused the Polish government to demand that UNESCO have the 'Auschwitz-Birkenau Concentration Camp' renamed to the 'Former Nazi German Concentration Camp'.²⁷⁴ As sociologist Natan Sznajder told the author, instead of seeing Germany through the prism of its Nazi past, the younger generation is guided by what they perceive as a technologically-advanced and modern state.²⁷⁵ Irrespective of age groups, visits to Germany further reinforce this image as the KAS poll found. Those who travelled to Germany over the past three years were 19 percent more likely to have a more positive image of Germany than those who had not travelled to Germany.²⁷⁶

3.3.2 PORI Findings

The annual PORI poll on the question "whether the Germany of today is a different Germany from Nazi Germany" has further confirmed the fading of historically linked perceptions of Germany in recent years, particularly among the younger generation. In the 1990s only a little more than half of the Israeli population answered that the Germany of today is a different Germany to Nazi Germany, by 2005 a total of 77.8 percent of Israelis answered affirmatively to this question, which was a four percent increase from 2004 and

²⁷³ Whilst different figures are provided on the number of Holocaust survivors in Israel, depending on who is included in the definition, conservative estimates see the number of survivors in Israel at about 250,000 people. The figure was kindly provided by Amanda Smulowitz at Yad Vashem, 5 February 2007. On population percentages according to age see *Israel in Figures* (2005), 6.

²⁷⁴ Polish government spokesman Jan Kasprzyk commented: "For the contemporary, younger generations, especially abroad, that association with Nazi Germany is not universal." Kasprzyk as cited in "Poland Seeks Auschwitz Renaming", *BBC News*, 31 March 2006.

²⁷⁵ According to Sznajder: "A sigh of relief is visible on the faces of the young Israelis arriving at the modern German airports from their trips to Poland where they visited Auschwitz." Interview with Natan Sznajder.

²⁷⁶ *KAS Survey* (2007), 10.

the highest percentage thus far.²⁷⁷ Among the 16-34 year olds, the percentage was above average at 78.1 percent.

Substantial differences are only discernable in terms of the level of religiosity. Generally, the higher the level of self-proclaimed religiosity, the more deeply entrenched are anxieties of Germany. The most positive view is expressed by secular Israelis (81.0 percent), followed by those who define themselves as traditionalists (78.1 percent). Of those who see themselves as religious the percentage stands at 71.2 percent. The figure drops substantially among the Ultra-Orthodox community of whom only 46.7 percent believe that the Germany of today is different from Nazi Germany.²⁷⁸ Moshe Zimmermann explained the differences between religious and secular Jews as lying in the biblical verse: “Remember what Amalek did to you!”²⁷⁹ By this analogy, Germany has become the embodiment of the biblical enemy of the Jews in modern times.²⁸⁰ The largely secular and Ashkenazi media elites of Israel’s two big daily newspapers, as well as Israeli TV, which foster a relatively indifferent, if not positive view of Germany, have had relatively little influence on changing this image among the religious and Ultra-Orthodox groups. These groups prefer to rely on religious media outlets such as Arutz Sheva and Hazofeh, in which a more sceptical view of Germany prevails.²⁸¹

Differences are also visible in terms of ethnicity. It is evident that Ashkenazim are more positive in their view of Germany than Sephardim; 74.9 percent of Sephardim as opposed to 83 percent of Ashkenazim answered affirmatively to the above question. This is

²⁷⁷ Moshe Zimmermann confirmed to me in Email correspondence that the 2006 figures were even higher. All PORI data was kindly provided by Professor Moshe Zimmermann.

²⁷⁸ However, amongst all these groups the 2005 figure is an improvement from 2004.

²⁷⁹ Deuteronomy 25:17.

²⁸⁰ Zimmermann as cited in the survey *Israelis and Germans: Ambivalence of Normality*, 39.

²⁸¹ Arutz Sheva is an internet based media network including internet radio and internet television reflecting the views of the settler movement. Hazofeh is a daily Hebrew language newspaper, reflecting the views of the religious Zionist movement.

indeed striking as it demonstrates how deeply embedded the memory of the Holocaust is among the Sephardim. Slight differences are also visible between new immigrants and second generation Israelis. At a percentage of 78.6 percent, second generation Israelis are more positive of Germany than immigrants of whom 75.5 percent think Germany is a different country from the past. Differences further arise according to educational level and income. Generally, the higher the educational level and the better the income, the better the view of Germany. Among those who have completed secondary school 75.9 percent answered affirmatively, followed by 77.2 percent among those with qualifications higher than secondary school, and 81.0 percent of academics. Similarly, in terms of income, 84.3 percent of those with an above average income see Germany today as different from the past, followed by 77.8 percent with an average income who hold this view and 72 percent of those who earn less than the average income.

3.3.3 Reconciliation

The growing distinction between modern Germany and Nazi Germany has also been demonstrated by the breaking down of opposition to ‘normalising’ relations with Germany and the willingness to reconcile with the Germans.²⁸² Israelis draw a clear line between the generation of the perpetrators and the younger generation. Only 10 percent of the Israeli population consider all Germans, including the post war generation, guilty of crimes against the Jews during the war.²⁸³

Corresponding to these findings, a total of 88 percent of the Israeli population is in favour of reconciliation with the Germans. Of this figure 42 percent think it is possible to reconcile with all Germans, including the perpetrators, whilst 46 percent hold that

²⁸² Interview with Moshe Zimmermann.

²⁸³ Germans and Jews, Bertelsmann Survey (2007), 13 and unpublished tables (Israel), 29.

reconciliation is only possible with the younger generation who had no part in Nazi atrocities. In contrast, in 1991 only 69 percent thought reconciliation with the Germans was possible, however, even then 42 percent held that it was possible to reconcile with all Germans.²⁸⁴ Reconciliation also featured in the widely watched Israeli movie ‘Walking on Waters’ of 2004, which told the story of a Mossad agent who, set to assassinate an old-time Nazi, befriends his grandchildren, thus foiling his mission. In discussion with Israeli students on the topic of Israeli-German relations, the movie often featured as an important reference point for where Israeli-German relations stand today.

The growing perception of a new Germany is also evident in the stance towards German products and companies. Calls for a boycott on buying Volkswagen cars and flying with the German aviation company Lufthansa have long subsided. To illustrate this point, in the month of January 2007, Volkswagen was amongst the five biggest foreign car importers to Israel²⁸⁵, whilst since 2001 Lufthansa has held the position of largest foreign carrier at Tel-Aviv airport.²⁸⁶ Today 58 percent of the Israeli public do not mind whether products have been produced in Germany, whilst a further fifth prefer German products over those from other countries (18 percent). Only 8 percent of the Israeli public state that they do not buy German products. In contrast, in 1999 only 25 percent stated to a similar question, offering the same set of available answers as the Bertelsmann survey, that they did not mind whether products came from Germany. A further 37 percent answered that they would prefer non-German products.²⁸⁷ As sociologist Natan Sznaider commented on the position today, “most Israelis don’t have any perceptions of Germany anymore [...].

²⁸⁴ Germans and Jews, Bertelsmann Survey (2007), 13.

²⁸⁵ Interviews with Tal Muscal and Tom Segev. Dubi Ben-Gedalyahu, “January Vehicle Deliveries Up 25 percent over Last Year”, Globes, 2 February 2007.

²⁸⁶ Email correspondence with Tal Muscal.

²⁸⁷ The question read: “Should Israelis avoid buying German products?” Israelis and Germans. The Ambivalence of Normality (2000), 35.

You can advertise German goods as efficient without people fainting and when Israelis talk about German efficiency they have Bayern Munich in mind where hardly any German players play.”²⁸⁸ Even the generation of 60 and above are only five percent more likely than the younger generation to protest against buying German products.²⁸⁹

The better Israeli perception of modern Germany is also evident in the growing number of German passports that have been claimed by Israelis throughout the Second Intifada.²⁹⁰ More than 60 years after the war claiming a German passport, which gives access to European universities and work possibilities, no longer holds the stigma of previous years.²⁹¹ The growing demand has caused Israeli law firms such as Dan Assan & Partner to expand their services to this field of law.²⁹²

Changes are also visible in the cultural sphere, including sports. Showing German movies in Israeli cinemas, even arguably sensitive movies such as ‘The Downfall’ (‘Der Untergang’) of 2004, which depicts the last days of Adolf Hitler in the Berlin bunker, no longer causes controversy. The German movie ‘Good Bye Lenin’ (2003), which dealt with the East/West divide in German collective memory, was shown in Israeli cinemas in German language with Hebrew subtitles. Also significant parts of the Israeli movie ‘Walking on Waters’ were in German language with Hebrew subtitles.

Traditionally, football had been a sphere in which historic divisions are strongly played out. For instance, during the 1974 World Cup Israelis supported Holland in the final match against Germany, as Holland was seen in Israeli collective memory as fighting

²⁸⁸ Email correspondence with Natan Sznajder.

²⁸⁹ Another 13 percent state that they would prefer products from other countries, which, however, can be related to other factors such as price or availability. *Germans and Jews*, Bertelsmann Survey (2007), 52 and unpublished tables (Israel), 9.

²⁹⁰ From about 1,200 in 2000 the number grew to 1,751 in 2001, 2,042 in 2002 and 3,312 in 2003, going back to 2,250 in 2004, 2,082 in 2005 and 1,767 in 2006. Interview with Christoph Blosen.

²⁹¹ Interview with Tom Segev.

²⁹² See website information on <http://www.danassan.com>.

against Nazi Germany.²⁹³ In the 1996 European Championship collective memory resurfaced when Germany won against Croatia. Israel's second largest daily newspaper Ma'ariv ran the headline: "To our regret – Germany won".²⁹⁴ Ma'ariv's sports editor thereafter commented on the headline in a television talk round: "For sports reasons and particularly for historical reasons the stance is justified." In contrast, Israelis reacted neutrally to both Germany's early exit from the European Championship in 2000 and reaching the final of the World Cup in Japan in 2002.²⁹⁵ As Moshe Zimmermann stated in a comment to the author regarding the World Cup 2006, "it was indeed a confirmation of the latest tendency – new Germany was taken seriously and the German team did not have to compete for the title of most hated team anymore".²⁹⁶ This also showed in a PORI poll, in which 60 percent of Israelis thought it would be a world cup as in any other country and only 22 percent of those asked expressed some concern on account of Germany's Nazi past.²⁹⁷

3.3.4 Israel's New Priorities and Indifference

The recent years of regional conflict and the rise of Antisemitic attacks throughout Europe have further diverted attention away from focussing on events in Germany. Further, many Israelis are concerned for the future of Israel as 77 percent of the Israeli public see the country heading in the wrong direction.²⁹⁸ These factors explain a certain indifference to the issue of Israeli-German relations. For instance, only 13 percent of the Israeli public have a 'strong' or 'very strong' interest in information on Germany, whereas 40 percent

²⁹³ Zimmermann (2004), 14.

²⁹⁴ As cited in Zimmermann (2004), 18.

²⁹⁵ Zimmermann (2004), 21.

²⁹⁶ Email correspondence with Moshe Zimmermann.

²⁹⁷ Moshe Zimmermann, "Der Beste Freund: Warum Begrüßt Man in Israel den Einsatz der Bundeswehr?", *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 14 September 2006.

²⁹⁸ *KAS Survey* (2007), 3.

have ‘no’ and the remaining 47 percent only a ‘weak’ or ‘moderate’ interest.²⁹⁹

Indifference to events in Germany is also reflected in ratings of Chancellor Merkel who over a year after having come to power is only known by 58 percent of the Israeli public.³⁰⁰

These findings also reflect that Germany is no longer being perceived as a subject of concern to the majority of the Israeli public. As recently as the early 1990s there were still issues relating to Germany that concerned the Israeli public. When it became public that German companies had helped Saddam Hussein build up his chemical warfare programme, images of Nazi Germany resurfaced and this clearly showed in the 1991 Bertelsmann survey.³⁰¹ Further, arson attacks against immigrants such as happened in Rostock in 1992 put focus on German Antisemitism.³⁰² In 1993, for instance, only 50.3 percent of Israelis believed that the Germany of today is a different Germany from Nazi Germany.³⁰³ Today, it is no longer Germany which reactivates images of the Shoah, but instead Iran’s nuclear armament programme, whilst Antisemitism is no longer seen as a German, but European problem.³⁰⁴

When asked in 2005 whether the Holocaust could repeat itself in Germany, 62 percent of the Israeli public answer negatively.³⁰⁵ In 1999, 44 percent believed that Antisemitism was higher in Germany than in other European countries, whereas only 22

²⁹⁹ There are slight variations according to age and ethnicity. Interest is slightly higher among the older generation of 60 and above as well as among the Ashkenazi population. Germans and Jews, Bertelsmann Survey (2007), 48 and unpublished tables (Israel), 2.

³⁰⁰ Germans and Jews, Bertelsmann Survey (2007), 57.

³⁰¹ Israeli interest in information on Germany was 20 percent higher than in 2007. Germans and Jews, Bertelsmann Survey (2007), 48.

³⁰² Pallade (2005), 22.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, 358.

³⁰⁴ Zimmermann (2004), 21.

³⁰⁵ Israeli Public Perception Regarding Different Questions to Germany and the Germans, (2005), 7.

percent of the Israeli public believed this in 2005.³⁰⁶ However, 75 percent of the Israeli public believe Israel's existence is threatened by the Iranian nuclear programme.³⁰⁷ A recent Ma'ariv survey further found that two thirds of the Israeli public believe that Iran, if it develops a nuclear weapon, would use it to destroy Israel. The fears of Israeli society are further evidenced by the fact that many Israeli households have started equipping their homes with nuclear-proof equipment such as air filters and water decontamination systems.³⁰⁸

3.3.5 Media Coverage

Newspaper coverage in Israel relating to Germany has reflected the above trends in recent years. This seems to confirm the findings of a study by Michael Bröning on the years 1990-2000. His study showed that media coverage on Germany by Israel's two biggest daily newspapers Yediot Ahronot and Ma'ariv was no longer strongly coloured by news items related to the Holocaust and Nazi Germany, but on the contrary dealt with Germany from a number of angles such as economics, human interest and foreign policy.³⁰⁹ The fact that Germany is no longer given special attention is also reflected in the small number of Israeli correspondents currently working in Germany. Of the two big dailies, only Yediot Ahronot has a permanent correspondent. Other than Yediot Ahronot, newspapers work with free lancers or dispatch their home journalists for a temporary amount of time to cover specific events such as the World Cup or Olmert's visit to Germany in December

³⁰⁶ Ibid., 7.

³⁰⁷ Germans and Jews, Bertelsmann Survey (2007), 44.

³⁰⁸ Survey as cited in Sonja Verma, "Bunker Mentality as Israelis Prepare for Nuclear Fallout", The Times, 10 March 2007.

³⁰⁹ Bröning (2002), 338.

2006. Among other media outlets only Israel Radio has a permanent correspondent.³¹⁰ As a consequence, Israeli media often draws on articles by European press agencies or quote from German media when referring to events in Germany.³¹¹

No substantial study on Israeli media coverage of Germany has yet been carried out for the years from 2000 onwards. However, the way newspapers responded to events related to Germany and Israeli-German relations, including ignoring certain issues suggests that the normalisation trend analysed by Bröning for the previous decade has continued. To illustrate this point, despite Antisemitic incidents, including some high-profile ones in the Bundestag in 2002 and 2003, Israel's print media refrained from turning these events into anti-German campaigns or even giving them much attention.³¹² Similarly, the media attention devoted to 40 years of diplomatic relations between Israel and Germany has been relatively marginal in contrast to coverage in Germany. The question of whether Germany should send troops to the Middle East, widely discussed in Germany, has not caused intensive debates.³¹³ In November 2006, 25 German and Austrian academics published a petition in the German newspaper Frankfurter Rundschau, which called for the cancellation of the special relationship. Israel's daily newspaper Ha'aretz decided against publishing the petition, arguing that given the marginal significance of these academics it was not worthwhile news.³¹⁴ Even at times of political tension such as when the German

³¹⁰ Eldad Beck reports for Yedioth Ahronot and Meir Dagan reports for Israel Radio. Email correspondence with Jörg Bremer.

³¹¹ One example is the use of German media sources in the wake of an incident between the Israeli Air Force and the German Navy off the Lebanese coast in October 2006.

³¹² Dreßler in Ben-Natan (2005), 255.

³¹³ Interview with Natan Sznajder. According to the Bertelsmann survey, 74 percent of the Israeli public stated that deployment of German forces 'was the right thing to do'. See Germans and Jews, Bertelsmann Survey (2007), 42.

³¹⁴ Interview with Tom Segev.

government decided against supplying Fuchs APCs in December 2002, articles on the issue did not evoke moral judgements, but remained neutral.³¹⁵

Furthermore, German government support for Israel has been positively noted. For instance, following a state visit by Ehud Olmert in December 2006, *Yediot Ahronot* ran a front page story covering a statement by Merkel which read: “Germany: Israel will never stand alone against Iran”.³¹⁶ When details of the submarine deal became known to the English language daily *Jerusalem Post*, which generally reflected a more reserved attitude to Israeli-German relations than *Ha’aretz* and *Yediot Ahronot*, its staff ran an editorial honouring Germany’s commitment: “[...] The current generation is helping prevent a second Holocaust by providing the IDF with some of the most important defensive weapons systems in its arsenal. As far as corrective steps go, that’s a huge one. [...] While Israel ultimately must take responsibility for its own defense, it is crucial that it have [sic] friends in the international community who are prepared to help. In this case, Germany has proved that it is a significant such friend.”³¹⁷ *Ma’ariv*, in an opinion piece, has also praised the special relationship stating: “Israel and Germany proved to the world that on the ruins of the difficult past it is possible to build a strong present.”³¹⁸

The above examples are just a sample of positive Israeli media coverage of Germany. These positive reports no doubt impact on public perception of Germany. In fact, 42 percent of the Israeli public believe that German policy is more pro-Israel than that of other Western European states. In contrast, in 1999 only 31 percent of the Israeli

³¹⁵ See for instance Yossi Melman, “Germany Reassessing APC Deal With Israel”, *Ha’aretz*, 23 March 2007.

³¹⁶ “Germany: Israel will never stand alone against Iran”, *Yediot Ahronot*, 13 December 2006.

³¹⁷ “Germany’s Transformation”, *Jerusalem Post*, 24 August 2006.

³¹⁸ “The Israeli-German Relationship”, *Ma’ariv*, 22 February 2007.

population considered Germany's policy to Israel friendlier than that of other European states.³¹⁹

3.4 German Public Opinion

3.4.1 The Fading Memory of the Second World War

In ten to twenty years time, when all witnesses of the war will be gone, the war will no longer be 'Zeitgeschichte' ('contemporary history'), but part of the historicised set of events, which historians will have to document on the basis of written sources only.³²⁰

Already in 1995, two-thirds of the German society was born after the war, and thus had no historical memories of the war period.³²¹ By 2005 this percentage had grown to about 75 percent. According to the Federal Statistical Office, the generation that experienced the war as adults, accounted for just 4.5 percent of the German population.³²² The growing distance to the war is also evidenced by the declining number of Germans who recall having lost relatives in the war.³²³ In 1995 the figure stood at 47 percent, by 2005 the figure had dropped to 39 percent.³²⁴ The war makes little impact on daily life, as is reflected in the small percentage of people who still often talk about the war at home. When asked in 2005, only 8 percent of Germans stated they would often talk about the war. The majority of 62 percent stated that they hardly ever do so.³²⁵

3.4.2 A Discourse of Victimisation

³¹⁹ Germans and Jews, Bertelsmann Survey (2007), 55 and Israelis and Germans, (2000), 30.

³²⁰ Frei (2005), 6.

³²¹ Frei (2005), 44.

³²² See information by the Federal Statistical Office under www.destatis.de.

³²³ This is either personally or through information passed on by relatives.

³²⁴ IMAS International Report (2005), 2.

³²⁵ The 8 percent figure is a decrease from 13 percent in 1995 and the 62 percent figure has risen by 18 percent. IMAS International Report (2005), 4.

German public discourse has recently come to reassess its past. Whilst a collective memory of German victimisation has always been present, evident, for instance, in the commonly held view that Hitler was ‘tolerated’ but not ‘embraced’, an allegation which historians have long since demonstrated to lack historical foundation, this current has gained enough momentum to dominate German public discourse today.³²⁶ In a 1995 survey 44 percent of the German public stated “that Germans were victims rather than perpetrators during the National Socialist period”; a slight majority of 48 percent opted for perpetrator.³²⁷

Against the backdrop of the 60 years commemoration of the end of the war, which reinforced public examinations of the war, it was no longer the Holocaust and Nazi crimes, which preoccupied public discourse. Instead, it was the expulsion of Germans from Eastern Europe and the bombardment of German cities by the Allied Forces, which caught public attention. These events were the subject of costly German TV productions such as ‘Dresden’ (2006) and ‘The Escape’ (2007) as well as numerous documentaries including a five-part series ‘The Big Escape’ (2004).³²⁸ Novelists such as Günter Grass, who took up the theme of German refugees in his novel ‘Crabwalk’ (2002), using the sinking of the Wilhelm Gustloff as historical context, furthered the image of the German victim.³²⁹ The changes that have taken place are also evident in the prevalence of plans for a centre commemorating German victims of expulsion from Eastern Europe, put forth by the Federation of Expellees in 2000, and supported by two thirds of the population.³³⁰ This

³²⁶ Frei (2005), 107.

³²⁷ Ernst Piper, “Ein Einig Volk von Opfern”, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 7 February 2005.

³²⁸ The two-part movie ‘Dresden’ was produced by ZDF in March 2006. It tells the story of a German nurse falling in love with a British bomber pilot. The film was watched by 13 million people. In 2006 the ARD produced the ‘The Escape’. It tells the story of a Prussian baroness who, during her escape from Eastern Europe, falls in love with a French soldier. Shown on German TV early 2007 the two part €9 million production was seen by a total of over 10 million viewers.

³²⁹ Frei (2005), 14.

³³⁰ Krzeminski (2003), 4.

support is particularly striking as only 14 percent of the German public still claim to remember having an expellee family background, which shows that the preoccupation with German victimisation does not stand in proportion.³³¹ To be built in Berlin, the centre, if built, will invariably claim to rival the Field of Stelae monument, commemorating the Shoah.

Changes in public discourse are also visible in statements circulating in the public domain. Without public objection, German actress Marianne Furtwängler, who played the role of a Prussian baroness in the movie 'The Escape' was recently able to call for an apology from Russian President Putin, stating: "I consider it a noble gesture if Putin would apologise for the rape by soldiers of the Red Army." Furtwängler further rejected the claim that expulsion of the Germans from Eastern Europe should be seen in proportion to German crimes.³³² Movie reviews confirm the 'victimhood contest' in German public discourse.³³³ One review on the movie 'Dresden' commended the 'cathartic effect', whilst another criticised that the destruction of the city has not taken a more prominent role although this was essentially the context in which the movie was embedded.³³⁴

The continued preoccupation with the myth of Stalingrad, which in German collective consciousness is entrenched as the turning point in the war, has to be seen in the above context. As historian Norbert Frei noted, at the end of 2002 and in 2003 it has virtually been impossible to evade watching the numerous documentaries and films on Stalingrad, which marked the 60 years anniversary. The fact that the turning point of the war already occurred in the battle of Moscow in 1941, is entirely blacked out. Instead,

³³¹ Kurt Reumann, "Wer War Himmler?", FAZ, 6 May 2005.

³³² Helmut Böger, "Putin Soll Sich Entschuldigen", Bild, 25 February 2007. "Auch Zweiter Teil der Flucht Erfolgreich", DPA, 6 March 2007.

³³³ Ha'aretz journalist Amira Hass aptly chose the title 'victimhood contest' in her article of 4 April 2004.

³³⁴ "Ohne Berlin Mag Ich Nicht Mehr Sein", Berliner Morgenpost, 21 March 2007.

Soviet aggression merges with images of suffering of the Wehrmacht soldiers, which fits into the wider framework of the German victim.³³⁵

Evidently, the fading memory of the war together with the newly-developed desire to be among the victims has implications for Israeli-German relations. Feelings of guilt, which during the Six Day War led to a wholehearted embrace of Israel amongst Germans have long subsided.³³⁶ The late Paul Spiegel, former head of the Central Council of Jews, commented on this process: “The times in which the existence of Israel constituted relief, if not redemption, are long over.”³³⁷ Two thirds of the German public feel ashamed of German crimes against the Jews, but only 4 percent hold that all Germans, including those after the war are guilty.³³⁸ 45 percent of Germans believe that only those Germans who were directly involved in the persecution of the Jews are guilty.³³⁹ The younger generation of up to 29 years old, who represent about one fifth of the German population, were the least inclined to accept statements of guilt, whilst showing the strongest support for the statement that only those directly involved in the persecution of the Jews are guilty.³⁴⁰ This group was also the least inclined to express feelings of shame, indicating that not even shame, but indifference marks their association with the Holocaust.³⁴¹

Furthermore, not only have feelings of guilt largely subsided, but Germans have also grown increasingly resentful towards accepting historic responsibility, evident in support for a ‘closure’ with regard to discussion about the persecution of the Jews in the

³³⁵ Frei (2005), 97.

³³⁶ Wolffsohn (1993), 108.

³³⁷ Spiegel, “Es Gibt Zeichen der Hoffnung”, *Tribüne* (2005), 45.

³³⁸ *Germans and Jews*, Bertelsmann Survey (2007), 11, 15.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

³⁴⁰ 53 percent as opposed to a 45 percent average believe that only those directly involved in the persecution of the Jews are guilty. Unpublished tables (Germany), 21. See also information by the Federal Statistical Office: Population according to age groups; available under www.destatis.de

³⁴¹ Unpublished tables (Germany), 15.

war. In total, about two thirds (58 percent) of the German public are in favour of a 'closure'.³⁴² As findings show, this trend is particularly evident among the younger generation, whose call for closure lies seven percent above the average. West Germans are ten percent more likely to favour a closure. This figure is directly related to the different approaches taken by the GDR and FRG, the latter having sought reconciliation with the Jews, whilst the former rejected any responsibility for Nazi crimes.³⁴³

This growing resentment towards accepting historic responsibility translates into an unwillingness amongst an overwhelming majority of the German population to honour Germany's special responsibility to the Jews and the State of Israel. Thus, nearly half of the German public reject responsibility towards the Jews, which is a five percent increase since 1991. The younger generation most strongly embrace this view (55 percent), which gradually decreases by age group to only 39 percent.³⁴⁴

Even fewer Germans seem to feel a historic responsibility towards the State of Israel. This view is shared across all age groups with relative homogeneousness.³⁴⁵ When asked to state their views on how Germany should relate to the State of Israel, 78 percent stated that Israel 'is a state like any other'. Only 20 percent acquiesce to the statement that the Germans cannot treat Israel as any other state.³⁴⁶

3.4.3 The Israeli-Arab Conflict

Sympathy ratings for Israel had been persistently low since the outbreak of the first Lebanon War, including during the euphoric Oslo years. In line with other European

³⁴² Unpublished tables (Germany), 11.

³⁴³ A call of closure is supported by 60 percent of West Germans and 50 percent of East Germans. Del Sarto (1998), 32.

³⁴⁴ Unpublished tables (Germany), 19.

³⁴⁵ Unpublished tables (Germany), 25.

³⁴⁶ Germans and Jews, Bertelsmann Survey (2007), 24.

countries, the German public has become further alienated by observing Israel's military operations during the years of the Second Intifada and the Israeli-Lebanese conflict of 2006.³⁴⁷ Surveys conducted by the German Marshall Fund between 2002 and 2006 found that lower sympathy ratings correlated with levels of violence. In 2002, when Palestinian and Israeli casualties reached a high, German public opinion gave Israel the lowest sympathy rating of all years surveyed up to date.³⁴⁸ The impact of the Israeli-Arab conflict on German perceptions shined through in a Eurobarometer poll of November 2003, which found that 65 percent of the German public perceived Israel as a 'threat to world peace'. Germany's percentage was seven percent above the European average and only three countries (the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Austria) had even higher results. Although the questionnaire was unfortunately phrased, stating Israel and not the Israeli-Arab conflict as an option, it reflected the extent to which the Israeli-Arab conflict has come to be viewed as a major issue of concern in international affairs.³⁴⁹

Unlike during the 1967 and the 1973 wars and even during the first Gulf War in 1991, Germans no longer sympathised with Israel, although this has not translated into greater support for the Palestinians.³⁵⁰ An overwhelming majority of 85 percent of the German public supported the imposition of sanctions on Israel in April 2002. When it became public that Israel had expressed interest in buying 200 Fuchs APCs, 71 percent of

³⁴⁷ For findings on the Oslo years see Wolffsohn (2007), 517-518. The only exception arose prior to the Gulf War, where a majority of Germans (78 percent) from the old federal states favoured 'better relations' in light of tensions over German companies' support for Saddam Hussein's chemical warfare programme. See Pallade (2005), 343.

³⁴⁸ From 32 points on a scale of 0-100 in 2002, ratings gradually improved to 47 points in 2006, leading to an average rating for the five years of 41.6. For Israeli and Palestinian fatalities during the Second Intifada see statistics by B'Tselem under www.btselem.org. Transatlantic Trends 2006: Topline Data, 18.

³⁴⁹ Eurobarometer (2003), 82. Iraq together with Iran ranked third (57 percent) among the countries that were perceived as threats to world peace by the German public. The high percentage for post-war Iraq reflects that domestic instability was as much considered a threat as the issue of WMD.

³⁵⁰ On polls of the 1967 and 1973 wars see Gardner-Feldmann (1984), 218. At an average of 38.25 on a scale of 0-100, feelings of sympathy with the Palestinian population in the years between 2003 and 2006 were even lower than those directed to Israel. See Transatlantic Trends 2006: Topline Data, 18.

the German public opposed their sale.³⁵¹ In contrast, during the Gulf War of 1991, 56 percent of the German public were in favour of weapons deliveries to Israel.³⁵²

On key issues of the conflict such as the use of force and involvement of external actors the Israeli and German public reach diametrically opposed conclusions. According to an EMNID poll conducted for the German newspaper Die Welt, 73 percent of the German public regarded Israel's military operation in Jenin as 'unjustified'. On the other hand, 72 percent of the Israeli public supported the operation.³⁵³ Whilst 90 percent of the Israeli population supported the military offensive against Hizbollah at the beginning of the war, a FORSA poll found that 75 percent of the German public considered Israel's military operation 'disproportionate'.³⁵⁴ Different opinions on the use of force are also evident on the issue of military force against Iran. Whilst a total of 80 percent of Israelis believe a military strike would be justified if Iran produces nuclear weapons, only 32 percent of the German public share this view.³⁵⁵ Differences of opinion are also evident on the involvement of external actors in resolving the Israeli-Arab conflict. Whilst Germans overwhelmingly disapprove of the American government's handling of international affairs, an overwhelming majority of 70 percent of the Israeli public favour the US if a foreign entity had to be part of the peace process.³⁵⁶ On the reverse, 77 percent of the German public favour stronger EU involvement in the Middle East peace process.

³⁵¹ Igal Avidan, "Israel Gives Up on German APCs", Jerusalem Post, 30 December 2002.

³⁵² Pallade (2005), 343.

³⁵³ As cited in Wolffsohn (2007), 518.

³⁵⁴ Raffi Berg, "Little Dissent as Israelis Support War", BBC News, 23 July 2006 and "Deutsche Halten Offensive für Unangemessen", Der Standard, 20 July 2006.

³⁵⁵ Germans and Jews, Bertelsmann Survey (2007), 45.

³⁵⁶ Transatlantic Trends 2006: Topline Data, 7.

Amongst Israelis only 17 percent can imagine the EU playing a more important role than the US.³⁵⁷

Further, since the outbreak of the Second Intifada and the Israeli-Lebanese conflict, one can observe a new ‘uninhibitedness’ in the way Israel is criticised in the German public, which is evident in the wide-spread acceptance of analogies to the Third Reich in describing Israel’s behaviour towards the Palestinians.³⁵⁸ A survey conducted by sociologist Wilhelm Heitmeyer in 2004 found that 51.2 percent of the German public believed to varying degrees that what the “State of Israel does to the Palestinians is the same as what the Nazis did to the Jews during the Third Reich”.³⁵⁹ Another 68.8 percent either strongly or fairly strongly believed that Israel conducts a ‘war of extermination’ (‘Vernichtungskrieg’) against the Palestinians.³⁶⁰

Although these figures have slightly decreased, in February 2007, 30 percent of the German public agreed to the statement that Israel was waging a war of extermination against the Palestinians and a further 40 percent believed that Israel’s behaviour was no different from the behaviour of the Nazis.³⁶¹ These analogies have already found their way into the political and public domain. In the wake of Israel’s Operation Defensive Shield in April 2002, Norbert Blüm (CDU), former Social Minister in the Kohl government, sent a letter to Israeli Ambassador Shimon Stein, in which he called Israel’s operation in Jenin a ‘war of extermination’.³⁶² Former Green Party member Jamal Karsli has publicly spoken

³⁵⁷ KAS Survey (2007), 25 and Eurobarometer (2003), 62.

³⁵⁸ Term used by Markovits (2006).

³⁵⁹ 27.3 percent of the German public stated that they fully agreed to the statement and another 23.9 percent stated that they fairly strongly agreed with the statement. Deutsche Zustände (key findings), 4.

³⁶⁰ Deutsche Zustände (key findings), 4.

³⁶¹ Unpublished tables (Germany), 35 and 37.

³⁶² As cited in Pallade (2006), 52.

of the ‘Nazi methods’ of the Israeli army.³⁶³ During a reception in 2003 Director of the German Orient Institute, Udo Steinbach, drew an analogy between the Warsaw Ghetto and Palestinian villages.³⁶⁴ More recently, the Bishop of Eichstatt, Gregor Maria Henke, made a similar comparison after having visited Yad Vashem.³⁶⁵

In addition, the German public has increasingly called into question the special relationship between Germany and Israel. As earlier mentioned, in November 2005 a group of 25 German and Austrian academics published a petition in the German newspaper *Frankfurter Rundschau* urging the government to stop its policy of restraint and end the delivery of weapons to Israel. The petitioners further called on the government to see the special relationship as extending to both Israelis and Palestinians. The petition stated: “It is not just Israel, which deserves special attention and well-meant criticism. As Germans, Austrians and Europeans we not only have a special responsibility for Israel’s existence, but [...] also a special responsibility for the living conditions and a self-determined future of the Palestinian people.”³⁶⁶

3.4.4 Media Coverage

German media coverage of Israel has played a substantial role in fostering the German public’s perception of a country in conflict. A Media Tenor survey analysing media coverage of the news programmes from ARD (*Tagesschau* and *Tagesthemen*) and ZDF (*Heute* and *Heute Journal*) between July 2001 and July 2006 found that out of a total of 2,355 news items on Israel in these programmes only 17.5 percent dealt with issues other

³⁶³ “Anti-Israel Remarks Plague German Party”, *Deutsche Welle*, 21 May 2002.

³⁶⁴ Pallade (2006), 49.

³⁶⁵ Henke commented to the press: “In the morning we saw inhuman pictures from the Warsaw Ghetto, and in the evening we are traveling to the Ramallah ghetto. It’s enough to drive you crazy.” As cited in Fania Oz-Salzberger, “The Obligation to Cry Out”, *Ha’aretz*, 19 March 2007.

³⁶⁶ “Manifest der 25”, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 15 November 2006.

than the Israeli-Arab conflict. Of these 17.5 percent the majority of issues dealt with topics related to political issues, whilst hardly containing news items on human interest.³⁶⁷ A study by the Duisburg Institute for Social and Linguistic Research (DISS) analysing major daily newspapers and magazines between the outbreak of the Second Intifada and August 2001 further showed that articles on the conflict were laden with references such as ‘powder keg’, ‘trouble spot’ and ‘wild fire’, which suggested Israel and the Palestinian territories have to be primarily viewed as places of continued conflict.³⁶⁸

German media has generally fostered negative perceptions of Israel. The exception to this is the Axel Springer Publishing House, which since 1967 has entrenched special relations as company policy, which explains the restraint exercised towards Israel in media coverage by Germany’s biggest tabloid Bild and the broadsheet paper Die Welt.³⁶⁹ As the DISS study showed, German media discourse contains a number of Antisemitic stereotypes such as the ‘ugly’ and ‘blood-thirsty’ Israeli, which had its counterpart in racist portrayals of the Palestinian population.³⁷⁰ A comparative study by Rolf Behrens of 345 articles on media coverage by the Spiegel magazine during the First Intifada and the years between 2000 and 2002 found that in twenty cases these contained comparisons between Israelis and Nazis.³⁷¹ Furthermore, Israel’s military operations were portrayed as reflecting a long history of Jewish violence stretching back to biblical times.³⁷² Recently, the Spiegel cover story ‘God comes from Egypt’, which sparked an affair of misquotations with the

³⁶⁷ Media Tenor Analysis (2006), 13.

³⁶⁸ The newspapers and magazines analysed included Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Frankfurter Rundschau, Süddeutsche Zeitung, Tagespiegel, Tageszeitung, Welt, and Spiegel. Jäger (2003), 350.

³⁶⁹ Axel Springer Publishing House Policy Guidelines. All journalists have to sign a contract committing themselves to “[...] working towards reconciliation between Jews and Germans, which includes support for the rights of the Israeli people.”

³⁷⁰ Jäger (2003), 346, 351.

³⁷¹ Behrens (2004), 40.

³⁷² Behrens (2004), 41. The Spiegel: “Going back to the kings David and Salomon, Israel’s history is full of war, murder and manslaughter” in Spiegel 41/2001 as cited in Behrens (2004), 41.

cited Egyptologist Jan Assmann, continued the theme of the Jewish villain, further including allegories of Jewish world conspiracy.³⁷³ No systematic study has yet been carried out on stereotypes in media coverage in other weekly German news magazines such as Stern and Focus. However, a Stern magazine cover story on Israel of August 2006 shows that stereotypes continue to be part and parcel of the way Israel is portrayed. The Stern front cover promises to inform about the following: “What makes the country so aggressive” and “The history of the Jewish State”, suggesting that the two are interlinked. In front of a tank, set against a blood red sky, which merges with the picture of an Israeli flag, one sees a religious soldier praying in the Tallith. At the bottom of the cover, a group of Kibbutzniks seemingly marches over the separation barrier.³⁷⁴

3.4.5 Antisemitism

3.4.5.1 Traditional and Secondary Antisemitism

Antisemitism cannot be ignored when looking at issues related to German public opinion towards Israel. There are a number of factors which relate to Antisemitism, which affect, or have the potential to affect, the special relationship. Germany has had a long history of latent Antisemitism, which worryingly now includes strong Secondary Antisemitism, including perceptions that Jews exploit the Holocaust for financial gain. Further, politicians have attempted to exploit the undercurrent of Antisemitism. This includes politicians from the parliamentary parties as well as extremist parties such as the NPD. On a positive note, attempts to exploit Antisemitic feelings have largely failed, although the rise of the NPD remains a concern.

³⁷³ Hannes Stein, “Ist eine Spiegel-Titelgeschichte Massiv Antisemitisch”, Welt, 13 January 2007.

³⁷⁴ See Stern, No. 32, 3 August 2006.

Traditional Antisemitic views are held on average by about one tenth to one fifth of the population.³⁷⁵ These include ideas such as Jews yielding too much power or being responsible for being hated, together with religious Antisemitism, which sees Jews as responsible for the death of Jesus. In terms of party affiliation, voters who hold Antisemitic views are relatively evenly spread among the five parties represented in the Bundestag.³⁷⁶ Therefore, even parties, mentioned above, who have provided strong support to Israel have on average up to ten percent of their support from voters who hold traditional Antisemitic views. Amongst voters for right-wing parties (NPD, DVU, REP) Antisemitic views are embraced by 50 percent of voters in East Germany and 37.8 percent of voters in West Germany.³⁷⁷

Germany has further seen strong Secondary Antisemitic views, where Jews are seen as financially exploiting the Shoah. 46 percent of the German public either totally agree (10 percent) or see some truth (36 percent) to the statement that “Jews try to use the past of the Third Reich to their advantage and let the Germans pay for that”.³⁷⁸ It can be assumed that to some extent these views are a factor in support for closure. Moreover, in light of reassessments of Germany’s past, these figures reflect that nearly half the German public not only feel as if they are victims of the war, but also victims of the Jews.

Other examples of strong support for Secondary Antisemitic views were revealed in the Heitmeyer survey. A total of 68.3 percent of the German public agreed with the statement: “I am angry that Germans are still reproached today with crimes against the

³⁷⁵ See for instance Decker and Brähler (2006), 38.

³⁷⁶ Among West Germans the percentages of voters with Antisemitic views according to party affiliation are 9.8 percent (CDU/CSU), 10.2 percent (SPD), 5.1 percent (FDP), 9.4 percent (Green Party), 4.8 percent (Left Party); among East Germans the percentages are 4.4 percent (CDU/CSU), 2.7 percent (SPD), 9.7 percent (FDP), 2.4 percent (Green Party), 4.2 percent (Left Party). See Decker and Brähler (2006), 38 and 51-52.

³⁷⁷ Decker and Brähler (2006), 38 and 51-52.

³⁷⁸ Germans and Jews, Bertelsmann Survey (2007), 32. The statement found 16 percent more support amongst West Germans than amongst East Germans and is more dominant among older population groups.

Jews.” Another 62.3 percent supported the statement: “I am fed up to hear again and again of the German crimes to the Jews.”³⁷⁹ An ADL survey of twelve European countries in 2005 showed that 42 percent of all respondents surveyed believed that “Jews still talk too much about what happened to them in the Holocaust”. The German percentage was above average at 48 percent and was the third highest result.³⁸⁰

The Heitmeyer survey has further shown that Israeli policy can serve as a pretext for expressing Antisemitic views. This is significant as some German Antisemitism can be attributed to a dislike of Israeli policy, which therefore can be said to relate to the special relationship. A total of 37.7 percent of Germans agreed with the statement: “Israeli policy makes Jews more dislikeable to me”. Another 44.4 percent agreed with the statement: “Given Israel’s policy I can understand well that one does not like the Jews.”³⁸¹ In a recent article for the German newspaper *Die Zeit*, Heitmeyer argued that his surveys have shown a correlation between the Israeli-Arab conflict and the rise of traditional Antisemitic views.³⁸²

3.4.5.2 Politicians and Antisemitism

A number of politicians in the Bundestag have tried to make use of these latent Antisemitic currents or have embraced them themselves. Ahead of the 2002 elections, FDP politician Jürgen Möllemann aimed to catch protest votes of right-wing party voters in his ambitious campaign to gain the FDP 18 percent of the vote by exploiting Jewish and Israeli issues. Shortly before the elections, Möllemann distributed about 8 million leaflets to households in North Rhine Westphalia which aimed to galvanise support against Ariel Sharon and

³⁷⁹ *Deutsche Zustände* (key findings), 4.

³⁸⁰ *ADL Survey* (2005), 8.

³⁸¹ *Deutsche Zustände* (key findings), 4.

³⁸² Wilhelm Heitmeyer, “Deutsche Angst”, *Zeit*, 14 December 2006.

Michel Friedman, Deputy Chairman of the Central Council of Jews.³⁸³ In addition to right-wing voters, he aimed to attract the votes of 400,000 Muslims voters, who he assumed would support his Antisemitic campaign. Möllemann prided himself for having received 35,000 letters of support ‘from mainstream voters’.³⁸⁴ Placards at NPD demonstrations stating ‘Solidarity with Möllemann’ clearly indicated how his campaign was received.³⁸⁵ However, on a positive note, representatives of the Turkish community, on whose votes Möllemann had counted, denounced the campaign. As Vice Chairman Kenan Kolat stated: “It is an insult to believe Muslims could be seduced with these Antisemitic tones.”³⁸⁶ The FDP marginally improved their percentage of the vote³⁸⁷, however high-profile members such as former State Minister in the Foreign Ministry Hildegard Hamm-Brücher left the party. Hamm-Brücher, who had previously written to the FDP stating that she felt ashamed of her party on account of Möllemann’s campaign, wrote in her letter of resignation that she could no longer recognise “the traces of upright liberals such as Theodor Heuss, Thomas Dehler, Karl-Hermann Flach and Ignatz Bubis” in a party which has now ‘styled itself as a right-wing party’.³⁸⁸

Former CDU politician Martin Hohmann, who was a member of the Bundestag, embraced Antisemitic views and was known to have lectured at right-wing extremist gatherings.³⁸⁹ In a speech entitled ‘Justice for Germany’ of 3 October 2003 marking Germany’s reunification, which Hohmann delivered to 120 party members in the community of Neuhof in the State of Hesse, he drew on Henry Ford’s Antisemitic four

³⁸³ Stefan Schmitz, “War Möllemann Käuflich”, Stern, 11 June 2003.

³⁸⁴ “Sie Haben Sich Verirrt Herr Möllemann”, WDR, 6 June 2002.

³⁸⁵ “500 Leipziger Protestieren gegen 1720 Neonazis”, Leipziger Volkszeitung, 10 June 2002.

³⁸⁶ Dominik Cziesche, “Schlag ins Wasser”, Spiegel, 10 June 2002.

³⁸⁷ The FDP party improved its 2002 election results by 1.2 percent.

³⁸⁸ Rainer Pörtner, “Abschied der Alten Dame”, Berliner Zeitung, 25 September 2002.

³⁸⁹ These gatherings were under close surveillance of the law-enforcement authorities. “Rechtsradikale in der CDU”, Panorama (ARD), No. 614, 6 June 2002.

volume publication ‘The International Jew’ as well as Johannes Rogalla von Bieberstein’s ‘Jewish Bolshevism: Myth and Reality’ to construct the argument that Jews through their participation in Communist organisations and parties must be held accountable for ‘millions of dead’.³⁹⁰ By doing so, he employed classic types of Antisemitic conspiracy theories of Jews being behind Russian Bolshevism, which had been used throughout the 1920s and 1930s by the Nazis. Hohmann further employed other well-known tropes to agitate against Jews such as when he pointed out that Germans “are treated worse than others”, referring to pension payments paid by Germany to Holocaust survivors, which he demanded to be cut in light of a strained German economy.

Although CDU politicians such as Heiner Geißler and Jürgen Rüttgers distanced themselves publicly from Hohmann’s speech, it took several weeks for the party to come forward with its decision to exclude Hohmann on account of his speech. Opinion polls showed that amongst the public, and particularly the CDU/CSU voters, Hohmann enjoyed relatively high support. 42 percent of all those questioned, and 49 percent of CDU voters and members, believed that “one should be able today to make Hohmann’s remarks without being seen as Antisemitic”, however, 45 percent of CDU/CSU voters and 52 percent of the German public supported Hohmann’s removal from politics.³⁹¹

Members of the Bundestag and high ranking military figures have shown support for Hohmann. Brigadier General Reinhard Günzel, who was commander of the Bundeswehr Special Forces Unit (KSK) thanked Hohmann in a personal letter for his “braveness and clarity”. As Günzel stated: “You can be assured that you represent the

³⁹⁰ Hohmann Speech (2003).

³⁹¹ The survey was commissioned by the ARD and conducted by Infratest among 1,008 people. See “Presseerklärung: Mehrheit der CDU-Wähler Hält Hohmanns Äußerungen Nicht für Antisemitisch und ist gegen Parteiausschluss”, Panorama (ARD), 13 November 2003.

thoughts of a majority of our people.”³⁹² Several CDU politicians further joined in the initiative ‘Critical Solidarity with Martin Hohmann’, which aimed to revoke his exclusion from the Bundestag and the party.³⁹³ When Günzel was sent into early retirement by Defence Minister Peter Struck (SPD), once the letter became public, Günzel also found support among CDU/CSU politicians such as when member of the Bundestag Hans Raidel (CSU) argued that Günzel “was by no means right-wing extremist”; Günzel’s more recent writings and activities have clearly suggested otherwise.³⁹⁴ Since his expulsion from the Bundestag, Hohmann has tried to attract the right-wing spectrum, campaigning on populist issues such as ‘strengthening German identity’ and increasing the ‘Volkswachstum’³⁹⁵ by banning abortion and revoking rights for homosexual partnerships, however, he failed to receive a direct mandate in the 2005 elections.³⁹⁶

3.4.5.3 Right-Wing Criminality

Germany has seen a constant rise in right-wing extremist crimes in recent years, including crimes with an Antisemitic background, which Interior Minister Wolfgang Schäuble termed a ‘cause of concern’.³⁹⁷ According to figures of the Federal Interior Ministry, right-wing politically motivated criminality rose from 11,576 attacks in 2003 to 18,142 in 2006, which is an increase of 63 percent.³⁹⁸ The number of right-wing politically motivated

³⁹² Letter from Reinhard Günzel to Martin Hohmann, 29 October 2003.

³⁹³ See www.kritische-solidaritaet.de.

³⁹⁴ Since being evicted from the Bundeswehr, Günzel has become a lecturer at the Institute for State Policy, which the North Rhine Westphalia Report on the Protection of the Constitution of 2002 pointed out as being one of the educational centres for the ‘New Right’. NRW Report on the Protection of the Constitution (2002), 111; “Ex-KSK Chef Lobt NS-Spezialeinheit als Vorbild”, Spiegel, 24 February 2007 and Barbara Bollwahn, “Ein General Wechselt die Front”, TAZ, 24 May 2004.

³⁹⁵ The term denotes ‘population increase’.

³⁹⁶ Hohmann presents his election campaign on his private website www.martinhohmann.de. Where Hohmann politically stands is also evident in the jargon he uses, talking of ‘Duckmäusertum’ and ‘Untertanengeist’ (‘subservience’) of Germany’s political culture.

³⁹⁷ Press Release on the Publication of Figures on Right-Wing Extremist Crimes in 2006, Federal Interior Ministry, 30 March 2007.

³⁹⁸ Figures available from the Federal Interior Ministry under www.bmi.bund.de.

crimes with an Antisemitic background has increased by a third from 1,199 incidents in 2003 to 1,682 in 2005.³⁹⁹ 1,662 incidents were registered in 2006, which is a slight decrease of 1.2 percent.⁴⁰⁰ Whilst the majority of crimes are non-violent crimes such as the desecration of Jewish cemeteries and memorial sights, there has been a doubling of violent crimes with Antisemitic background from 22 cases in 2004 to 44 in 2006.⁴⁰¹

3.4.5.4 Extremism in State Institutions

Of particular concern to the authorities has been the apparent rise of Antisemitic incidents in institutions such as the Federal Police and the Bundeswehr. For instance, in 2005 an incident took place at the Munich Bundeswehr University where a student had his door defaced with Nazi graffiti. Although the perpetrator was not found, he was assumed to have come from within the campus as the university can only be entered through passing a control.⁴⁰² In another incident, a group of police cadets refused to listen to the testimony of Holocaust survivor Isaak Behar who spoke at the Berlin Police Academy, shouting that the Jewish community was emotionally blackmailing Germany. Further, three police bodyguards who had been installed by the State of Hesse to protect former Deputy Chairman of the Central Council of Jews Michel Friedman were found to be Nazi sympathizers.⁴⁰³ A publication entitled *Secret Warriors*, which was published in the right-wing publishing house *Pour le Merite* in 2006, contained articles by Ulrich Wegener,

³⁹⁹ *EUMC Report* (2006), 10.

⁴⁰⁰ Figures from the Federal Interior Ministry.

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰² “Nazi-Schmiererei an der Stubentür”, *AFP*, 30 March 2007.

⁴⁰³ One bodyguard dressed in his free time in a black SS uniform. Another printed out a fake certificate declaring himself to be a member of the SS. The third bodyguard stored the Horst Wessel song on his computer. Roger Boyes, “Police Cadets’ Treatment of Holocaust Survivor Fuels Neo-Nazi Fear”, *The Times*, 23 March 2007.

founder of the GSG-9 counter terrorism unit, and Reinhard Günzel, which placed the GSG-9 and the KSK in the tradition of the Wehrmacht unit Die Brandenburger.⁴⁰⁴

3.4.5.5 Rise of the NPD

Various commentators have warned against growing support for the NPD, particularly in Eastern Germany.⁴⁰⁵ Although the DVU and the REP have seen a steady decline evident in the decrease of their membership base, the NPD has been able to widen its support in recent years, increasing its membership base within one year by 1,000, so that the total membership was 7,000 members by the end of 2006.⁴⁰⁶ In the 2005 general elections, a total of 5 percent of the 18 to 24 year olds voted for the NPD; in the five East German states the number rose to a total of 10 percent.⁴⁰⁷ Whilst only securing 1.58 percent of the votes in the general elections of 2005, the NPD has recently succeeded to enter the local parliaments of two states in Eastern Germany. In the September 2004 elections in Saxony, the NPD secured 9.2 percent of the votes, which gained it 12 out of 124 seats. In the elections of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania in September 2006, the NPD secured 7.3 percent of the votes, which gives it 6 out of 71 seats.⁴⁰⁸ Die Zeit journalist Toralf Staud who observed the NPD for many years cautioned against wide-spread support for right-wing groups in Eastern Germany. Although not yet represented in the Bundestag, the danger of the NPD lies, according to Staud, in playing on the relatively strong authoritarian views among Eastern Germans, which are a relic of the regime of the Socialist Unity Party

⁴⁰⁴ “Ex-KSK Chef Lobt NS-Spezialeinheit als Vorbild”, *Spiegel*, 24 February 2007.

⁴⁰⁵ See for instance Staud (2005), Decker and Brähler (2006) and Protection of the Constitution Report 2005.

⁴⁰⁶ In terms of members, the NPD is thus the second biggest party after the DVU. The DVU counts 8,500 members and the REP 6,000. Protection of the Constitution Report 2005, 6-7 and “Verfassungsschützer Sehen NPD Dominanz am Rechten Rand”, *Reuters*, 11 January 2007.

⁴⁰⁷ Protection of the Constitution Report 2005, 7.

⁴⁰⁸ Sabina Casagrande, “Germany Struggles to Explain Far-Right Election Success”, *Deutsche Welle*, 19 September 2006.

of the former GDR.⁴⁰⁹ The party's appeal further lies in incorporating 'völkisch' socialist and xenophobic concepts, which enjoy wide-spread popularity.⁴¹⁰ The NPD particularly finds strong support among the younger generation where it is able to blend into a growing skinhead youth culture.⁴¹¹

⁴⁰⁹ Staud (2005), 13. The FES study has drawn similar conclusions from its findings. See Decker and Brähler (2006), 83.

⁴¹⁰ Staud (2005), 14. The 2006 FES study has found that xenophobic beliefs are held by about 30 to 40 percent of the population. For instance, 39.1 percent of the German public believe that "Germany has become swamped by the presence of many foreigners"; 40.5 percent in East Germany and 38.8 percent in West Germany thought so. Decker and Brähler (2006), 37.

⁴¹¹ As one example, there has been a 40 percent rise in skinhead concerts between 2004 and 2005. Protection of the Constitution Report 2005, 8 and Staud (2005), 14.

4. Conclusion

4.1 Major Findings

Political relations between Israel and Germany have been strong and deep throughout the past six years. Both the Schröder and the Merkel governments have been staunchly committed to the special relationship, emphasising that this is a firm pillar of German foreign policy. As Merkel stated, “relations [with Israel] will always remain special relations on account of the unique historical situation”.⁴¹²

German governments have underlined their sincerity to acknowledge Germany’s past by, for instance, setting a lasting symbol in the capital’s centre to commemorate the Shoah, as well as through symbolic gestures such as when former President Johannes Rau announced in the 1999 presidential elections that his supporters should know that he would work for the special relationship.⁴¹³ Germany’s commitment to the special relationship has also caused different governments, including the Schröder and the Merkel governments, to take a stronger stance than other European countries in combating Antisemitism. German courts have made full use of existing legal provisions, for instance, through tackling Holocaust denial. Following up on a number of verdicts against high-profile Holocaust deniers in Germany over the past years, a Mannheim court recently sentenced Gernar Rudolf to two and a half years in prison for having denied the Holocaust in a number of publications and on the internet.⁴¹⁴ Employing anti-terrorism legislation, Germany has

⁴¹² Merkel as cited in “Mit Tiefer Scham Erfüllt”, *DPA*, 30 January 2006.

⁴¹³ Pallade (2005), 275.

⁴¹⁴ “German Court Jails Holocaust Denier”, *EJP*, 15 March 2007.

further banned Islamist groups on grounds of denying Israel's right to exist, which has little precedent in other European states.⁴¹⁵

The relationship has received important institutional support from different policy groups, parliamentary friendship groups in the Bundestag and the Knesset, and political foundations operating in Israel. These groups have, for instance, worked towards facilitating contacts between Israeli and German politicians, raising awareness amongst the Israeli and German public, and fostering relations between the younger generations on the leadership level as well as on the grass-roots level.

Further, German governments have demonstrated their commitment to the special relationship by extending diplomatic support to Israel. Reflecting on the depth of the relationship, Germany provided support on the sensitive issue of Soviet Jewish immigration, which had been a cause of concern to the Sharon government in light of demographic studies showing that Israel's Jewish population might no longer represent the majority population in the future. On the EU level, Germany has helped Israel by blocking EU sanctions, modifying EU statements, and preventing cease fire calls. Since assuming the EU presidency in January 2007, Germany has used its leverage to press for EU-wide legislation to ban Holocaust denial, something that has recently been achieved.⁴¹⁶ Further, Holocaust denial featured prominently at a public hearing in the European parliament in March 2007.⁴¹⁷

⁴¹⁵ As an example, in contrast to the Federal Interior Ministry's ban of Hizb alTahrir in 2003, in 2006 Britain shelved moves to outlaw the Islamist group under new legislation against the glorification of terrorism after warnings from intelligence chiefs, police and civil liberties groups that the step would backfire by forcing the group underground. Nigel Morris, "PM Forced to Shelve Islamist Group Ban", Independent, 18 July 2006.

⁴¹⁶ However, some commentators point to the limitations of the agreement. "New EU Rules Would Jail Shoah Deniers", AP, 20 April 2007.

⁴¹⁷ Yossi Lempkowicz, "Fighting Racism in Europe: Criminalizing Holocaust Denial?", EJP, 20 March 2007.

Germany has also played a key role in upholding the EU boycott against Hamas. Since the January 2006 elections, Germany has imposed a strict communication ban with Hamas, which the government has announced would remain in place for as long as Hamas refuses to recognise the ‘three conditions’. As head of the EU presidency, the German government has intensified pressure on the Palestinian Unity government, calling on the government to release Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, whilst continuing its policy of sidelining officials from Hamas in an effort to keep up the EU boycott on Hamas.⁴¹⁸

On the UN level, Germany has continued its policy of extending diplomatic support to Israel by abstaining or voting against UN resolutions related to Israel and helping to prevent Israel from being singled out during the UN Conference against Racism in Durban. Disregarding its economic interests, Germany has further supported UN sanctions against Iran. Unilaterally, Germany has provided support on the Iranian issue by cutting back loan guarantees and carefully investigating cases of illegal weapons exports, leading, for instance, to the arrest in May 2006 of four men said to have supplied equipment to Iran which could be used for the building of drones.⁴¹⁹

On the level of security cooperation, the events of 9/11 have brought the two countries closer together. Against the background of terrorists operating in Germany, Germany’s security services actively sought Israel’s assistance in counter-terrorism, drawing from Israeli expertise and intelligence. Moreover, Germany’s ban of organisations collecting money for Hamas and support for the security barrier, which has been voiced by

⁴¹⁸ As one PA official stated following Merkel’s visit to the Palestinian territories at the beginning of April 2007: “She [Merkel] appeared to be obsessed with the case of Gilad Shalit. But she refused to even acknowledge the fact that we have more than 10,000 prisoners in Israel.” As cited in Khaled Abu Toameh, “PA Upset Over Merkel’s Pro-Israel Stance”, Jerusalem Post, 4 April 2007.

⁴¹⁹ Peter Scherer, “100 Deutsche Firmen Lieferten Rüstungsgüter an den Iraq”, Die Welt, 12 March 2003 and Iran Report (2006), 12.

Fischer, Schily and Merkel alike, indicate a great deal of identification with Israel's security concerns.⁴²⁰

The depth of Israeli-German relations is also evident on the level of military cooperation, where Germany helps Israel to extend its submarine flotilla by providing Israel with two more nuclear Dolphin-type submarines. Demonstrating that Germany is firmly committed to the special relationship, the government will make a contribution of up to €333 million to the total costs. Israel emphasises the strategic importance of the deal, allowing for the Israeli Navy to position the submarines at strategically important locations in the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea. Concerns that the deal might upset Germany's relations with the Arab states and Iran, or go against Germany's restrictive armaments policy were of secondary importance when the Federal Security Council after several years of negotiations approved the submarine deal in November 2005. The Merkel government's willingness to provide Israel with Dingo II transport vehicles, should Israel desire to buy these vehicles from Germany, further demonstrates a commitment to the special relationship. As a novelty in the military relations of the two countries, since September 2006, the German Navy has been patrolling the Lebanese coast with the explicit public embrace and support of Israel. Even though the mission has been criticised as having mere symbolic character as the trafficking of weapons occurs mainly on the land route from Syria into Lebanon, the presence of German troops demands unprecedented efforts in Israeli-German military cooperation.⁴²¹

⁴²⁰ This goes against the argument that "Germany does not seem to appreciate Israel's unique security dilemmas" as, for instance, voiced by Efraim Inbar in his article "A Friendship That Needs Fostering", Jerusalem Post, 28 May 2005.

⁴²¹ Incidents such as those between several F-16 fighter jets and the German vessel Alster, in which flares were fired by the Israeli planes close to the German ship, leading the German troops to believe that Israel wants 'to teach them a lesson', demonstrate that better coordination is needed to avoid further misunderstandings. Efrat Weiss, "Peretz: Israel Didn't Fire at German Ship", Ynet, 25 October 2006.

The depth of Israeli-German political relations also has to be seen against the background of political dissenting voices, both within the government coalitions and the opposition, who contested the government's weapons exports to Israel and its policy of providing diplomatic support to Israel. Responses by external actors, either positive or negative, further demonstrate that the depth of Israeli-German political relations has not gone unnoticed. Whilst the US commends the strength of Israeli-German relations, within the EU, some member states have taken issue with German support for Israel, leading Germany, for instance, to be sidelined in a Middle East initiative launched by Spain, Italy and France in November 2006. In the Arab world, the depth of Israeli-German relations has caused considerable aggravation, which clearly shines through in Arab media coverage on the topic.⁴²² Different Palestinian negotiators have pointed out that Germany, due to its special relationship with Israel, cannot be considered an honest broker in the Israeli-Arab conflict. As one Palestinian government official put it following Merkel's visit to Ramallah in April 2007: "Germany will not be able to play any role in the peace process because of the Chancellor's bias to Israel."⁴²³

As the above factors suggest, political relations throughout the past six years have been strong, indeed allowing for the relationship to be termed 'special'. However, looking at the public opinion level, a growing asymmetry is discernable, which casts doubt of whether the special relationship can be preserved into the future. Whilst Israeli public opinion has indicated that Israelis are willing to reconcile with Germans and normalise

⁴²² Berlin correspondent Abdel-Azim Hammad of the Egyptian daily newspaper Al-Ahram, for instance, wrote: "Germany often tries to be even-handed in the Arab-Israeli conflict, but it sometimes has a peculiar way of going about it. It offers the Arabs technical and financial assistance, and at the same time it offers Israel weapons. On the diplomatic front, Germany tends to undermine any European decision not approved in advance by Israel. Germany also tends to unleash a pre-emptive broadside of criticism at the Palestinians, before it allows itself the luxury of slapping Israel on the hand." See Abdel-Azim Hammad, "God Cop, Bad Cop?", *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 23-29 September 2004.

⁴²³ Khaled Abu Toameh, "PA Upset by Merkel's Pro-Israel Stance", *Jerusalem Post*, 4 April 2007.

relations, even though a certain indifference is discernable in attitudes to Germany, German public opinion has been ambivalent about preserving special relations with Israel.

As memories of the war have almost totally lapsed, Germans no longer feel responsible for their past. Particularly the younger generation, who already represent the third or fourth generation after the war, are no longer inclined to accept a historic responsibility for German crimes against the Jews.⁴²⁴ Instead, the German public has come to reassess its past, devoting attention to the suffering of the German victims of the war. Politicians have been receptive towards this shift in public attention. For instance, the building of a centre in Berlin, which commemorates the expulsion of Germans during the Second World War, has received support from Chancellor Merkel.⁴²⁵ The Israeli-Arab conflict of the past six years further galvanised negative public opinion towards Israel. In line with other European countries, the German public's negative view of Israel corresponds with the perceived level of violence. As found by sociologist Wilhelm Heitmeyer, the perception of many Germans is such that they compare Israeli behaviour to the Palestinians with the behaviour of the Nazis to the Jews. Alienation over Israel's military response during the Israeli-Lebanese conflict further increased public calls on the government to reassess its special relationship with Israel such as when 25 academics launched a petition in a German daily newspaper in November 2006. Media coverage of Israel during the past years reinforced the image of a country in permanent conflict. The

⁴²⁴ Unpublished tables (Germany), 15.

⁴²⁵ Traditionally a concern of the CDU/CSU, upon the party's initiative, the 2005 coalition agreement included a statement of willingness to establish such a centre in the current legislative period. The SPD, however, has signalled its caution to the project. Coalition Agreement (2005), 114. Sven Kuntze, "Gedenken Vertreibung: Gedenkstunde für Vertriebene", Tagesschau ARD, 18 September 2006.

use of different stereotypes in media coverage of Israel such as the ‘war loving’ and ‘blood thirsty’ Israeli have reinforced negative perceptions of the country.⁴²⁶

As a further factor impacting on the relationship, in addition to traditional Antisemitic views, Germany has seen strong Secondary Antisemitism, according to which nearly half of the German public either totally or fairly strongly agree that Jews are using the Shoah to financially exploit the Germans. These Antisemitic undercurrents have at times been used by politicians of the mainstream parties in the Bundestag, such as Jürgen Möllemann. Positively, Möllemann’s campaign has been unsuccessful; however, the fact that voices such as that of Möllemann or Hohmann emerged amongst parties in the political centre should be cause for concern. Equally worrisome, despite additional educational efforts, federal institutions such as the Bundeswehr and the Federal Police have repeatedly seen right-wing extremist and Antisemitic incidents, including at the top of the hierarchy. On a positive note, cases such as Reinhard Günzel’s embrace for Hohmann were quickly dealt with by the authorities.

Germany has further seen a rise in Antisemitic attacks in recent years and growing political support for the right-wing extremist NPD, both of which have the potential to harm future relations between Israel and Germany. Since 2003 the number of officially recorded attacks with Antisemitic background has grown by roughly one third. Violent crimes with an Antisemitic background have even doubled between 2004 and 2006. The recent attempted arson of a Jewish kindergarten in Berlin illustrates the new brutality of attacks. Indicating the extent to which the Jewish community in Berlin feels threatened, Gideon Joffe, head of the Jewish community in Berlin, suggested in the wake of the attack

⁴²⁶ See for instance the Stern cover story on the reasons behind the Israeli-Lebanese conflict, which creates the perception that Israelis ‘love’ to go to war. See Stern, No. 32, 3 August 2006.

that non-Jews should for one day wear the Kippah or the Star of David to experience the extent to which Antisemitism exists in Germany.⁴²⁷ Concerns over the rise of Antisemitic attacks shined through in a statement published by the Israeli embassy in Berlin in response to the attack: “We observe with great concern the rise of Antisemitic and right-wing extremist crimes in Germany in recent years. [...] The attack [on the Jewish kindergarten] crossed a line.”⁴²⁸

The rise of the NPD, which has recently succeeded to enter two parliaments in Eastern Germany and continues to increase in membership base, particularly among the younger generation, should be a further cause of concern. Still a marginal political force with no representation in the Bundestag, the NPD has nevertheless succeeded to attract 10 percent of the young male vote in Eastern Germany and 5 percent of the total young male vote in all of Germany during the 2005 elections. Moreover, like no other political force, the NPD has succeeded in recent years to infiltrate the youth culture in Eastern Germany. Without alternative ideologies and concepts, right-wing extremist views have come to be firmly established in some rural areas of Eastern Germany.⁴²⁹

4.2 Government Responses

The German government has begun to respond to the above challenges to the special relationship by, for instance, providing greater support for youth exchange programmes and educational programmes, which tackle Antisemitism and deal with Holocaust remembrance.

⁴²⁷ “Kanzlerin Verurteilt Anschlag auf Jüdischen Kindergarten”, *DPA*, 1 March 2007.

⁴²⁸ Israeli Embassy in Berlin Press Release: Israeli Embassy Condemns Attack on a Jewish Kindergarten, 1 March 2007.

⁴²⁹ Staud (2005), 14.

In an effort to bring together young Israelis and Germans, the German government stepped up efforts to extend the long-established youth exchange programmes between the two countries, providing an additional €3.875 million in financial support since the year 2001.⁴³⁰ Although overshadowed by the Second Intifada, between 2001 and 2006, a total of 908 youth leader seminars and exchange visits took place during these years, which were subsidised by the Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth.⁴³¹ Moreover, the government has provided a number of scholarships for Israeli students and supported a limited number of volunteers working either in Israel or Germany.⁴³² Following a Bundestag law of 2000, the government has further set aside an endowment of €358 million to support projects which focus on Holocaust remembrance and the development of new educational concepts.⁴³³ The endowment has, for instance, financed invitations for over 1,200 victims of National Socialist crimes, including Holocaust survivors, to speak to different German audiences.⁴³⁴

On the educational level, the endowment has provided support to the Leo Baeck Programme, which offers teacher training on the subject of German-Jewish history and has recently finished a list of recommendations on the teaching of German-Jewish history in

⁴³⁰ Information provided on www.conact-org.de.

⁴³¹ Five Years Conact (2006), 31.

⁴³² These initiatives are financed by the Remembrance and Future Fund (see below).

⁴³³ The endowment is part of the Remembrance and Future Fund, set up in 2000 to compensate forced labourers and other victims of the Nazi regime. As stated in the 2000 Bundestag law on the Remembrance and Future Fund, the special endowment should promote the “understanding between the peoples, the needs of survivors of the National Socialist regime, youth exchange, social justice, remembrance of the threats by totalitarian regimes and joint international projects in the humanitarian field.” In order to preserve the fund into the future, support is limited to about €7 million per year, making use of the annual revenues. See Remembrance and Future Fund: Funding Policy, 22 June 2006.

⁴³⁴ This included, for instance, an event initiated by the DIG Magdeburg, in which Holocaust survivors from Magdeburg shared their experiences. Financial support was also provided to organisations in Israel and Eastern Europe who have invited victims of the Nazi regime to speak to their audiences.

German schools, which is to become part of future school curricula.⁴³⁵ The government is also the major donor of an educational website on the history of National Socialism.⁴³⁶ Launched in 2000, the so-called 'Learning from History' website contains different educational materials which provide guidance on teaching about the National Socialist regime. Educators have the opportunity to share school projects, in which students researched aspects of the National Socialist era or dealt creatively with Holocaust remembrance. The website informs on current exhibitions, events and publications, and further functions as a portal to various other websites containing documents and projects.

Recognising the threat of growing right-wing extremism and Antisemitism, in addition to the approximately €192 million already provided between 2001 and 2006 to existing educational programmes, at the beginning of 2007 the government launched an additional programme, for which €19 million are set aside in the 2007 budget to encourage municipalities, particularly in Eastern Germany, to set up action plans countering right-wing extremism.⁴³⁷ In addition, the programme is to support model projects, which provide educators in kindergartens and schools with the didactic skills to educate children towards tolerance for foreigners. Further, the programme is to support new educational concepts for Holocaust remembrance acknowledging that remembrance has to take on a new role in light of the passing away of the survivors of the Shoah. Finally, the programme supports new educational concepts for dealing with right-wing extremist youth.⁴³⁸

⁴³⁵ Put together as an 'orientation guide', the recommendations are available on the Leo Baeck Programme website and have been forwarded to the cultural ministries of the sixteen federal states. See information provided under the Leo Baeck Programme website under <http://www.lehrerfortbildung-leo-baeck.de>.

⁴³⁶ The website is available in English under www.holocaust-education.de.

⁴³⁷ Youth for Pluralism, Tolerance and Democracy: Against Right-Wing Extremism, Hatred Against Foreigners and Antisemitism, Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, 15 December 2006, 1.

⁴³⁸ Ibid., 7-14.

Still, more needs and can be done, particularly on the educational level. Whilst the Israeli-Arab conflict will always overshadow relations between Israel and Germany, reinforcing the German public's critical stance towards Israel and impeding personal visits to Israel, education can make a significant contribution towards lowering Antisemitic prejudice and breaking down stereotypes, and infusing the younger generation with a sense of historic responsibility. Through its actions the government has demonstrated its willingness to preserve the special relationship, however, its future remains in the balance, as these efforts will be futile if they do not receive the support of civil society.

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