

## ISRAEL'S ROLE IN THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM AND IN THE MIDDLE EAST

The peace process, which was primarily initiated by the United States, was supposed in the long run to result, amongst other things, in the normalization of Israel's position in the Middle East. This expected outcome was viewed as being even more important in light of the fact that the peace treaty signed with Egypt in 1979 had not put an end to Israel's 'pariah' status in the region.

With the end of the Cold War, Israel found itself in a strategically favorable position. The country has its own nuclear weapons,<sup>1</sup> an excellent system of medium-range missiles, and has concluded as America's junior partner a military alliance with Turkey. Since the signing of the Declaration of Principles (DoP), numerous states have established diplomatic relations with Israel. However, the current government under Benjamin Netanyahu is well on its way to destroying the newly formed relations with Israel's Arab neighbors because it does not stick to the stipulations laid down in the agreements and denies the Palestinians even the smallest concessions. Prime Minister Ehud Barak will have to repair the damages done by his predecessor.

Israel - although a regional power - has taken on a 'superpower status' and wants to assert its influence until Morocco and Pakistan.<sup>2</sup> Any hegemonic claim of another power in the Middle East, e.g., Iran, is being rejected in alliance with the United States under the motto 'Fight the Islamic fundamentalism'.

### 1. US-Israeli Relations

Following the end of World War II, the foreign policy of the United States pursued three main goals: first, to contain communism; second, to secure raw material sources in the Third World for American concerns; and third, to universally enforce the American style of democracy and - connected with this - the free trade principle. Any liberation or independ-

<sup>1</sup> The nuclear weapon program was developed from the 1950s onwards with the help of France.

<sup>2</sup> See Israel Shahak, *Open Secrets. Israeli Nuclear and Foreign Policies*. London, Chicago, 1997.

ence movement was automatically categorized as a threat to American interests, suspected of 'acts of communism' and fought accordingly.

When the French and British could not hold on to their colonial outposts any longer the United States took over their role, including in the Middle East. Until the second Gulf War of 1991 the United States had no troops deployed in the region. According to the British power model of 'indirect rule', the American policy was meant to be built on an 'Arab façade', which, according to John Foster Dulles, had to be weak and dependent and something over which the United States should never lose control. Back then, only the non-Arab states Iran, Pakistan, Israel and Turkey were eligible to take on the role of 'policemen', who were to support the American position on the spot and put an end to any form of internal unrest that had the potential to turn into a national uprising.

Since the recognition of Israel by American President Harry Truman in 1948, Israel and the United States have maintained close bilateral relations. Already in 1958, the US National Security Council assigned Israel the role of an ally against Arab nationalism.<sup>3</sup> In the Six-Day War of June 1967, the Arab states suffered a crushing defeat at the hands of Israel, which thus fulfilled its mission as a bulwark of Western civilization. Since that time, the US-Israeli relations have strengthened even further.

In 1967, the UN passed Resolution 242 in which territorial gains through war were condemned and Israel was urged to withdraw from the occupied territories as a prerequisite for peace. At the same time, the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states in the region - including the Jewish State - was emphasized. The Rogers Plan also foresaw a complete withdrawal of Israel to the border of 1967 as a prerequisite for peace. The Egyptian President Anwar As-Sadat accepted this proposal made by UN mediator Gunnar Jarring but Israel rejected it.

In 1971, Henry Kissinger - security advisor to President Nixon since 1969 - thwarted the Rogers Plan and directed the American Middle East policy with a focus on Israel.<sup>4</sup> Kissinger stressed that the region was like Latin America, a domain of the United States, and Europe and Japan should therefore 'stay away', including diplomatically. The US-Israeli security partnership led to a common rejectionist attitude: until today both states have prevented an international conference on the Middle East under the umbrella of the United Nations (UN) and with European Union

<sup>3</sup> See interview by the author with Noam Chomsky in *Challenge*, VIII (1997) 4, p. 6-7.

<sup>4</sup> See Norman G. Finkelstein, *Image and Reality of the Israel-Palestine Conflict*. London, New York, 1995, p.164.

(EU) participation from being held and have only accepted bilateral negotiations. The United States has vetoed numerous UN resolutions in favor of Israel.

With the Yom Kippur War, the frozen fronts reshaped anew. Kissinger, since 1973 US Secretary of State, secured with his shuttle diplomacy a cease-fire and an agreement between Egypt and Israel. In the second Sinai Agreement, which was signed in September 1975, both parties guaranteed not to use armed forces in any future conflicts.

As the 'patron saint' of Israel the United States felt responsible for the economic welfare and the security of the country. After the Yom Kippur War, it increased its financial support to the civil sector in Israel – since 1976 Israel has remained the largest individual recipient of American foreign aid. Moreover, after the signing of the Camp David Accords the military assistance was increased by a considerable amount (and remains at such a high level). In 1983, both countries signed an agreement on 'strategic cooperation', which was followed by the subsequent formation of three joint working groups: the 'Joint Political Military Group' (JPMG), the 'Joint Security Assistance Group' (JSAG), and the 'Joint Economic Development Group' (JEDG). Through these working groups, Israel has a say in essential decisions regarding American foreign aid.

After Egypt had broken away from the Arab front, the "administrations in Jerusalem... [could] further pursue their highest priority - to give no more land back - because their room to act was adequate."<sup>5</sup> Immediately after the signing of the Camp David Accords, the Begin government intensified its settlement policy.

The United States pursued a double-track policy: on the one hand it tried to achieve a solution to the Middle East conflict on the basis of 'land for peace', and on the other hand, it blocked any initiative that was based on an authentic interpretation of UN Resolution 242 and that indirectly supported the construction of settlements under Begin and Shamir. Even the large-scale Israeli technology espionage in the United States and the reselling of rockets to countries, such as China, which were the enemies of America, did not induce the administration in Washington to take action. The US Congress has not pushed through the Arms Control Export Law, initiated by President Jimmy Carter. According to statements by John Davitt, a former director of the Internal Security Department at the US

<sup>5</sup> Stefan Braun, "Die amerikanisch-israelischen Beziehungen und die Friedenssuche im Nahen Osten" in Sabine Hoffmann/Ferhad Ibrahim (ed.), *Versöhnung im Verzug. Probleme des Friedensprozesses*. Bonn, 1996, p.85.

Ministry of Justice, Israel maintains the "second most active espionage service in the United States." Nevertheless, it is still being supplied with high technology.<sup>6</sup> In addition, the United States has yet to insist that Israel sign the nuclear weapons non-proliferation treaty and open its plants for inspectors.

The outbreak of the *Intifada* in 1987 brought about a slow reevaluation in Israel and the United States. The uprising extended to all social strata in Palestinian society and showed that the Palestinians were no longer prepared to bear the occupation with all its humiliations. The American administration under Reagan and Bush made many efforts to get the contradicting parties to the negotiation table but in vain. The occupation of Kuwait by Saddam Hussein's troops opened a new chapter in the Middle East. In the first Gulf War, the United States and France had armed Iraq to the hilt because it had served as a useful instrument against the Mullah regime in Iran. Even in the early months of 1990, the Bush administration still guaranteed Saddam Hussein not only normal relations, but also the sale of sensitive technology and loans from the Import-Export Bank. However, from the beginning the United States left no doubt that it was willing to disperse Iraqi troops from Kuwait by force especially since the dictator had turned against the 'Arab façade' and thus threatened the security of Israel.

The connection of the invasion with the occupation of the occupied territories by Israel hit the fundamental interests of the United States. In 1990, Saddam had told the United States that Iraq would destroy its chemical and biological weapons if Israel would also destroy its non-conventional arms. The US State Department rejected this deal; to admit that Israel had nuclear weapons would have raised the question of the legitimacy of financial support for Israel, because American legislation from the 1970s prohibited financial aid to countries that possess nuclear weapons. In short, nothing was going to stop the United States from entering an armed conflict against Iraq, and the Bush administration succeeded in forming a coalition of Western European and Arab states and in rejecting all diplomatic initiatives.

The Palestinians found themselves between the different parties to this conflict. In Saddam they saw the strong man who wanted to take care of the Palestine problem, and they did not want to recognize the fact that he only used them for his own goals. Because of its support for Saddam, the PLO was even less acceptable as far as Israel was concerned than before.

<sup>6</sup> See Donald Neff, "Spies at Large" in *MEI*, 16 February 1996, p.9-10; and Duncan L. Clarke, "The Arrow Missile: the United States, Israel and Strategic Cooperation" in *Middle East Journal* (Summer 1995).

After the end of the second Gulf War and the proclamation of a 'new world order' by President Bush, the United States made increased efforts to settle the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. It had to exert both diplomatic and political pressure in order to have the Shamir government give up its blockade attitude and be able to open the Middle East Peace Conference on 31 October 1991 in Madrid. The subsequent negotiation rounds were doomed to failure from the very beginning because the Israeli Government – according to statements made by Shamir – was not interested in results. When Bill Clinton took over office from George Bush in January 1993, the American policy pertaining to Israel became even more one-sided.

All former American governments had rejected the annexation of East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights as well as the construction of settlements, considering them as being against International Law. For the Clinton administration, however, the territories were no longer 'occupied' but only 'disputed'. It also blindly supported the operation 'Grapes of Wrath' in Lebanon, ordered by Shimon Peres in the spring of 1996. Every condemnation on the part of the UN was blocked by the United States, which even blamed the victims for the death of over 100 civilians in a camp of the UNIFIL troops. During his subsequent visit to the United States, Peres received absolution from Clinton for the invasion. The sociologist Baruch Kimmerling wrote on 26 April 1996 in *Ha'aretz* that Israel had led a war against the civil population. "Only people who lack moral standards can think up such a policy and execute it. It is the kind of policy to which only the worse regimes in this world resort." US Secretary of State Warren Christopher tried to convince Assad to take action against the Hizbollah.

Since the end of the bi-polarity the American Government has pursued an unconcealed 'hands-off' policy *vis-à-vis* all potential actors with regard to the Middle East, especially as far as Europe and the UN are concerned. It keeps declaring that all disputes between Israelis and Palestinians should be settled without external influence but, in the background, it still holds the reins. Parallel to this, it tries to rewrite the history of the Middle East conflict in the UN according to its own interpretation. The former US ambassador to the UN and now Secretary of State Madeleine Albright in particular energetically pursues this re-interpretation process. In a *communiqué* she demanded from the UN General Assembly the taking back of "obsolete, disputed, and irrelevant resolutions that emphasize political differences without offering solutions." Among the resolutions in question is Partition Resolution 181, which divided the country and declares Jerusalem an international city, and Resolution 194, which deals with the return of the Palestinian refugees or their compensation. Were the United States to have its way, this would mean that the bilateral conflict could only be solved on the basis of political power without possible legal provisions being taken into consideration.

The hope of the Arab countries that the pro-Israel attitude of Bill Clinton would change after his re-election has disappeared completely. American and Israeli economic circles express increasing criticism about the hard-line attitude of Netanyahu, which has had disadvantageous effects on the Israeli economy. The Prime Minister rejected all arguments and blamed the international press, which published "incredibly wrong reports" and portrayed him as "Saddam of the West." He even accused the media of anti-Semitism because their criticism was directed against the 'Jewish people' and not only against the 'Israeli Government'.

Before his visit to the United States, Netanyahu stated in the *Yediot Aharonot* of 9 January 1998 that he had never shared the American ideas concerning an end to settlement in Judea and Samaria and that he rejected the idea of a so-called 'timeout' in the settlement construction, even against the wish of the United States. With this rejection Netanyahu was able to portray himself as a hard-liner who had not given in to American or Arab demands. Due to pure powerlessness and helplessness Arafat still seemed to count on Washington exerting pressure on Israel. Neither Clinton nor the Congress, however, will intervene in favor of the Palestinians before the impending Congress elections. The United States has proposed that Israel should re-deploy in the planned second phase from 12 percent of the West Bank, but even this is being rejected by the Israeli Government, which is only ready to return nine percent of the territory, even if the Palestinians renew their readiness to fight terrorism. Arafat – due to the absence of another protector or other peace concepts – must accept that Clinton has willingly become a supporter of Netanyahu's unilateral redeployment plan and that the US Congress continues its conservative pro-Israel policy.

Netanyahu met with representatives of the 'Christians for Israel', a fundamentalist organization that blindly supports the hard-liners in the US Congress as well as the expansionist and settlement policies of Israel. Most of the organization's dollar donations go to the construction of settlements. Pastor Jerry Falwell, a leading representative of the Christian fundamentalists in the United States, organized an enthusiastic reception for the Israeli Prime Minister. There are indications that this organization is responsible for a report prepared by Netanyahu's office in which Arafat was accused of allowing the Palestinian Authority (PA) to recklessly persecute Christians. The American group also cooperates with the organization of 'Christian Zionists' in Jerusalem, whose members reject any territorial compromise with the Palestinians and consider the Jewish settlements part of the preparations for the 'Second Coming of Christ'.

The loyalty of the United States *vis-à-vis* Israel contradicts its traditional democratic practices and makes its foreign policy dubious. Instead of returning to the principles of justice and freedom and standing up for the underprivileged, the Americans supply Israel with a continuous supply of arms and grant it diplomatic support, even though it intends to annex large parts of the occupied territories, tramples on the human rights of a suppressed people, and has been repeatedly condemned by the international community for its permanent breach of International Law. The United States consistently uses its veto in the UN Security Council in order to prevent condemnation of Israel, most recently when the Israeli settlement policy in Jerusalem was on the agenda. The Americans have also tried everything in order to prevent the publicizing of the UN report on the Qana'a massacre of the Israeli army. The Arab states did not let the Clinton government use them again for its own ends and refused to join a renewed alliance against Saddam Hussein at the beginning of 1998. Many of them had previously turned down the invitation to the MENA Economic Conference in Doha on 17 November 1996, but it is still not clear if the Americans have understood the message.

With regard to the Middle East conflict, the United States can only regain its credibility when it acts according to International Law and exerts pressure on Israel to force it to keep to the agreed upon accords. This would have to include an end to settlements and new negotiations on the status of Jerusalem. Jerusalem should become the capital of both peoples and be put under UN supervision in order to secure free access for followers of the three monotheistic religions to their holy places. With such a policy the United States could improve its image in the UN, but corresponding positive initiatives cannot be expected from the Clinton government. The question remains whether the involvement of the EU could not help in light of such a complicated situation.

## 2. The Middle East Policy of the European Union

One cannot speak about a coherent and convincing Middle East policy of the EU as the national interests of the 15 EU member states are too diverse. Apart from the pledge to allocate some US\$600 million during the period 1994-1998 and the French mediation between the Hizbollah and Israel during the military confrontations in South Lebanon, the EU has done little to influence events since the beginning of the peace process.

The author is of the opinion that the European powers cannot accept a 'Monroe Doctrine' for the Middle East.<sup>7</sup> That the EU has failed to transform its economic power into political influence is partly to be blamed on Germany. For example, the federal government did not support the mission of the French Foreign Minister Hervé de Charette in April 1997. Despite American-Israeli resistance, France had succeeded in mediating an agreement between Israel and the Hizbollah in which both sides agreed only to attack soldiers and freedom fighters directly and to spare the civil population. Bonn also remained silent about Jacques Chirac's Middle East trip in 1997, which did not go so well. The French President stayed for almost three days in Syria but hardly a day in Israel before he proceeded to Ramallah to address the Palestinian Parliament. Chirac should have criticized the Israeli occupation policies and practices before the Knesset – there the attention of the international public would have been guaranteed. After the visit no more French initiatives on an EU level followed, apart from the appointment of EU representative Miguel Angel Moratinos. "Europe's absence from the Middle East, which can only be called abnormal, is usually explained in terms of the profound disparity between the power of the United States and that of the European states."<sup>8</sup>

The European Middle East policy, which since May 1971 has been coordinated in the framework of the European Political Cooperation (EPC, and since the Maastricht Treaty CFSP), oscillates between the pro-Arab policy of France and the pro-Israeli policy of Germany and Great Britain. In a joint declaration made on 13 May 1971, Israel was asked to withdraw from the territories it had conquered in the course of the Six-Day War. The declaration further called for the return and compensating of the refugees as well as for secure borders for Israel and the internationalization of Jerusalem. In 1973, the EU member states explicitly recognized the 'legitimate rights' of the Palestinians and demanded a solution within the frame of the UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 as well as the withdrawal of Israel from all occupied Palestinian territories.

Between 1973 and 1980, the Palestine Question was often on the agenda of the European governments. The 11-point Venice Declaration of 13 June 1980, which had been pushed for by France, led to diplomatic turbulence. The declaration called for the creation of a regional security structure and an unlimited guarantee with regard to the existence of the

<sup>7</sup> See Ludwig Watzal, "Hilfreiche Konkurrenz? Die Nahost-Politik der USA und der EU im Vergleich" in *Internationale Politik* (1995), 7, p.38; reprinted in: *Frieden im Nahen Osten? Chancen, Gefahren, Perspektiven*. Ed. by Angelika Volle and Werner Weidenfeld. Bonn, 1997, p.94.

<sup>8</sup> Paul-Marie de la Gorce, "Europe and the Arab-Israeli Conflict: A Survey" in *JPS*, XXVI (Spring 1997) 3, p.6.

State of Israel, in addition to an end to the Israeli settlement policy in the occupied territories, the recognition of the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination "with all its consequences" and the participation of the PLO in a Middle East peace process.<sup>9</sup> Menachem Begin compared the declaration with the 'Munich Pact' of 1938. The press person of the Israeli Embassy in Bonn, Amnon Noy, judged things differently in 1997: "In retrospect, one can claim today that the Europeans chose the right way with their position."<sup>10</sup>

The United States was not interested in this initiative, which it regarded as a disturbing factor that could jeopardize the developments that had taken place since the concluding of the Camp David Accords. The pro-Palestinian position of the Europeans gave Israel reason to get closer to the United States. When the EU foreign ministers met in autumn of 1980 with representatives of Arab states, the then Israeli Foreign Minister accused the EU of supporting anti-Semitism. While Israel no longer accepted the EU as a mediator, the EU could also not realize the demands of the Arab party, which also increased its pressure. During the *Intifada* the EU pursued its own political goals as outlined in the Madrid Declaration of 27 June 1989, in which it called, among other things, for the protection of the Palestinian civil population under Israeli occupation and for the respect of human rights and the Fourth Geneva Convention. In 1990, the EU Commission proposed to the Israeli Government the assignment of a representative to the occupied territories.

During the Gulf War, the EU displayed its solidarity with Israel when British, French and Italian troops fought side by side with the United States army against Iraq. In the course of the year 1991, the EU fell far behind the United States with its Middle East policy. Israel had vehemently rejected the Europeans' call for a conference under the patronage of the UN and with PLO participation, using the argument that both the UN and the EU were biased. At the opening ceremony of the Madrid Conference, the EU and the UN played – accordingly – only minor roles, with the EU barely succeeding in getting a foot into the multilateral talks that were established in Madrid. After the conclusion of the peace negotiations the EU pledged large amounts of financial assistance for the establishment of the Palestinian Self-Government Authority.

The economic relations between Israel and the EU are based on a free trade agreement from 1975 in which Israel was granted reduced custom taxes

<sup>9</sup> See in this context also the EPC declaration on the Middle East and the European-Arab Dialogue in Venice of 13 June 1980 in *Europa-Archiv* (1980), 14, p.D 382.

<sup>10</sup> Amnon Noy, "Die Rolle Europas im nahöstlichen Friedensprozeß" in *Politische Studien*, 18 (1997), 356, p.62.

for agricultural exports. In 1978, a supplementary agreement on industrial, scientific and agricultural cooperation was signed. Beyond these agreements, Israel received huge amounts of financial aid, but with the Europeans always trying to make economic cooperation dependent on political progress. The bases for the cooperation with the Palestinians in the occupied territories and in Israel are the EU Council guidelines of 1986 as well as the EU resolutions on human rights, democracy and development of 28 November 1991. With these, the EU wants to ensure the following:

1. The aid shall be of use to the Palestinians in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip.
2. It will be granted without the prior agreement of Israel.
3. It does not release the Israeli Government of its responsibility for the maintenance and development of the infrastructure in the occupied territories.
4. It aims at strengthening the economic, social and productive sectors.

In its Strasbourg Declaration of 1989, the European Council reiterated its previous positions and its commitment to carry on supporting the Palestinians in the occupied territories, with a special focus on the promotion of the education and health sectors. The ambitious development program for the occupied territories that was decided upon by the EU in autumn 1989 exceeded that of the United States by US\$100 million. The agreement on further loans concluded in 1987 only came into force in 1989 because the European Parliament demanded that it must also be applied to the occupied territories. With the abrogation of the last customs taxes *vis-à-vis* Israel, a free trade zone in the sphere of industrial goods was realized as of 1 January 1989. Since then, the EU has remained the most important trade partner of Israel. In 1992, Israel concluded another free trade agreement with the EFTA states.

The Rabin government's deportation of 415 Palestinians to South Lebanon in December 1992 caused considerable tension between the EU and Israel, but the dialogue between the two sides was resumed after the signing of the DoP the following year. Under the German EU presidency the negotiations with Israel on an extension of the free trade concept beyond industrial produce was, with the exception of a few details, successfully concluded, now embracing a law pertaining to the registration of companies, transnational services, capital flows, and scientific-technological cooperation. Thanks to the efforts of Helmut Kohl at the EU Council summit on 10-11 December 1994 in Essen and in June 1995 in Cannes, Israel was granted a privileged position in the joint declaration

and came very close to the status of a member of the European Economic Area (EEA). During his last state visit to Israel in 1995 the Federal Chancellor received an extraordinarily warm welcome and the Hebrew University in Jerusalem even named its Institute of European Studies after him.<sup>11</sup>

During the visit of an EU delegation to Israel under the leadership of then French Foreign Minister Alain Juppé on 8 February 1995, the EU and Israel both blamed one another. The Europeans criticized the closure policy, which they regard as collective punishment and the continuation of settlement construction and demanded a stronger role in the peace process. Otherwise, they said, Israel should not expect to be granted the same advantages that the Eastern European states would be granted after joining the EU. The Israeli Government on the other hand accused the Europeans of not holding Israel's readiness for peace in high enough esteem.

In November 1995 in Barcelona, the EU initiated a cooperation program with the Mediterranean states that envisions the creation of an Euro-Mediterranean free trade zone by the year 2010. In doing this, the EU aims at strengthening its presence in the Middle East, although the program is not directly connected to the peace process. In February 1997, the EU signed a cooperation agreement with Arafat's PA that grants farmers in the West Bank and Gaza Strip easier access to the European market. It liberalizes the trade between the two partners and allows the Palestinians quicker access to the European Development Fund. Until the year 2001, all customs and other trade restrictions are supposed to be cancelled.

The EU's room to act politically and influence the situation in the Middle East is very limited. France has sought in vain a say in the peace process, which is dominated by the American influence. "The EU is only the Middle Eastern paymaster without playing a role in the region," as Jean Michel Dumont, the General Secretary of the Parliamentarian Association for Euro-Arab Cooperation in Brussels stated. The EU should make its economic relations and money transfers *vis-à-vis* both Israel and the PA more dependent on strict adherence to the protection of human rights. This context is regulated in Article 2 of the free trade agreement between Israel, Palestine and the EU. In its Luxembourg Declaration of October 1996, the European Council threatened Israel with sanctions if it blocks EU projects for the Palestinians. However, the Council has failed to take any suitable measures.

<sup>11</sup> See Ludwig Watzal, "Geld und Teilautonomie im Nahen Osten" in *Die Neue Ordnung*, 49 (1995), 6, p.468.

The Europeans should push more for adherence to International Law, which seems to have been replaced by the American principle of 'power is right'. They have enough economic forms of pressure at their disposal to prevent the worst violations of International Law by the United States and Israel from happening. Israel's trade volume with the EU is by far larger than that with the United States. The EU could call, for example, for a boycott of goods from the Israeli settlements – which are a violation of International Law – like it did in the case of South Africa.

A possible war or serious tension in the region would have direct repercussions on Europe. In their Amsterdam Declaration of mid-June 1997, the European leaders stated that the "nations of Europe and the Middle East" are linked "with a common destiny." They added that peace was a necessity, but would only be achievable if the right of the Palestinians to decide themselves about their future and the UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 425 (Lebanon) were recognized. Then British Foreign Secretary Malcolm Rifkind declared that Israel's rule over East Jerusalem was illegal and that it had only "*de facto* authority over West Jerusalem." Similarly clear was his successor Robin Cook during his most recent Middle East visit as Chairman of the EU Council on 16 March 1998. Cook did not bend to the pressure of the Israeli Government but visited the site of the controversial settlement Har Homa as planned, after which he met with PLC member Salah Ta'mari from the Bethlehem constituency. Because Cook was clear in his demand for an immediate end to settlement, the Israelis turned the episode into a scandal and accused the EU again of acting in a one-sided manner. The affront against Cook was also an affront against the EU, which was threatened for the second time with losing face because it did not take any counter-measures. In the long term, a stronger political engagement of the Europeans is necessary in order to achieve a permanent peace between Israel and the Palestinians.

### 3. The Israeli-Turkish Alliance

After the transformations of 1990 and especially after the Gulf War, many opportunities arose for Turkey to once again become a power factor in the Middle East. There was a significant "*revirement des alliances*"<sup>12</sup> away from Europe and towards Central Asia and the Near and Middle East.

Turkey has maintained diplomatic relations with Israel since 1949. Under Prime Minister Turgut Özal the country was more oriented towards central

<sup>12</sup> Udo Steinbach, "Außenpolitik am Wendepunkt? Ankara sucht seinen Standort im internationalen System" in *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, B 11-12/97, p.25.

Asia but from an internal social point of view, it maintained its Western orientation as well. After the Six-Day War of 1967, Turkey identified with the Palestinian position but maintained its neutral attitude in the Arab-Israeli conflict.<sup>13</sup> During the second Gulf War, Ankara joined the ranks of the US-led alliance against Saddam Hussein, and the government placed its infrastructure including the airports at the disposal of the anti-Saddam alliance.

The commemoration of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the dispersal of the Jews from Spain and their reception in the Ottoman Empire led to an atmospheric rapprochement between Turkey and Israel that continued over a series of mutual visits and peaked with the visit of the Turkish Prime Minister Tansu Ciller in 1994. Both sides signed various agreements concerning the fight against terrorism, drugs and crime. Instead of renewing the relations in its old area of influence, Turkey decided to further the antagonism in the region, an attitude that resulted in the Israeli-Turkish Military and Education Agreement of 24 February 1996, which was signed on the occasion of the visit of the Turkish General Chief of Staff Ismail Hakkı Karadayı, which took place from 24-28 February 1996. His deputy General Cevik Bir signed the agreements on behalf of Turkey. Israel and Turkey had already reached an understanding – laid down in the secret Security Agreement of 31 March 1994 – that all information obtained by either country was to be kept secret. Without the encouragement of the United States, such agreements would have never materialized. Historically, Turkey had always been keen to keep a distance in the Middle East conflict and had avoided any involvement in both inter-Arab disputes and the Arab-Israeli conflict. Even during the Iraq-Iran War Turkey remained neutral, and it was only in the Second Gulf War that Turkey took a side and joined the allies. Turkey tried to maintain good relations with all Arab countries – with the exception of Syria – as well as with Israel and Iran. Turkish-Syrian relations are poisoned until today due to a dispute over Turkish sovereignty of the formerly Syrian Alexandretta province.

The influx of Iraqi Kurds into Turkey became a heavy burden on the domestic policy as well as with regard to Turkey's relations with Syria and Iraq. Syria was suspected of providing the Kurdish Communist Worker's Party (PKK) with strategic posts within its borders. While Syria rejected the Turkish accusations, it also criticized Turkey for its exploitation of the water from the Euphrates River. The deterioration of Turkey's relations with Syria was an important reason for the conclusion of a military training and education program with Israel. The agreement shall facilitate formal

<sup>13</sup> For the history of the relations see Sabri Sayari, "Turkey and the Middle East in the 1990s" in *JPS*, XXVI (Spring 1997) 3, p.44-55.

cooperation in military educational matters between the two countries. To achieve this, a series of measures is foreseen, including joint training of the airforce, mutual visits by the navy, the exchange of military personnel and their joint training in the military academies of the two countries. The Israeli and Turkish airforces are to meet four times a year for joint maneuvers. The neighboring states are of course aware that the bilateral agreement is directed against Syria and Iraq, and – secondarily, according to the American 'double containment strategy' – also against Iran. Worthy of mention is the fact that the United States joined a Turkish-Israeli military maneuver on 5 January 1998. Udo Steinbach is right to point to the fact that the "increasing military closeness of the two strongest powers in the region is of far-reaching significance."<sup>14</sup> Should Syria get into a military conflict with either Turkey or Israel, the agreement could be easily turned into a mutual assistance pact. Although Turkey is a member of NATO, the country could in this case count on the assistance of the United States.

That the Turkish-Israeli-American axis is designed to last a long time became clear with the visit to the United States of the Turkish Prime Minister Masut Yılmaz from 17 to 21 December 1997. Yılmaz visited the Jewish-American Lobby, which treated him like an Israeli Prime Minister. The President of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), Abraham Foxman, ensured Yılmaz of his organization's support and asked that Turkish schools should teach students about the Holocaust. He did not tackle the policy of the 'ethnic cleansing' of the Turkish Government *vis-à-vis* the Kurds, nor did he mention the Turkish genocide of the Armenians. In turn, Turkey wants Israel to support its position *vis-à-vis* the American administration, i.e., no American criticism regarding the suppression of the Kurds. Furthermore, Turkey hopes to receive increased American weapon deliveries with the help of Israel and the Jewish-American Lobby. Both Israel and Turkey pursue a policy of discrimination against their respective minorities, and to be successful both need the tacit support of the United States.

On 26 August 1996 a special agreement was signed that regulates the modernization of the Turkish F-4 Phantom Fighter Planes. The Israeli Government and private Israeli banks covered the costs of US\$650 million. The Turkish side downplays the agreement with the argument that it was not a formal alliance because the country had such agreements with many other states. The former Islamist Turkish Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan signed the agreement shortly after his return from Iran, where he had signed agreements regarding security, trade and the utilization of gas resources. This agreement aimed at counter-balancing the Syrian-Greek

<sup>14</sup> Udo Steinbach, "Die Türkei, der Nahe Osten und das Wasser" in *Internationale Politik*, 53 (1998) 1, p.14.

military agreement of 1995. Another motive for Turkey was to find new weapon deliverers because it was finding it increasingly difficult to buy arms from the United States because of its human rights violations *vis-à-vis* the Kurds. Thus, Turkey become another country - after Jordan and Egypt - that depends in terms of military technology on Israel and the United States. The goal is also to keep the Syrians away from a potentially hostile policy *vis-à-vis* Turkey. The Islamic World expressed concern over the Israeli-Turkish alliance; at a meeting in June 1996, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Syria urged Turkey to reconsider the conclusion of such an agreement. However, due to Jordanian resistance the Arab summit that took place at the end of June in Cairo failed to condemn Turkey.

The Israeli-Turkish cooperation also foresees intensive economic cooperation. At the beginning of December 1996, the Joint Economic Council convened in Istanbul in order to implement the trade agreement signed in March that year. Forty representatives from Israel and 97 companies from Turkey participated in the meeting. On 26 December 1996, the council signed in Jerusalem a trade agreement in which the customs for textiles were lowered. This cooperation is important for Israel because Turkey is the biggest expanding economic power in the region. Furthermore, Israel obtained access to the Eastern Mediterranean region and the entire Near and Middle East, which should help to facilitate its integration.

The controversial nature of the visit of the General Chief of Staff of Turkey on 24 February 1997 lay in the fact that he had not consulted his own government. This shows the real power balance in Turkey between the democratically elected government and the military. Besides questions of how to elaborate the relations between Israel and Turkey, the alleged Iranian transports of Scud rockets to Syria - from where Israeli targets can be reached - were discussed. The cooperation between Turkey and Israel shows that both countries have reached an understanding concerning pragmatic goals. It seems as if Israel will support Turkey's struggle against the PKK and Kurdish nationalism. In return, Turkey can help Israel with the water problem. Turkey is still ready to join Israel in putting pressure on Damascus in order to make Assad bend to the will of Israel and America and their conditions pertaining to the peace process. Through this, the relationship between Syria and Iran would be disturbed, which, in turn, would have an effect on Tehran's support for the Hizbolah. Another interesting question pertains to the geopolitical consequences of the Turkish-Israeli alliance.

Although Turkey keeps stressing that the Israeli-Turkish relations are not directed against any third party and are limited in their scope, they are *de facto* directed against Iran and Iraq, and more clandestinely also against

Syria, especially since the right wing took power in Israel. Their offensive component, however, can only be realized with the approval of the Americans since both countries are dependent on the United States. The agreement also strengthens Israel's dominant role in the Eastern Mediterranean; moreover, Israel has a keen interest in the new oil resources in Aserbaidjan, an ally of Turkey. Furthermore, the agreement allows for the containment of Iran, especially in relation to the Gulf region and the limiting of Iranian connections to Syria and Lebanon. Any previous regional power claim on the part of Iraq or Iran has diminished due to Israeli-Turkish alliance. Turkey has the second largest army in NATO and Israel is the only nuclear power in the region. Syria in particular must feel encircled with Turkey at its northern border and Israel to its south. This creates a climate of polarization and confrontation in the region.

In order to decrease the pressure a little Damascus invited a delegation of Israeli Palestinians - among them three Knesset members - to Syria. The trip was organized by a Syrian with American and Syrian citizenship whom Israel allowed to enter the country. Amir Oren wrote in the *Ha'aretz* of 25 July 1997 that Israel - and especially Ariel Sharon - had tried to counter the approach of Syria towards Iraq by offering to reopen the pipeline from Iraq to Haifa that had remained unused for many years. It was also the former general Sharon who offered to pay back to Iran some of Israel's debts dating back to the time of the Shah and to use the pipeline from Eilat to the Mediterranean Sea, which would make the transportation via the Suez Canal superfluous. Sharon seems to be the only Israeli politician who could make such an offer, the Labor Party being too preoccupied with demonizing the two countries. However, despite such offers, Iran believes that it is being targeted by the *de facto* Israeli-Turkish-American alliance.

Similarly, Greece interpreted the Turkish-Israeli pact as a hostile act against itself and has warned Israel that it could disturb its bilateral relations with Israel, which have gradually improved since 1987. In 1990, Greece established diplomatic relations with Israel, and in December 1994 the two countries signed a defense agreement. In 1995, Greece also signed an identical defense agreement with Syria.

Assad is worried that Syria could get involved in a war-like conflict with both Turkey and Israel, especially in light of the fact that the Turkish Prime Minister Mazut Yilmaz stated even before he took office that "Syria must be given a lesson." Syria could only lead a war on two fronts with the help of Iran and Iraq. Another issue the Syrians are concerned with is the law being debated in the Knesset that would make the annexation of the Golan Heights irreversible. Syria believes that the United States has given up its role as the sponsor of the Middle East Peace Proc-

ess and thus no longer functions as a 'buffer' between Syria and Israel. Notwithstanding, Syria does not have to fear an Israeli attack as long as it has the say with regard to the Hizbollah. Should, however, an Israeli be killed in a Hizbollah attack on the north of Israel the situation would change. Were Israel to decide to unilaterally withdraw from South Lebanon, Syria would lose the Hizbollah as an instrument with which it is able to provoke Israel.

The following chapter will examine the Israeli relationship with Syria since whether or not Israel will be able to live in lasting peace in the region depends on this country. Lebanon will not be dealt with because a peaceful solution with Syria would automatically be followed by one with Lebanon. A unilateral withdrawal of the Israeli occupation troops from South Lebanon, however, would not immediately lead to full Lebanese sovereignty because there are still some 30,000 Syrian troops in the country. The relations between Israel and Jordan can be neglected here because they have always been good and the two countries signed a peace treaty back in October 1994. In addition, Egypt, which has for almost 20 years enjoyed a 'cold peace' with Israel, no longer poses an immediate threat to Israel. President Mubarak plays the role of a mediator in the ongoing conflict with the Palestinians, whose task it is to keep Arafat on the 'peace track', thereby underlining Egypt's regional significance that crystallized with the question of nuclear non-proliferation.<sup>15</sup>

The Egyptian President plays in the peace process a similar role *vis-à-vis* the Palestinians as the United States does *vis-à-vis* Israel. Since the Netanyahu government took over, however, Egypt has lost this position because in Israel's opinion it did not put enough pressure on Arafat.

#### 4. Israeli-Syrian Relations

The further postponement of reconciliation between Israel and Syria carries the potential for another Middle East war with disastrous consequences. Peace is not only for Syria but also for Israel of strategic and political significance. The discord between the two countries is the geopolitical core of the conflict. Israel would rather force a final agreement upon the Palestinians than reach a peace treaty with Hafez Al-Assad, for it is very unlikely that the Syrian leader would accept less than Egypt did, i.e., he will insist on the evacuation of the entire Golan. The Syrian President knows Israel's legalistic negotiation position and tries himself to count on Inter-

<sup>15</sup> See Ferhad Ibrahim, "Ägyptens regionalpolitische und wirtschaftliche Orientierung seit dem Beginn des Friedensprozesses" in *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, B 39/97, p.21.

national Law. Since Peres suspended the bilateral negotiations in February 1996, there has been only silence between the two countries. It is not at all likely that the relations will develop positively under the Netanyahu government as long as the Israeli Government insists on its standpoint, which is that it is not bound to the agreements signed by the government that preceded it. The question was what kind of deal was needed to make Israel withdraw from the Golan? Allegedly, Rabin and Peres had agreed upon a withdrawal to the cease-fire line of 4 June 1967 and Warren Christopher, on the order of US President Bill Clinton, passed on the message to Assad. If this is true, then Israel is making a huge mistake in saying that it does not feel bound to this pledge anymore - as made clear by Netanyahu - on the grounds that nothing about it exists in writing. Furthermore, the United States will make a tactical mistake if it does not make the Netanyahu Government honor the previous pledges. It seems to be generally characteristic of the Netanyahu government that it does not feel bound to anything, including the Oslo Accords. When Madeleine Albright during her first Middle East tour tried to persuade Assad to accept Netanyahu's proposal to resume talks 'without prior conditions', the Syrian leader replied with the remark that he was not interested in talks for the sake of talks. The Syrians certainly still remember Shamir's delay tactics during the negotiations in Washington.

Assad's pragmatism was reflected in an interview with the news channel CNN on 28 September 1996 when he replied to the moderator's question as follows: "If peace does not return the land to its rightful owner, why should we make peace? Can any sensible human being in the world expect Syria to make peace with Israel while Syrian territory remains occupied by Israel? If Netanyahu sticks to his current position I do not think that there will be a way to achieve a just and comprehensive peace in the region." However, Assad also clarified that the logical consequence of the failure of the peace process does not necessarily need to be war.

Syria's standpoint is that Rabin's and Peres' promises were preconditions for the Syrians to accept on their part the Israeli conditions for security and normalization. Therefore it was a formal matter to which Netanyahu was also bound. The talks therefore should resume at the point at which they were interrupted. Netanyahu, on the other hand, argues that the promises of his predecessors were only 'hypothetical statements' that were never put down in writing. In the *Ha'aretz* of 24 October 1996 former US Secretary of State Warren Christopher is quoted as supporting the Israeli position as follows: "I believe that from the standpoint of International Law Israel's position is valid: on nothing had an understanding been achieved, as no agreement has been signed. Neither side can force upon the other side a temporary position... Everything that has been pro-

posed by Israel was relative." However, was it not Christopher who was commissioned by Rabin on 18 July 1994 to pass to Assad the verbal pledge concerning Israel's readiness to withdraw from the Golan? Due to domestic considerations Rabin insisted that the pledge should remain secret, a request Assad honored. Syria has always been ready to negotiate about everything except Syrian land. The Syrian President asked Christopher more than once whether Israel would claim any parts of the Golan and Christopher replied "No." The question "Does Rabin understand that the entire territory that was under Syrian control and sovereignty on 4 June 1967 must be returned to Syria?" was answered by Christopher with a 'yes'. Only because of the formal pledge on the part of Rabin did serious talks between Israel and Syria commence.

However, the bilateral talks brought only little progress because the Syrians were very careful in dealing with the Israelis and the Israelis made excessive demands. Had the Syrians accepted Rabin's demands, they would have had to retreat to the Turkish border, as some observers stated. Nevertheless a common agreement was reached in May 1995 between the United States, Israel and Syria, in which 'goals and principles concerning security arrangements' were laid down. After the assassination of Rabin, acting Prime Minister Peres commissioned the head of the Israeli negotiation delegation, Itamar Rabinowitz, to put Rabin's pledges to Assad in writing. Peres insisted, although Rabinowitz warned him of the possibility that such a document could reach the public. During his visit to the United States, when Peres told Clinton that he stood by Rabin's pledges, Clinton called Assad on the telephone and announced the visit of his Secretary of State carrying good news. In mid-December Warren Christopher met Assad in Damascus and informed him that Peres stood by the word of Rabin and was ready to fulfill the pledges made to the Syrians. With that, Assad had not only the word of the Israeli Prime Minister but also that of Bill Clinton. Shimon Peres was ready to reach an agreement with Syria, but he made some tactical mistakes that eventually contributed to his defeat in the election. Instead of calling immediately after Rabin's assassination for new elections in order to get the mandate that would legitimize his further negotiations, Peres only decided in January 1996 to call for early elections to take place in May of that year. Similarly fatal was the decision to have the Shin Bet assassinate the 'engineer' of Hamas, Yahya Ayyash, in Gaza, a killing that led to the disastrous revenge terror attacks in February and March 1996 in Jerusalem. The operation 'Grapes of Wrath' against the Hizbollah also ended in a disaster and made a fatal contribution to the election defeat of Peres.

When Netanyahu learned about the pledges of his predecessors he immediately denied that they had been made. In order not to be regarded as a

'liar' Assad was obliged to publicize these pledges and point to the fact that they should serve as a basis for any future talks.

For the Syrians, the return of the Golan is not only a matter of prestige and significant for the sake of the land, but also important because of the water resources located there. The question of water seems to have developed besides the land question into the central dispute. One can support the thesis that it is no longer status questions alone that make up the Israeli-Palestinian-Arab conflict but also the matter of who controls the water resources. Since Israel controls the largest part of the available water in the Middle East and has entered into an alliance against the Arab states with Turkey, which also controls a considerable part of the potential water reserves for the neighboring Arab countries, it can put political pressure on its neighbors. Should Turkey realize its project South Anatolia (GAP) by the year 2010, the redirecting of the Euphrates will reduce the amount of water that passes annually through Syria from 30 billion cubic meters to half that amount. Because of their high population growth, the Arab states will face enormous water crises within only a few years. In a study conducted by The Strategic Institute in Tel Aviv the Israeli Government was warned that withdrawing from the Golan Height would imply the loss of the control of over 40 million cubic meters of water. Any withdrawal should therefore only be considered if the question of water is first settled to Israel's satisfaction. Furthermore, if water rights in the occupied territories were to be transferred to the Palestinians, there would be a danger that half the Israeli agricultural areas would become dry. With regard to the so-called security zone in South Lebanon, the ultimate issue is control over the water of the Litani and the Hasbani rivers.

The water issue is increasingly turning into a political conflict that might one day need to be solved militarily. However, the scientist Manuel Schiffler considers such a military conflict unlikely because the costs would be too high compared to other structural measures or the savings potential.<sup>16</sup> What speaks against this point of view is the fact that the increasing water needs in Turkey, Syria and Iraq could, along with other problems, develop into a political explosion "which leaves an armed conflict within the range of possibilities."<sup>17</sup> The Israeli-Turkish military agreements could make a decisive contribute to a possible conflict since they further destabilize the already labile geopolitical situation.

<sup>16</sup> See Manuel Schiffler, "Wasser im Nahen Osten: Kriegsursache oder Friedensbringer?" in Hofman/Ibrahim, op.cit. (footnote 5), p.238.

<sup>17</sup> Steinbach, op.cit. (footnote 12), p.31.

In 1978, Israeli soldiers entered Lebanon for the very first time. Back then, the United States voted for UN Resolution 425, which calls for a withdrawal and the deployment of UN peace troops – the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). The Netanyahu government finally recognized this resolution in April 1998. As an important contribution to peace, Israel was to unilaterally end the occupation of South Lebanon unconditionally, which could have contributed immensely to the improvement of the reputation of the Netanyahu government. A unilateral withdrawal would have several advantages for Israel. Both the Lebanese Government and Syria would be forced to keep the northern border of Israel calm and as an occupier, Syria would be held responsible for any further provocations on the part of the Hizbollah, whose leaders have repeatedly declared that their resistance against Israel is due only to the occupation of their land. Syria would thus lose the instrument with which it is able to blackmail Israel. Should the shelling of the north of Israel not end even after a withdrawal of Israeli occupation troops, there would remain a possibility of the country attacking Hizbollah posts at any time.

### 5. German-Israeli-Jewish Relations

German-Israeli-Jewish relations were never as good as under the government of Helmut Kohl. For Israel, the significance of its relationship with Germany is second only to that of its relationship with the United States. The German Government has become Israel's most important supporter within the European Union. How did this happen? The dramatic changes of the years 1989 and 1990 changed the roles of Germany and Israel as actors in the international system, and both states are now in the process of adjusting their foreign policies to the new realities and normalizing their relations. At the end of the normalization process, both Germany and Israel will be able to participate as equal actors in the concerted action of other states. However, there is still some way to go before this happens.

Even at this point, 53 years after the end of the terror rule of the National Socialists (Nazis), one is still unable to speak of 'normality' with regard to the German-Israeli-Jewish relations. Until today the historical legacy still imposes a special responsibility and a heavy burden upon Germany, which it is likely to continue carrying for some time. Israeli politicians keep reminding the Germans of this fact and German politicians are also very aware of the issue. One consequence of this perspective is a narrowed perception of the Israeli injustices *vis-à-vis* the Palestinians and a reluctance to criticize Israel. Whenever the German Government dared in the past to appear a little more critical of Israel within the frame of the EU

– which does not happen anymore – it always led to considerable turbulence with regard to the Israeli-German bilateral relations.

Relations between sovereign states are usually businesslike, i.e., orientated toward the respective interests of the countries involved. In the case of Israel this is not the case. The majority of German politicians refuse until today to treat Israel as a normal state. While this is understandable due to historical reasons on the one hand, it – on the other hand – limits the foreign policy options *vis-à-vis* not only Israel but also the region and in general. The paradox is that Israel sees itself as a normal state and wants to be seen and treated as such. The goal of Zionism, the state rationale of Israel, was and remains the normalization of the situation of the Jewish people. Israel is to be an equally valued and treated nation among others, a political unit that becomes an integral part of the international system. Henryk M. Broder wrote on this issue in *Der Spiegel* of 12 June 1995 the following: "In the meantime, Israel has become not a normal but an utterly deadly normal country." The Israeli Ambassador in Germany, Avi Primor, compares the German-Israeli relations with a wound that healed a long time ago but that has left a scar that is still very sensitive.<sup>18</sup> For the ambassador, Israel will in the coming years be "normally linked with Germany and, at the same time, anchored in Europe."<sup>19</sup> However, according to him, the future relationship between the two countries will depend to a large extent on the honesty and strength of the common responsibility for the past. The question is, of course, on which occasion will the scar of the injured begin to hurt and how many generations will still feel this pain? In an interview with the *Der Spiegel* of 3 April 1995, the journalist Tom Segev points to some kind of a historical paradox: "Meanwhile, we have totally normal relations – and the opposite has happened: the Holocaust is more present than ever." This observation applies to both Israel and Germany.

A normalization of the bilateral relations would not change the historic guilt. The historian Moshe Zuckermann still considers the relations abnormal. "What happened in the Holocaust is, measured by standard scales, no normal matter."<sup>20</sup> What took place was normalization on the state level, but not necessarily on the popular level. According to Zuckermann, even the Germans have not become 'normal', as the discourse of

<sup>18</sup> See Avi Primor, "...mit Ausnahme Deutschlands." As Israel's Ambassador in Bonn, Berlin 1997, p.265; see also the interview of the Ambassador in *Der Spiegel* of 5 May 1997, p. 60, and the conversation of the author with Primor: "An Anniversary without Euphoria" in *Neue Gesellschaft/Frankfurter Hefte*, 45 (1998) 4, p.301-308.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p.269.

<sup>20</sup> "Mit Schuldgefühlen ist nichts getan – Ludwig Watzal Talks With Moshe Zuckermann" in *Universitas*, 52 (1997) 616, p.961; a slightly shorter version appeared in the *Frankfurter Rundschau* of 17 October 1997.

historians, the exhibition of the armed forces and the Goldhagen debate illustrate. For the historian Moshe Zimmermann, on the other hand, a normal state was founded in 1948; the people wanted to build a model society in Israel, based on justice. Only because these ideas were abandoned in recent times for a "romantic-nationalistic ideology," is there "yet a lot of work to do for this normal, Jewish national state."<sup>21</sup>

Germany could only pursue a *Realpolitik vis-à-vis* Israel, just like France does, if the German politicians were prepared to differentiate between the Holocaust on the one hand, for which Germany bears the responsibility, and the Israeli policies on the other hand, for which the respective Israeli governments bear the responsibility. In *Public Forum* of 4 June 1993, Yvonne Deutsch from 'Women in Black' suggested the following to the Germans: "They must learn how to handle the blame of anti-Semitism. Criticism of Israel's policy has nothing to do with anti-Semitism. It is time to separate the Holocaust from Israel. The killing of the Jews is one thing and the persecution of the Palestinians another. He who condemns the former cannot afford to be silent about the latter." The religious philosopher Yeshayahu Leibowitz expressed a similar viewpoint in a television interview: despite the Holocaust and the manifold crimes committed against the Jewish people throughout their history, Israel cannot be released from the responsibility for the acts it has committed against the Palestinians during the 30 years of occupation. The past cannot be weighed against the present. Such a differentiation is necessary because from the point of view of responsibility, neither can be equaled, diminished or added up. Despite the Holocaust, the Israeli Government cannot be released from the responsibility for the measures it took at the expense of the Palestinians, nor can the Holocaust be dismissed.

Felicia Langer, an Israeli lawyer living in Germany and holder of the 'Alternative Nobel Prize' has asked the Germans to stop remaining silent about the events in Israel and - despite the possibility of their being accused of anti-Semitism - not to let Israel blackmail them morally. "In fact, the Germans are obliged - particularly because of their past - to interfere everywhere where human rights are being violated... We, the Israelis, the Jews, cannot claim any right as victims of yesterday to be perpetrators today. The testament of our dead, the dead of the Holocaust, is a clear message. We have also no right to make use of the guilty conscience of the Germans - as Israel does - and condemn them to remaining silent concerning our actions, in order for us to be able to suppress the Palestinians undisturbed and beyond any interference and criticism. Those who

<sup>21</sup> Interview of the author with Moshe Zimmermann, "Der lange Weg zum dauerhaften Frieden im Nahen Osten führt über Katastrophen" in *Das Parlament*, 22 August 1997.

claim that Israeli violations of human rights and International Law may not be denounced... because this is anti-Semitism, lie deliberately, boldly, and extortionately in order to silence the voice of criticism... The Germans must decisively take on their obligation - which, due to their past, weighs twofold and threefold compared to other nations - and fight against the slightest sign of racism, human rights violations, anti-Semitism, or xenophobia, in whichever form... We Israelis and Jews also have no right to declare the Germans - throughout generations - unqualified to express their viewpoints on moral questions because of their past, nor to accuse them collectively of a quasi-inherent form of anti-Semitism. This is racism and one that remains ugly - like any other form of racism - even if its representatives are the victims of yesterday."<sup>22</sup>

For more than two decades, Germany saw in the Palestinians only a refugee problem. After the Six-Day War of June 1967, the federal government opted for strict neutrality, although its sympathy lay more with Israel. Before International Law, neutrality does not necessitate indifference. The Palestine Question only penetrated the conscience of the Germans very slowly. Because of the German division, the emphasis on the right to self-determination of all people was in their own interest, and it was only natural that Germany gradually began to point to the Palestinian right to self-determination. However, the suppression, deprivation of rights, discrimination and economic strangulation of the Palestinians were discussed only very rarely. The political scientist Kenneth Lewan is of the opinion that Germany could do much more with regard to the Palestinians. "The hair-shirt was never appropriate in relation to Israel, especially as the harm caused to the Palestinians was predictable and accepted. That the Federal Republic of Germany likens its role to that of an impartial arbiter should not divert our attention from the fact that it still favors one side. It is similarly wrong for Germany to insist that it was too powerless to have any effect on the matter. It can do a lot."<sup>23</sup> If the Arab side counts here on the younger generation, it should not expect too much. Although awareness concerning injustice is widespread there, it is always a different matter when it comes to the case of Israel; also the younger generation is fully aware of Germany's special moral obligations *vis-à-vis* Israel.

A first shift in the German-Israeli relations occurred under the social-liberal government of Federal Chancellor Willy Brandt, whose goal was to open up a larger political and economic area of action for Germany in the Middle East. Then Foreign Minister Walter Scheel explained to the Israeli

<sup>22</sup> Felicia Langer, *Brücke der Träume. Eine Israelin geht nach Deutschland*. Göttingen, 1994; see also her autobiography *Zorn und Hoffnung*. Göttingen, 1991 and 1996.

<sup>23</sup> Kenneth M. Lewan, *Sühne oder neue Schuld? Deutsche Nahostpolitik im Kielwasser der USA*. Jerusalem, Ottawa, 1984, p.7.

newspaper *Yediot Aharonot* in 1969 the following: "Our relationship with Israel is like that with other countries... There is nothing special in it." This self-confident conclusion would soon turn out to be a fallacy. In the first declaration of the European Political Cooperation (EPC) of 13 March 1971, Germany wanted to present its first 'normalization exercises' in the Middle East by joining the five other EEC-member states in calling upon Israel to withdraw from the conquered territories and to compensate the Arab refugees as well as to internationalize Jerusalem. Although the declaration also emphasized Israel's right to secure borders the country reacted angrily, accusing Germany of having given in to the pro-Arab policy of France. The episode with the EPC declaration made Germany realize how sensible its stand actually was.

Willy Brandt initiated a renunciation of the 'special relations' with Israel on his state visit on 7 June 1973. Brandt underlined in Israel that it was in Germany's interest to maintain good relations with all states in the Middle East. The bilateral relations with Israel were thus degraded to relations with a 'special character'. On the occasion of the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the foundation of the State of Israel, Brandt said that the birth of the state had demanded the price of new victims and sufferings. "The misery of others, especially the Palestinian Arabs, does not weigh light."<sup>24</sup> The fact that Israeli maintained its occupation and continued with its settlement policies led to a greater understanding of the aspirations of the Palestinians. Especially during the term of office of Chancellor Helmut Schmidt the relations became more objective and to the point, which resulted in the worst crisis to rock the German-Israeli relations. The Israeli side interpreted Schmidt's politics as a shift to the right in Germany. Henceforth, the German Government advocated the right of the Palestinians to self-determination and a 'homeland'.

The bilateral relations moved towards their lowest point after Menachem Begin took office on 16 March 1977 and began his expansionist settlement policy. Schmidt took the offensive and stood up for the Palestinians' right to self-determination and to a state. Begin reacted in an undiplomatic manner, saying that a country that had killed six million Jews, among them 1.5 million children, should not make recommendations to Israel. Begin added that it was "absolutely disgusting" to buy Arab oil with Jewish blood.

With the arrival on the scene of Helmut Kohl, the German-Israeli relations again took a calmer turn, which was mainly due to the uncritical Israel-policy of the CDU. The German Government joined the ranks of the Americans blindly, which inevitably led to widening of the gap *vis-à-*

<sup>24</sup> Willy Brandt, quoted *ibid.*, p.77.

*vis* the Palestinians, reflected in the fact that the principle of the right to self-determination for people was no longer mentioned in the Palestinian context and vanished from the vocabulary of German diplomacy.

There is no change under the new Red-Green Government in the relationship between Israel and Germany. There will be continuity as was stressed by chancellor candidate Gerhard Schröder during his visit to Israel. Moreover, the times when leftist forces demonstrated against Israel and called loudly for the rights of the Palestinians and other suppressed people are gone. Today, the German left wing follows by and large the American line and vehemently defends American policies like, most recently, *vis-à-vis* the Kosovo. A division within the left wing only occurred during the second Gulf War when parts of it demonstrated against the United States and thus implicitly against Israel. A former member of parliament belonging to the Green Party Christian Ströbele made a grave mistake during his visit to Israel by saying that it was Israel's own fault that it was now being attacked by Scud missiles, which led to an outcry of indignation in Israel and the premature departure of the German delegation.

Moshe Zuckermann supports the thesis that an Israeli could afford to say such a thing but not Ströbele, because there is no symmetry between perpetrators and victims. "Here we have a clear case of *quod licet jovi, non licet bovi*"<sup>25</sup> (one man's meat is another man's poison). Whether SPD or Alliance 90/The Greens, voices critical of Israel do not represent a majority.

Since the signing of the Oslo Accords between Israel and the Palestinians, Germany's criticism has concentrated on Israel's settlement policies. Not publicly criticized by Germany are the massive human rights violations of the Israeli Government *vis-à-vis* the Palestinians nor the human rights violations perpetrated by the Arafat regime against their own people. This silence is pitiful because the principles of International Law are widely disregarded. During the inaugural visit of Israel's Foreign Minister David Levy, German Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel still reassured the Netanyahu government of the full support of Bonn. During Arafat's last visit to Bonn in autumn 1997, however, he strongly criticized the Israeli settlement policy.

The carefulness of the German foreign policy is clearly demonstrated in an article by Klaus Kinkel that appeared in the *Tagesspiegel* (Berlin) of 13 September 1997. He writes that the Germans can only take on a role that "takes into consideration the legitimate interests of both sides, does not take either side, and does not create taciturnity through loud condemnations nor destroy a readiness to talk." The German policy should rather

<sup>25</sup> Zuckermann, *op.cit.* (footnote 20), p.963.

show consideration for Israel's special security interests on the one hand, while, on the other, not forget the right of the Palestinians to self-determination "free of Israeli occupation." "Our past forbids us in a particular manner from taking on the role of an unwelcome advisor." Does not our history demand a more active role, as, for example, Felicia Langer requests from the Germans? Tom Segev represents a similar standpoint; in the aforementioned interview with *Der Spiegel* he rejects the opinion that the Germans have no right to criticize Israel. "Every human being is obliged to criticize the politics of another country if it violates human rights. This is one of the lessons of the Holocaust. However, a German should never ask Israel for something that the Germans do not ask themselves for."

Maybe Foreign Minister Kinkel saw a need for clarification after the German Government was the only European country to abstain from casting its vote in the UN General Assembly in March 1997 with regard to the condemnation of the Israeli settlement policy in East Jerusalem (Har Homa) and the Arab ambassadors lodged complaints with the Foreign Ministry. The Foreign Minister had instructed his civil servants against the original advice, to abstain due to "our history" – a more than anachronistic reasoning. Anyway, Kinkel traveled immediately to Egypt, where he reassured President Mubarak that the German abstention was not directed against the Arab countries and tried to gain sympathy for the German attitude. In mid November, during the UN General Assembly session during which the Israeli settlement policy was condemned, Germany voted in favor of the resolution.

Could Germany play a role in the Middle East? During his visit to Germany in August 1994, then Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres not only expressed the wish that Germany would become a full member with all rights and duties of the UN Security Council but he also provoked discussion of the topic 'German blue helmet soldiers in the Middle East'. With the words "Why not?" he drew attention to a topic that the German hosts did not want to deal with in the first place. Peres returned to the subject on the occasion of a ceremony honoring Chancellor Kohl in Munich by the Jewish welfare organization Bnai Brith. Would the Israeli request for Germany to possibly send blue helmet soldiers to the Golan not be like a moral entry ticket into world politics? Who, if not Israel, could legitimately issue such a ticket?<sup>26</sup> Avi Primor also confirmed in an interview with the *Der Spiegel* of 5 May 1997 that Israel would hardly object to a German troop contingent being deployed on the Golan as part of a UN

<sup>26</sup> See Ludwig Watzal, "Deutschland und Israel in der Weltpolitik" in *Neue Gesellschaft/ Frankfurter Hefte*, 43 (1996) 8, p.713; and "Germania e Israele: le 'normalizzazione' parallele" in *liMes*, 4/95, p.269-276.

troop within the framework of a peace treaty with Syria. So far, no German politician has commented on the statements of the Israeli politicians and diplomats.

With its own troop contingent on the Golan Heights, Germany could play a mediating role. Its superb relations with the Arab states could also be useful for Israel. The German politicians should not categorically reject such an engagement in advance because it would be in Germany's own long-term interest. The Arab side could also benefit from such an assignment because Germany is seen as more of an honest broker than the United States. With the allocation of financial means alone, one cannot push through one's interests in the Middle East in the long run. Since Germany is not ready to do anything without the EU, it should at least lobby within the EU for a more comprehensive type of participation in the peace process.

Besides the engagement, the German policy has a moral obligation to stand up more for the Palestinian right to self-determination, because on the one hand the Palestinians are suffering from the Israeli occupation and suppression and on the other hand, the current development is not moving toward a Palestinian state but toward a Bantustan like in South Africa. The South African solution would not be in the interest of Germany or the EU because it would not bring peace to the region and would harm the long-term goals of the EU's Mediterranean policy. Furthermore, the evolution of another Arab dictatorship should no longer be backed financially. "To speak out is difficult for the Germans in general, which is especially obvious with the German politicians, particularly when it comes to Israel."<sup>27</sup> It is difficult to imagine how Germany could effectively set the course for a political change in the Middle East since not even the United States seems to be in the position to do so.

A further intensification of the bilateral relations, which must also be reflected on the European level, is in the long-term interests of both Germany and Israel. Only then can the relations be normalized. History should not be ignored, but the Holocaust must not remain an exclusive topic for Germany and Israel. Rather, the lessons from the catastrophe should be learned by both countries and implemented politically. This would mean that Israel and Germany would have to act globally against racism, nationalism, chauvinism, and any form of discrimination and stand up for human rights.

<sup>27</sup> Adel S. Elias, *Dieser Frieden heißt Krieg. Israel und Palästina – die feindlichen Brüder*. München, 1997, p.317.