



Israel

Herf: Undeclared Wars against Israel

Four decades after Jeffrey Herf was preparing his thesis in sociology on reactionary modernism in Weimar and the Third Reich, the German version of his sixth book “Undeclared Wars with Israel: East Germany and the West German Far Left, 1967-1989”[1] was released. The scholar of Maryland University knows that this monograph will lead to controversies. At first, Herf **shows** how East Berlin went into the offensive after the 1967 June war - West Berlin and Bonn reacted especially to new Arab terror and how both dealt with the East German diplomatic breakthrough in the Mideast 1969 and the related struggle of Arabs, Israelis and Germans at the UN.



The next parts deal with 1972 Palestinian and West German terror circles; both Germanies in the UN and during the Israeli-Arab war of 1973; and the UN politics and terror attacks in Northern Israel. Then Herf explores the 1974 Palestinian terror in Israel, talks with the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) in East Berlin and reactions of the West German radical Left; the UN resolution that equates Zionism with racism; the 1977 Palestinian terror attack in Entebbe and the West German “revolutionary cells”; East Berlin and Arab states 1978-1982; fights in Lebanon 1977-1982; and the 1982 Beirut clashes of the PLO and Israel. Surely, the most productive aspect is Herf’s discussion of American, Israeli, and twofold German records on those topics. His conclusions reflect the fact that East Berlin cultivated a deep antagonism to Israel while similarly the West German Red Army Fraction cooperated with various Palestinian terror organizations. These actions, underlines Herf, were never a critique of Israel but targeted hits against its right to exist. The East Communist regime and the radical Left in the West wanted to harm Israel. Although they rarely declared it openly, they waged wars against Israel. But it seems now that East Berlin’s escalation of 1956, 1965 and 1967 formed together – a steady declaration of war.

Indeed, East Berlin’s diplomats talked much about negotiations and political solutions at the UN but furtively, they acted quite to the contrary by making Israel the scapegoat while giving more weapons and training to the Arab side. As Herf can prove, this occurred in a concerted action within the Soviet bloc. Their ideologies had an enduring impact in the Mideast. In a bitter irony, the author says, they presented their anti-Israeli fight as a second war against “fascism”. But the left also used the term for Fascist Baath ideology (164), though Iraqis copied rather from Hitler than Mussolini. The author often blurs key points with long quotes, even though some might arguably find his way of using sources appealing.

Despite many special studies being available on his topics, he rarely uses them and weighs for instance Abd an-Nasir’s talk with the envoy Gerhard Weiss (76, not Weiß) in 1967, while overlooking its main point: After the 1967 defeat, this president declared the end of positive neutrality, الحيادة الإيجابية, “Short of officially saying, we really are Communists”. [2] Cambodia recognized East Berlin as first non-Warsaw Pact member in 1969 –

yet, only on paper, for Iraq had broadcasted it a week earlier on 1 May. In 1967, Walter Ulbricht agitated Eastern Bloc states for a swift diplomatic break off with Israel to gain recognition by a group of Arab countries. Iraqis even asked to deliver weapons to the Palestinian as-Saiqa, the mufti al-Husaini's heirs, intended for "the destruction of Israel".^[3] East Berlin denied the latter but intensified its fatal course in 1969: It prepared Arabs for their 1973 war and knew a week earlier the date of Egypt's "Yom Kippur attack" against the shocked Israelis.

In 1952, Bonn offered Israel full ties, but Israel declined, for too many "Ribbentropers" worked in the Foreign Office. After 1967 East Berlin often gained intelligence before terror attacks ensued, as in Munich 1972. An unaddressed theme is how the Left, and perhaps radical Left, reacted in Israel to this "axis of radicals". Besides misspelled Arabic and German names (215: Black September is Ailul al-Aswad, أيلول الأسود; 224: Fatah; 298: Büttner, Rabenhorst), the Council of Ministers is erroneously presented as "influential" but was in fact rather weak (308). In 1968, the mufti al-Husaini asked Yasir Arafat for a plan to lead Palestinians and "liberate" the Westbank (307) – the result was their three-step plan. Key texts of those actors are in Arabic in German archives but were not used in this book.

East German officials knew that the Syrian defense minister Mustafa Talas (46, not Tlass) had edited two volumes of the forged "Protocols of the Elders of Zion" and Hitler's "Mein Kampf". Max von Oppenheim's perilous idea to leave Palestine only to Jews who had lived there before 1917 made it into the 1968 Palestinian National Charter (114). There was a faraway interaction of events in Vietnam and the Mideast (120), later also Afghanistan, where both Germanies supported their respective superpowers in waging wars of revenge. In turn, they often got their junior partners into trouble. For example, Bonn sent weapons to Israel upon request of the Americans that led to the 1965 Mideast debacle – a "win" for East Berlin. The Arab break up ensued with Bonn. Suddenly, East Germans were the only official Germans in ten Arab states, a leap to the 1969 diplomatic recognition. This led to the "Ulbricht doctrine": Bonn may return to the Mideast only if it abolishes the "Hallstein doctrine" and agrees to a normalization with East Berlin with both sides joining the UN. Ulbricht cemented it in single pacts with five Eastern Bloc countries that lead henceforth to Bonn's "New East policy".

The striking aspect of this history is its timeliness regarding today's dynamics at the level of the UN and the EU and their relation to the Mideast. Indeed, East Germany and the Soviet Empire vanished. Nevertheless, next generations continue to refine their activism and ideologies to their own needs. The radical Left moved on as if this history had never happened. They use boycotts and other strategies to gain ground in the former centers. Two key events favor a major turn to the left today, that are, the emergence of an institutionalized morality with the so-called 'political correctness', and the increase of leftists discourses on the issue of mass immigration. Thus, the author wrote a prehistory of current affairs and new axes. Willy Brandt's former "German neutrality" to Israel can be seen again. All in all, Jeffrey Herf offers his remarkable insights into a crucial time of transregional German, Arab and Israeli history.

Wolfgang G. Schwanitz

[1] Jeffrey Herf, *Undeclared Wars with Israel: East Germany and the West German Far Left, 1967-89*, New York 2016

[2] Wolfgang G. Schwanitz, *Ägypten: zweierlei Deutsche in Kalten Krieg*, in *Comparativ*, 18(2006)2, 13

[3] A 1969 Iraqi file with point one "Liquidation of the State of Israel" see Wolfgang G. Schwanitz, *Israel* (6/11/2012)

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