

DR. WOLFGANG SCHMIDT

**FROM HISTORICAL RESPONSIBILITY, MORAL OBLIGATION,
AND POLITICAL CONVICTION.**

**GERMAN CHANCELLOR WILLY BRANDT'S EFFORTS ON BEHALF OF
ISRAEL AND PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST**

Just in time for the 40th anniversary of the first visit to Israel of a sitting German Chancellor, there appeared on June 9th, 2013 an article in the newspaper "Welt am Sonntag" ("WamS") authored by Michael Wolffsohn and Hagai Tsoref under the heading "Wie Willy Brandt die Friedenskarte verspielte" ["How Willy Brandt gambled away the peace card"].¹ The article claims that then Chancellor Brandt could have prevented the Yom Kippur War, triggered by the attack launched against Israel by Egypt and Syria on October 6th, 1973. The consequences of that conflict, namely the oil crisis and the accelerated development of atomic energy, would thus have been avoided, or would at least have been less severe.

In the authors' opinion, Willy Brandt "objectively" bears responsibility for a "failure to act," as he refused to lend support to a "peace initiative" put forward by the Israeli Prime Minister of the time, Golda Meir. Three reasons are given for this "failure": first, Brandt allegedly had "fundamentally no particular interest in close relations with Israel," second, he was "in principle not willing to act as a mediator in the Middle East," and finally, the Chancellor handed off "the initiative envisioned by Golda Meir as put forward by one head of government to another" to the pro-Arab, not Israel-friendly Foreign Ministry ["Auswärtiges Amt"]. "Brandt's fiasco of a peace policy" was, it is claimed, "a matter neither of chance nor accident," but

¹ See the article in the "WamS" at http://www.welt.de/print/wams/politik/article116950837/Wie-Willy-Brandt-die-Friedenskarte-verspielte.html#disqus_thread. The online availability of the links mentioned in this publication was last verified on February 2nd, 2018.

“was consistent with his Middle Eastern strategy,” for his administration perceived “Israel as a disruptive factor in its policy toward the Middle East.”

The authors base their virulent criticism of Willy Brandt primarily on documents declassified last year by the Israel State Archives and since then freely available online, as well as on previously edited documents from the “Akten zur Auswärtigen Politik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (AAPD)” [“Files on the Foreign Policy of the Federal Republic of Germany”]. Simultaneously, Hagai Tsoref published an academic article on the same topic.²

To what extent do the allegations against Brandt actually hold water? This article represents an attempt to illuminate and assess the relevant facts and circumstances surrounding the Chancellor’s trip to Israel and the supposed peace initiative of Golda Meir.³ The written records preserved in the Willy Brandt Archive were also consulted. In order to objectively assess and understand Brandt’s actions in 1973, it is first necessary to review and analyze the course of German-Israeli relations during his Chancellorship from 1969 onward. Particular attention is paid to the personal relationship between Willy Brandt and Golda Meir, as revealed especially in their correspondence and in accounts of their conversations with one another. The exchanges between these two politicians played a very important role

² See the Hebrew-language article available on the Internet – including links to the documents from the Israeli State Archives – at <http://www.archives.gov.il/chapter/the-visit-of-chancellor-brandt/>

The English version of this website is unfortunately not available online anymore. The same applies to the academic article which Hagai Tsoref had published, also in June 2013, on the internet, in Hebrew as well as in English. The English version bore the title „From Now On, the Arabs’ Fate is in their Own Hands’ – Egypt Rejects Golda Meir’s Proposal For Secret Talks with German Mediation, June–July 1973“. It was striking that Tsoref spoke out on the role of the chancellor in a much more careful way than he did in his article in the German newspaper.

³ In addition to Israeli sources published on the Internet, reference was made to the materials found in the Willy-Brandt-Archiv [Willy Brandt Archive] (WBA) in the Archiv der sozialen Demokratie [Archive of Social Democracy] (AdSD) of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung [Friedrich Ebert Foundation] in Bonn, as well as to the documents published in the “Akten zur Auswärtigen Politik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland” [Files on the Foreign Policy of the Federal Republic of Germany]. This PDF article is a translation of the German brochure “Aus historischer Verantwortung, moralischer Verpflichtung und politischer Überzeugung. Wie sich Bundeskanzler Willy Brandt um Israel und den Frieden im Nahen Osten bemühte,” published in February 2014. The translation was carried out by Michael Bennett.

in the development of relations between their countries. This may be seen not only in the events occurring during and immediately after the Chancellor's visit to Israel, but also in his reaction to the Yom Kippur War of October 1973, which will be discussed at the end of this article.

“Balanced Middle Eastern Policy“

What were the principles and objectives of the Middle Eastern policy pursued by the Social Democratic-Liberal coalition led by Willy Brandt? Its central concepts were “peaceful reconciliation” and “balance.” In his first policy statement on October 28th, 1969, the newly elected German Chancellor emphasized: “We wish to maintain good relations with all countries of this region, and simultaneously affirm to sell no weapons in regions of tension.”⁴ This was clearly addressed to the Arab states, nine of which – first and foremost Egypt – had broken off contact with Bonn after diplomatic relations were established between West Germany and Israel in 1965. Like their predecessors in Kiesinger's Grand Coalition government, the SPD-FDP coalition hoped to mend the Federal Republic's badly damaged relations with the Arabs. Brandt's assurance that the embargo on arms deliveries to Israel in place since February 1965 would remain in effect underscored the new German government's efforts appear even-handed.

The rapprochement between West Germany and the Arab world, and in particular Brandt's new “Ostpolitik” toward the Soviet Union, which provided support for the Arab regimes and was attempting to extend its influence in the Middle East, raised concerns in Israel that Bonn's new course would be at the expense of the Jewish state. These fears were stoked by the new German administration's attempt to play down the notion of a “special relationship” with Israel. Foreign Minister Walter Scheel (FDP) repeatedly and publicly mentioned the “normalization” of the German-Israeli

⁴ Willy Brandt: *Ein Volk der guten Nachbarn. Außen- und Deutschlandpolitik 1966–1974*, edited by Frank Fischer, Bonn 2005 (Berlin Edition, Vol. 6), No. 27, p. 242.

relationship, which also caused a stir among some Social Democrats.⁵ In a letter to SPD Bundestag member Claus Arndt, Brandt declared these concerns baseless, and made clear: “I share your assessment that, even today, one cannot measure relations between Germany and Israel with the same yardstick applied to those with other countries.”⁶

In a Cabinet meeting on February 11th, 1970, which was attended by the Ministers Walter Scheel, Helmut Schmidt, Hans-Dietrich Genscher, Erhard Eppler, and Horst Ehmke, by leading deputies of the coalition in the Bundestag, by officials from the Foreign Ministry and the Chancellor’s Office as well as by Walter Hesselbach, Chairman of the Board of the “Bank für Gemeinwirtschaft” [“Bank of Social Economy”], and Chairman of the “Deutsch-Israelische Wirtschaftsvereinigung” [“German-Israeli Business Association”], and Otto Kersten, director of the international department of the executive board of the “Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund” (DGB) [“German Confederation of Trade Unions”], Chancellor Brandt set out his position: “Our Middle East policy should be balanced, but that in no way implies indifference to the fate of Israel. Similarly, the heralded ‘normalization’ of our relations with Israel in no way implies the devaluing of these relations, but rather a goal to be achieved.” With an eye to the upcoming visit to Bonn at the end of the month by Israeli Foreign Minister Abba Eban and talks with leading Arab political figures scheduled shortly thereafter, Brandt continued to make his case, as the transcript records: “It is important that we speak with one voice in all these encounters, so that one person doesn’t make a promise here and another a diametrically opposed one there.” Balance was also to mean frankness. “All in all,” the Chancellor summed up the position of his government, “we must pursue a policy free of complexes even with regard to Israel.” This view incidentally met with the approval of even the staunchly pro-Israel Hesselbach, who

⁵ See Sabine Hepperle: *Die SPD und Israel. Von der Großen Koalition 1966 bis zur Wende 1982*, Frankfurt a.M. 2000, p. 105.

⁶ Letter from Brandt to Arndt, February [20th], 1970, in: *AdsD, WBA, A 8, 34*.

was a vigorous advocate of continuing German support for the survival of the Jewish state and expanding it to the extent possible.⁷

That the leading lights of the Social Democrat-Liberal coalition struck an “unfriendly, almost spiteful, populist tone,”⁸ as Wolffsohn claims, is not evident from the record of the meeting; rather, the participants soberly and intensively debated the relationship between Germany and Israel. With his comment about disliking “blackmail, even from friends,” which was echoed in similar terms by Scheel and to which some might take offense, Brandt referred to the specific importunities and demands of the Israeli government, not all which the Federal Republic was inclined to grant. The Cabinet in Bonn was opposed to extending new government loans and financial aid, as it was feared the proceeds would be used to purchase arms from the United States. However, the coalition agreed to continue providing aid to Israel at its existing level of 140 million DM per year, and to reschedule outstanding development loans.⁹

Furthermore, the Brandt/Scheel government was conscious of the German people’s particular obligations toward the Jewish state, and acted accordingly. After years of intensive Israeli pressure, West Germany agreed on February 6th, 1970, in a secret accord (the Dinstein agreement) to provide 100 million DM a year for pension payments to handicapped survivors of Nazi persecution living in Israel, initially for a period of three years. Also involved in these negotiations was the president of the Jewish Claims Conference and the World Jewish Congress, Nahum Goldmann.¹⁰

Bonn’s new Middle Eastern policy was thus not at Israel’s expense. During Eban’s visit at the end of February 1970, Foreign Minister Scheel also underscored that the rapprochement with the Arab states would “never

⁷ AAPD 1970, edited by Ilse Dorothee Pautsch, Daniela Taschler, Franz Eibl, Frank Heinlein, Mechthild Lindemann and Matthias Peter, München 2001, pp. 207–214.

⁸ Note 1.

⁹ The public guarantees for private infrastructure development loans were in fact expanded. See Carole Fink: *Ostpolitik and West German–Israeli Relations*, in: Carole Fink/Bernd Schaefer (eds.): *Ostpolitik, 1969–1974. European and Global Responses*, Cambridge 2009, pp. 182–205 (p. 190).

¹⁰ See AAPD 1970, pp. 83–85 and pp. 92–95.

be aimed against Israel,” and could “never be allowed to damage the positive relationship with Israel.” For his part, the Israeli Foreign Minister publicly stated that he could see no evidence of a change in German policy toward Israel.¹¹ The Federal Republic remained the most important European spokesman for Israeli interests. Within the European Economic Community, Germany lobbied in particular for a preferential trade agreement with Israel; signed on June 29th, 1970, it granted Israel extensive tariff exemptions.

The Impact of the Holocaust on Relations with Israel

With his genuflection on December 7th, 1970 before the monument to the heroes of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising of 1943, Willy Brandt made an indelible mark on the public consciousness that also held great significance for the relationship between Germany and Israel. With this gesture, Brandt acknowledged the guilt and historic responsibility of the German people for the Holocaust. In a speech at the opening ceremony of the “Week of Brotherhood” in Cologne on March 21st, 1971, Brandt explained his action in the following words: “I did what people do when words fail them, and thus, also on behalf of my compatriots, I commemorated the millions murdered. (...) Where, if not there where the Warsaw Ghetto stood, would be the place for the German Chancellor to feel the burden of responsibility, and, from this responsibility, redeem such guilt!”¹²

The “indelibility of the murder of millions of the Jews of Europe,” Brandt made clear elsewhere in his speech, was the defining fact of Germany’s relationship with Israel, and made it unique. “The name of Auschwitz will remain a trauma for generations. We can hold no illusions: the wounds

¹¹ See Markus A. Weingardt: *Deutsche Israel- und Nahostpolitik. Die Geschichte einer Gratwanderung seit 1949*, Frankfurt a.M./New York 2002, pp. 213–214.

¹² Bundeskanzler Brandt – Reden und Interviews, published by the Presse- und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung [German Federal Government Press and Information Office] [Bonn 1971], pp. 446–455 (p. 448) (see also the documentation in the Annex). This phrasing was the work of Günter Grass. See Willy Brandt und Günter Grass: *Der Briefwechsel*, published by Martin Köbel, Göttingen 2013, pp. 451–452 and p. 1122.

inflicted in those dozen years of darkness to the soul of the nation of the victims and to the soul of the nation of the perpetrators will not heal quickly, for the image of man was violated, of man we perceive as the likeness of God. This experience – the real catastrophe of mankind, more than all wars and their horrors [–] weighs upon the Jewish people, not only in Israel; and it weighs upon us Germans. One may not point to the younger generation and speak of its freedom from inhibitions. No one is discharged of the obligations of history.”¹³

Klaus Harpprecht, a personal friend of Brandt and the husband of Renate Lasker-Harpprecht, who had survived Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen, had played a role in drafting this speech. In a conversation with Harpprecht in May of 1973, Israeli Ambassador Eliashiv Ben-Horin made reference to the speech and singled out as its most important line Brandt’s statement that “the question of guilt does not dissipate with the passing of generations, but continues to loom as a historical force.”¹⁴ When Foreign Minister Scheel visited Israel in July of 1971, he also proclaimed in a speech to the Knesset: “No German can steal away from his history.”¹⁵ Shortly afterward, Scheel observed in the Bundestag: “Our good and still developing relations with Israel owe their special character to that what was done to the Jewish people in the name of Germany.”¹⁶

Given this historical baggage, the Federal Republic could not take a completely neutral position in the Middle Eastern conflict, and certainly not an anti-Israeli one. “Israel is – and the slogans of radical groups can do nothing to alter this – the magnificent attempt to create a secure homeland for a long homeless people,” Brandt proclaimed in his Cologne speech. He did not gloss over what the founding of the Jewish state had meant for the “Palestinian Arabs” in particular. “But in this as well, we have no right to

¹³ Bundeskanzler Brandt – Reden und Interviews, p. 453.

¹⁴ Klaus Harpprecht: Im Kanzleramt. Tagebuch der Jahre mit Willy Brandt, Reinbek 2000.

¹⁵ Cited in: Archiv der Gegenwart (AdG) 1971, p. 16395.

¹⁶ Plenarprotokoll der 133. Sitzung des Deutschen Bundestages [Transcript of the 133rd Session of the Bundestag] of July 19th, 1971, 6. Wahlperiode, p. 7759. See <http://dipbt.bundestag.de/doc/btp/06/06133.pdf>.

appear as the arrogant moralists of the world. Rather, we must follow the chain of causality of suffering and injustice back to its origin: here in the heart of Europe,” the Chancellor emphasized. He promised that the German government would do what it could, “with the appropriate humility (...) to encourage a will toward peaceful reconciliation in the tense Middle Eastern region.” An eternal, irrevocable condition, however, was that “we (...) cannot permit that Israel’s right to exist be placed in doubt.”¹⁷

The Development of Personal Contacts Between Willy Brandt and Golda Meir, 1971/72

While Willy Brandt’s good relations with Abba Eban dated back to his own time as Foreign Minister, his relationship with Golda Meir was more challenging. They had first met in 1960, when the then Governing Mayor of West Berlin paid his first visit to Israel. Later, Brandt and Meir were sporadically to cross paths at meetings of the Socialist International (SI), including in May 1971 at a Council Conference of party leaders in Helsinki. A heated exchange of opinions occurred between the Israeli Prime Minister and the German Chancellor; Meir was greatly annoyed that the foreign ministers of the European Community (EC) had issued a declaration on the subject of the Middle East two weeks earlier, and brusquely asked Brandt: “What business is that of the Six?”¹⁸

In their first joint position paper formulated as part of the European Political Cooperation (EPC), a paper intended to remain confidential but soon leaked to the public, the six EC member states had adopted a formal position on the Middle Eastern conflict calling for a peaceful solution with international guarantees. In his response to Meir’s question, Brandt pointed to Europe’s interest in a peaceful neighboring region and reaffirmed the right of the EC to express itself accordingly¹⁹ Nonetheless, the Chancellor did have reservations about the content of the declaration in question. It

¹⁷ Bundeskanzler Brandt – Reden und Interviews, pp. 453–454.

¹⁸ Willy Brandt: Erinnerungen, Frankfurt a.M. 1989, p. 446.

¹⁹ See Willy Brandt: Begegnungen und Einsichten. Die Jahre 1960-1975, Hamburg 1976, p. 590.

was based on the French version of UN Security Council Resolution 242 of November 1967, which demanded that Israeli troops withdraw from “the occupied territories.” The EPC paper envisioned at most “minor territorial changes.”²⁰

On the other hand, Israel clung to the English text of the resolution, which called for withdrawal from “territories occupied,” which, in the Israeli reading, did not require that all territories seized be returned, and would permit Israel to negotiate borders at its option.²¹ In a March 1971 interview with the “Times” of London, Golda Meir outlined Israel’s idea of appropriate national borders. She proclaimed that Israel would have to retain Sharm el-Sheikh on the southeastern coast of the Sinai, along with land access to the port city. Meir also demanded that the border around the port of Eilat on the Red Sea be renegotiated, and the Gaza Strip severed from Egypt. The Israeli Prime Minister also underscored that Israel would not withdraw from the Golan Heights and East Jerusalem.²² A few days later, she stressed in a speech to the Knesset that the future borders of Israel needed to be chosen with deterrence in mind.²³ These demands were asserted by Foreign Minister Abba Eban in conversation with his German colleague Walter Scheel on the occasion of the latter’s visit to Israel at the start of July, 1971.²⁴

The Israelis dismissed the EPC paper as pro-Arab, and categorically rejected it. The government and the Israeli public worried that Germany had bowed to the influence of France, which had turned away from Israel after the Six-Day War of 1967. Among staunchly pro-Israeli members of the Bundestag and of the Social Democratic Party leadership, and in particular Herbert Wehner, who had traveled to Israel in the spring of 1971, the

²⁰ See AAPD 1971, edited by Martin Koopmann, Matthias Peter and Daniela Taschler, München 2002, pp. 666–671.

²¹ This was the same line of argument deployed by Golda Meir in her speech to the Council Conference of the SI in Helsinki in May of 1971. See *Socialist Affairs* 21 (1971), No. 5–6, pp. 98–99.

²² See *Europa Archiv* (EA) 26 (1971), 7, p. D 68.

²³ See *ibid.*, 8, p. D 79.

²⁴ See AAPD 1971, p. 1104.

Middle East declaration of the EC also met with disapproval. The Chancellor attempted to reassure the head of the SPD parliamentary faction in the Bundestag with a letter of May 22nd, 1971, in which he described the paper of the Foreign Ministers as “a confidential interim report” intended to serve as a basis for further discussion. Brandt also stated that it was accepted that “limited territorial changes” had to be possible on the basis of Resolution 242; the “Israeli polemics” were thus “difficult to understand”.²⁵

But the commotion only increased when the full text of the document became known shortly thereafter. A delegation from the Bundestag visiting Israel at the invitation of the Knesset in June 1971 was made to feel the displeasure of its hosts, as was the German Foreign Minister four weeks later. Scheel's reassurances to Meir and Eban that the Middle East declaration was a compromise actually moderating the French position did not allay Israeli complaints.²⁶ However, while Scheel was still in Israel, Bonn distanced itself from the EPC paper, to the profound irritation of the government in Paris. Brandt's spokesman Conrad Ahlers declared on July 9th, 1971, that the German government continued to interpret Security Council Resolution 242 in accordance with the English text.²⁷ Three days earlier, the Chancellor had met with French President Georges Pompidou and expressed understanding “that Israel demanded modifications in keeping with its security interests”. Brandt was thus sympathetic to the Israeli wish for “secure borders” differing from those in place prior to the Six-Day War of 1967 by more than merely “minor border changes”. On the other hand, he wondered with Pompidou: “How can one stop the Egyptians from shooting this autumn?”

Brandt and Pompidou were plainly disappointed in the seemingly entirely intransigent position of the Israeli government, which had rejected the peace initiatives put forward by the United States (the Rogers Plan) and

²⁵ See Brandt's letter to Wehner from May 22nd, 1971, in: AdsD, WBA, A 8, 21.

²⁶ See AAPD 1971, pp. 1099–1100 and pp. 1105–1106.

²⁷ See *ibid.*, p. 1113, Note 3.

the UN (the Jarring Mission). The French President opined that Israel trusted no one to secure its borders anymore, only itself and its military. His German counterpart recounted similar impressions from his meeting with Golda Meir in Helsinki, namely that “she had displayed a very combative attitude, and depicted Israel as standing alone, without friends, and ready to fight to the last man if necessary”.²⁸ His subsequent remark that Defense Minister Moshe Dayan was likely more amenable to compromise was apparently based on his conversations with Nahum Goldmann, with whom Brandt met with some frequency.²⁹ Dayan had already in 1970 raised the prospect of an interim agreement with Egypt for the reopening of the Suez Canal, under which both sides would pull their troops back from the canal some 30 kilometers, thus placing them beyond the range of opposing artillery. When, however, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat offered in February 1971 to reopen the canal if Israel withdrew to the Sinai passes of Mitla and Gidi, Dayan failed to fight for his plan. In May of 1971, a majority of the Israeli Cabinet was willing to accept at most a demilitarized zone of 10 kilometers on either side of the canal.³⁰ As Sadat then declared that he would only accept a bilateral withdrawal from the canal if Israel first recognized it as a first step in returning all occupied territory, the matter went no further.

Despite her intransigence, personal contact between Golda Meir and Willy Brandt increased steadily from the autumn of 1971 on. A crucial role in this development was played by Günter Grass – perhaps surprisingly, given his admission in 2006 of having briefly served in the Waffen-SS and his sharp criticism of Israeli policy in 2012. Grass, who had first visited the Jewish state in early 1967, traveled to Israel in November 1971 to participate in the “German Culture Week” initiated by the German Foreign

²⁸ Ibid., p. 1084.

²⁹ On Brandt’s conversations with Goldmann and the latter’s opinion of Dayan, which Pompidou shared, see *ibid.*, p. 164.

³⁰ See Abba Eban: *Personal Witness. Israel Through My Eyes*, New York 1992, pp. 503–505.

Ministry.³¹ In his luggage, Grass carried a letter from the Chancellor to the Israeli Prime Minister, which he delivered personally during an hour and a half-long meeting with Meir on November 10th.³²

In the letter dated November 2nd, Brandt thanked Meir for her congratulations on the occasion of his Nobel Peace Prize, which he described as both a great obligation and an incentive. He wrote that he was looking closely for signs of a path to long-term peace in the Middle East. The Chancellor related the impression he had gained in his talks with Brezhnev in the Crimea in September of 1971 that the Soviet Union was interested jointly with the United States in preventing a further escalation of the situation. Though, as he reminded Meir, West Germany could exert only limited influence in these matters, Brandt offered the Israeli leader his best efforts: "Whenever you think that I should know something for my deliberations and discussions that goes beyond the official statements, please do not hesitate to tell me."³³

"She was more than merely pleased with your letter," wrote Günter Grass to his friend upon his return from Israel.³⁴ He also communicated to Brandt Meir's suggestion that he invite "10 or 15 European Social Democrats" for a private conference with her to discuss the situation in the Middle East. "The conduct of the Swedish and English comrades seems to have particularly depressed her at the conference in Helsinki", Grass reported. In a letter of November 29th, 1971, Meir officially broached her idea to Brandt: "I think it is necessary that people who share the ideology that I have lived with all my life, should know all the facts and try to

³¹ The organizers of the event displayed a truly remarkable tin ear for Israeli public opinion. The "German Culture Week," which was scheduled to run, of all times, from the 6th to 12th of November, 1971, provoked massive anti-German protests in Israel, particularly on November 9th. See Fink 2009, p. 192.

³² See the comment by Wolf-Dietrich Schilling from November 3rd, 1971, in: AdsD, WBA, A 8, 53. For the discussion between Meir and Grass and on the latter's Israel trip, see Briefwechsel Brandt-Grass, p. 513 and pp. 523-526.

³³ See Brandt's letter to Meir of November 2nd, 1971, at <http://www.archives.gov.il/archives/Archive/0b0717068001c167/File/0b07170684cd4bda/Item/0907170684f9e414>. See also the copy of the letter in: Briefwechsel Brandt-Grass, pp. 946-947 and AdsD, WBA, A 8, 53.

³⁴ Briefwechsel Brandt-Grass, p. 524.

understand and then, maybe, also possibly to help.” Meir thanked Brandt for his willingness to keep her informed and to help. However, she assessed the likelihood of involving the superpowers in a solution to the Middle East conflict as very low, and, as long as Egypt made an Israeli withdrawal to the borders of 1967 a precondition for any talks, she saw no prospect of an agreement of any kind. She emphasized that if, as rumored, President Sadat wished to go to war yet again, Israel had no fear: “We are certain how the war will end”, the Israeli Prime Minister stated with confidence, but added that the thought of being attacked once more left her permanently uneasy.³⁵

In his response of January 26th, 1972, Brandt welcomed Meir’s idea for an informal discussion among social democratic party leaders and suggested that the meeting be held in Vienna that June. Despite all obstacles, Brandt continued, he was not entirely without hope regarding developments in the Middle East. He also apologized for not having written earlier; he had had numerous engagements in December, including a meeting with President Nixon in the United States shortly before New Year’s and a subsequent vacation in Florida.³⁶ Meir in turn expressed in a letter of February 20th, 1972, her satisfaction that her suggestion had been accepted, and confirmed that the meeting could be held peripherally to the Congress of the Socialist International in Vienna in June. Meir also thanked Brandt for his interest in Israel’s problems.³⁷

She had already made clear two weeks earlier how much she welcomed an ongoing exchange with the Chancellor. “I deeply value this exchange,

³⁵ See Meir’s letter to Brandt of November 29th, 1971, in: AdsD, WBA, A 8, 53. Reprinted in: Briefwechsel Brandt–Grass, pp. 948–949. See also the copy at <http://www.archives.gov.il/archives/#/Archive/0b0717068001c167/File/0b07170684cd4bda/Item/0907170684f9e414>.

³⁶ See Brandt’s letter to Meir of January 26th, 1972, at <http://www.archives.gov.il/archives/#/Archive/0b0717068001c167/File/0b07170684cd4bda/Item/0907170684f9e415>. See also the copy of the letter in: AdsD, WBA, A 8, 53. The text of the letter is included in the Annex to this issue.

³⁷ See Meir’s letter to Brandt of February 20th, 1972, in: AdsD, WBA, A 8, 53. See also the copy of the letter at <http://www.archives.gov.il/archives/#/Archive/0b0717068001c167/File/0b07170684cd4bda/Item/0907170684f9e415>. The text of the letter is included in the Annex to this issue.

both for itself and for the friendly relationship to which it bears witness”, she wrote in a letter delivered to Brandt by Ambassador Ben-Horin in Bonn on February 8th, 1972. The letter contained “a most cordial invitation (...) to come to Israel as the honoured guest of my Government at a time of your choice”.³⁸

The circumstances under which this invitation was extended were unusual, and did not conform to the normal diplomatic practice. It had been reported in the Israeli press on January 30th, 1972, that Meir would shortly invite the Chancellor to Israel, a report the government in Jerusalem did not initially confirm. After West German Ambassador Jesco von Puttkamer erroneously responded to the reports with an announcement that an invitation had been received, the German government saw itself forced to issue a statement that no invitation had yet been received, and that nothing was known of any such intention on the part of the Israeli government.³⁹

When the invitation – which had not been coordinated with Bonn, but had already been leaked to the public from within the Israel government – did in fact arrive, Brandt did not hesitate to accept. The AFP news agency reported that same day, February 8th, that the Chancellor had already stated his response to members of the international press corps, but that the precise dates of the visit had yet to be worked out. The report continued: “Addressing the possible fallout this invitation could have for the process of normalization between the Arab states and West Germany, Brandt emphasized that the Federal Republic was equally interested in maintaining good relations with Israel and with the Arab states.”⁴⁰

Excepting the special case of Jordan, with which diplomatic ties had been resumed as early as 1967, it was only in December 1971 that Bonn had been able to restore diplomatic relations with any of the Arab states

³⁸ The words “at a time of your choice” were underlined by hand by Brandt. See Meir’s letter to Brandt of February 6th, 1972, in: AdSD, WBA, A 8, 53. A copy of the letter is published at <http://www.archives.gov.il/archives/#!/Archive/0b0717068001c167/File/0b07170684cd4bda/Item/0907170684f9e416>.

³⁹ See AAPD 1972, edited by Mechthild Lindemann, Daniela Taschler, and Fabian Hilfrich, München 2003, p. 121, Note 28.

⁴⁰ Cited in: Ibid., Note 29.

that had broken them off in 1965, namely Algeria and Sudan. Not until March 14th, 1972, did the Arab League permit its member states to exchange ambassadors with the Federal Republic, which a further seven Arab countries did in the ensuing months. Thus, for example, diplomatic relations between Egypt and West Germany were officially restored on June 8th, 1972. It was his concern for the rapprochement with the Arab world then underway that caused Willy Brandt to observe to French President Georges Pompidou that the invitation from Prime Minister Meir put him “in a difficult position.”⁴¹ Observing the thawing relations between West Germany and the Arabs, the invitation from the government in Jerusalem was a clear signal to Bonn that Israel was not to be forgotten. The impending accession to the UN of the Federal Republic and Brandt’s prestige as a leading global figure can be considered additional motives for the invitation to the Chancellor.⁴²

Though he recognized the element of coercion, Willy Brandt felt it impossible “in light of the German past” to reject the invitation, as he explained to British Prime Minister Edward Heath on April 20th, 1972. The Chancellor was determined to visit Israel in the latter half of the year.⁴³ Finding a date for the trip, however, was difficult given the domestic political situation in Germany at the time. In his letter to Golda Meir of March 9th, 1972, officially confirming his intention to accept the invitation, Brandt made reference to the pending ratification of the various treaties with the Eastern Bloc countries (the “Ostverträge”) to excuse his inability to suggest specific dates at that time.⁴⁴ The new elections scheduled for November 19th, 1972, in response to the failure of the constructive vote of no confidence against Brandt’s government on April 27th and the ensuing deadlock in the Bundestag further pushed back the voyage. At the Congress of the Socialist International held in Vienna from the 26th to 29th of June of that

⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 120–121.

⁴² See Fink 2009, p. 193. Fink’s description of the timing and circumstances of the invitation is significantly flawed, however.

⁴³ See AAPD 1972, p. 436.

⁴⁴ See *ibid.*, p. 121, Note 29.

year,⁴⁵ Brandt assured Meir that he would come to Israel as soon as possible after the general election.⁴⁶ This promise further encouraged the dialog between the two politicians. The Israeli Prime Minister was “significantly friendlier in tone” than a year before in Helsinki.⁴⁷

The degree of trust she now placed in Brandt is demonstrated by the text of a letter to the Chancellor of September 4th, 1972.⁴⁸ In it, Meir thanked Brandt warmly for the extensive exchange of views in Vienna, and set out her thoughts on the situation in the Middle East after the withdrawal of Soviet military advisors from Egypt. The Israeli government believed “that developments in Egypt are likely to bring about a more realistic appraisal by the leaders there of the alternatives open to them”. President Sadat was on the verge of reaching an important decision, “namely, that he can solve his problems only by himself and together with us. (...) It has been our contention that Egypt cannot seriously be said to be ready for peace as long as she refuses to negotiate freely with Israel”, Meir continued. Her government was prepared to negotiate directly, as she had said in the Knesset on July 26th, 1972, Israel would impose no preconditions for talks, and had no intention “to perpetuate the cease-fire lines (...) and we have not drawn any ultimate maps as to where the peace boundaries must be”. “It is possible,” the Israeli Prime Minister wrote, “that the meaning of our appeal has not been fully grasped by President Sadat.” However, to ensure that he did not shrink yet again from the step of direct negotiations, there should be no “external diplomatic initiatives”, particularly not emanating from Europe, unless the initiatives were accepted by both sides in the

⁴⁵ See Socialist Affairs 22 (1972), No. 6–8, pp. 113–116. See also AdG 42 (1972), p. 17181.

⁴⁶ See Tsoref, “From Now On ...” (Note 2). Apparently the two spoke twice, though no meeting had been planned in advance. No record of these discussions can be found in the WBA. Brandt’s appointment book for the evening of June 26th, 1972 makes reference to a “discussion with Golda Meir” after a reception hosted by Bruno Kreisky. See AdsD, WBA, A 19, 270.

⁴⁷ Brandt 1989, p. 447.

⁴⁸ See Tsoref, “From Now On ...” (Note 2), and see the document at <http://www.archives.gov.il/archives/#/Archive/0b0717068001c167/File/0b07170684cd4bda/Item/0907170684ce29e2>.

conflict, Meir emphasized. She trusted that Brandt would withhold his support from any proposals that Israel perceived as directed against its interests.

This letter documenting the Israeli negotiating strategy with regard to Egypt implicitly called upon the Chancellor to do two things: first, to restrain Germany's European partners, and second, to motivate the Egyptians to engage in direct talks with Israel. However, this letter must be interpreted with a grain of salt, as it is rather questionable whether it was in fact ever sent: the Willy Brandt Archive, which contains all other written records of the exchanges between Brandt and Meir and where this letter should thus also be found, has no record of this very significant communication from the Israeli Prime Minister. Furthermore, the unsigned copy found in the Israel State Archives is on the original letterhead of the Prime Minister, and thus not a photocopy or carbon copy, as would be expected had the signed original actually been sent. Finally, the Willy Brandt Archive also contains no response from Brandt, as was specifically requested in Meir's letter. It is difficult to imagine that the Chancellor would have simply failed to respond to the tremendous show of confidence represented by the letter, and the implied request for his involvement. It thus seems highly doubtful that Meir's communication, the arrival of which would have coincided with the massacre of Israeli athletes at the 1972 Summer Olympics in Munich, was actually delivered. More likely, the completed but yet unsigned letter remained unsent in the face of the dramatic events in Munich.

The Crisis in Relations After the Olympic Massacre of 1972

After the attack by Palestinian terrorists against the Israeli Olympic team in Munich on September 6th, 1972, relations between West Germany and Israel entered a period of crisis. The inadequate security precautions at the Olympic Village and the catastrophic failure of the German authorities' rescue attempt were not the subject of criticism in the first official reaction of the Israeli government. Initially, Golda Meir worked to prevent a wave of Israeli reproaches directed at Germany. Instead, she thanked the German

Chancellor in a telex of September 6th and praised him as an ally of Israel: "We appreciate fully what your government did in a desperate attempt to save the lives of our sportsmen without yielding to brutal intimidation."⁴⁹ In her response of September 29th to Brandt's telegram of condolence on the morning of September 6th as well as his telegram on the occasion of Rosh Hashanah three days later, in which he expressed his "especial solidarity" with the Israeli people in the face of their tragedy, Meir also found cordial words for him.⁵⁰

Her readiness to spare her German counterparts from criticism was soon past. On the evening of September 6th, Meir and some of her Cabinet received an oral report of the incompetent and eventually catastrophic handling of the situation by the German security forces by Mossad chief Zvi Zamir, who had personally been present during the disaster at Fürstenfeldbruck.⁵¹ The Prime Minister then dispatched another telegram to the Chancellor, calling on him to launch an investigation of the events as soon as possible.⁵² At Meir's request, a written report from Zamir was personally delivered to Brandt by Israeli Ambassador Ben-Horin on September 13th.⁵³ German Interior Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher issued a comment on the report which was sent to the Israeli Prime Minister with a letter from Brandt of October 9th, 1972. While Genscher discussed "inaccuracies or errors" in Zamir's report, no mention was made of German mistakes or failures.⁵⁴ For her part, Golda Meir was unable and unwilling to

⁴⁹ Meir to Brandt, September 6th, 1972, in: AdsD, WBA, A 8, 53.

⁵⁰ See the telegrams, which were also published, in: AdsD, WBA, A 8, 53.

⁵¹ See the article published by Michael Borgstede on August 30th, 2012 „Als der Mossad-Chef vor Wut kochte“, at <https://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article108885258/Als-der-Mossad-Chef-vor-Wut-kochte.html>. See also the documentary "The Munich massacre, September 1972" at <http://www.archives.gov.il/en/publication/israels-olympic-sportsmen/>.

⁵² See the telegram at <http://www.archives.gov.il/archives/#/Archive/0b071706800171a0/File/0b07170680ed5994/Item/0907170684cd3ecc>.

⁵³ See AAPD 1972, pp. 1243–1247. See Zamir's report at <http://www.archives.gov.il/archives/#/Archive/0b0717068001c167/File/0b07170684cc483a/Item/0907170684cd4242>.

⁵⁴ See Brandt's letter to Meir of October 9th, 1972, and Genscher's comment of October 5th, 1972, at <http://www.archives.gov.il/NR/rdonlyres/BB109633-F87C-4415-A57A-C93C3D0A60A3/0/munich026.pdf>.

accept before the Israeli public the results of a German inquiry clearing German officials and public agencies of any implication of error, as she stated to German Ambassador Jesco von Puttkamer on October 13th, 1972.⁵⁵ She followed through on this intention in a speech to the Knesset three days later,⁵⁶ nonetheless, she once more found words of praise for the German decision to free the hostages by force of arms.⁵⁷ It was also noted within Israel that the German government quickly expelled from the Federal Republic 1,500 Arabs suspected of involvement with terrorism, banned two Palestinian student organizations, and agreed on even closer cooperation with Israeli security agencies.⁵⁸

All pretense of diplomatic restraint was discarded in Jerusalem, however, when the Federal Republic on October 29th, 1972, released the three Palestinian terrorists who had survived the bloody denouement of the Munich attack and were now jailed in Bavaria awaiting trial. The release was in response to the demands of PLO terrorists who had, just hours before, hijacked a Lufthansa plane and taken its 20 passengers hostage. The urgent request of the Israeli government, transmitted via Ambassador Ben-Horin, that Bonn refuse to give in to Palestinian blackmail was rejected. The German reaction met with total incomprehension in Israel, and was vehemently criticized by the Israel Cabinet and the public at large. Prime Minister Meir and Foreign Minister Eban accused West Germany of a “volte-face” and a “precipitate surrender” in the face of terrorism.⁵⁹ In the Israeli media, comparisons with the Nazi period were made, and the German government and Chancellor were the subject of personal attacks. Golda Meir distanced herself from the most extreme charges, however, saying that she “would not connect what has just happened with the Holocaust.”⁶⁰ The outrage and anger in her Cabinet was nonetheless so

⁵⁵ See AAPD 1972, pp. 1534–1537.

⁵⁶ See Matthias Dahlke: *Der Anschlag auf Olympia '72. Die politischen Reaktionen auf den internationalen Terrorismus in Deutschland*, München 2006, pp. 67–68.

⁵⁷ See AAPD 1972, p. 1615, Note 4.

⁵⁸ See Fink 2009, pp. 195–196.

⁵⁹ See AAPD 1972, pp. 1615–1617.

⁶⁰ Quoted at <http://www.archives.gov.il/en/chapter/aftermath-hijacking-lufthansa-plane->

intense that Ambassador Ben-Horin, who had delivered an official note of protest in Bonn on October 30th, was recalled to Jerusalem for consultations.⁶¹

The unusual circumstances of the hijacking⁶² and the lightning release and deportation of the Olympic terrorists, who were flown out to Tripoli via Zagreb that same day – a Sunday – aroused suspicions of a put-up job that have never entirely died away.⁶³ However, the chaotic and dramatic events surrounding the release, particularly at the airport in Zagreb, argue against the theory of collusion between German officials and the terrorists and their leaders.⁶⁴ However, the West German government and the Bavarian state government were clearly interested in ridding themselves of the three Palestinians before a trial could be held. Recent investigations by the television news magazine “Report München” revealed that Bavarian police and justice officials had prepared extensively for the release and subsequent deportation of the terrorists.⁶⁵ Immediately after September 5th, 1972, warnings and threats were received of new attacks intended to secure the release of the jailed Palestinians.⁶⁶ At the time, it was widely hoped that their freedom would buy the Federal Republic immunity from further attacks by Arab terrorists. In addition, the government in Bonn did

release-munich-terrorists-lead-outrage-israel/.

⁶¹ See AdG 42 (1972), p. 17519 as well as Hepperle 2000, p. 116.

⁶² Including the two hijackers, there were only thirteen passengers on the aircraft (nine Arabs, two Americans, a Frenchman, and a German), none of them women or children. See Majid Sattar: Folgen eines Anschlags, in: Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung of November 9th, 2006.

⁶³ See *ibid.* and Simon Reeve: One Day in September. The Story of the 1972 Munich Olympics Massacre, London 2000, pp. 128–131.

⁶⁴ See AAPD 1972, pp. 1635–1638. Before landing in Zagreb, the hijackers ordered the plane to fly in circles for some four hours, until only enough fuel for another approximately 30 seconds of flight remained. Against the initial wishes of the West German government, Yugoslavia permitted the aircraft to be refueled after landing and flown to Libya. The hostage-takers had previously threatened to blow the aircraft up. Bonn's demand that the kidnappers release their hostages in Zagreb was also not complied with. The departure of the aircraft carrying the three Palestinians from the Munich-Riem airport to Zagreb also occurred without permission from Bonn, which had wished to negotiate further guarantees. See Dahlke 2006, pp. 22–25.

⁶⁵ The report concerning this issue was telecasted on June 18th, 2013, on ARD.

⁶⁶ See Dahlke 2006, p. 20.

not wish to strain its recently reestablished relations with the Arab states.⁶⁷ A trial of the Munich terrorists would also unavoidably have raised questions about their organizers and helpers abroad.

Chancellor Brandt defended the decision and rejected the Israeli criticism. As he said in a speech at an election rally on November 6th, 1972, he could not accept “connections being made with a criminal period in German politics.”⁶⁸ At the same time, Brandt attempted to limit the damage to German-Israeli relations. On November 8th, von Puttkamer delivered to the Israeli Prime Minister in Jerusalem a message from the Chancellor. The message explained that “(o)ur actions were determined by the conviction that the deliverance of those in danger took priority over all other considerations. In this particular case, there was no other choice. The position taken on October 29th by the German government does not imply a retreat in the face of terrorism. The German government will in future continue to resist terrorism with all its strength and with all means available to it.” Brandt continued that he was “painfully affected” by Israeli comments made in connection with the hijacking. “I must emphatically object when parallels are drawn with a criminal period in German politics. It fills me with concern that these events could tarnish the relationship between our two countries, and I believe we should jointly do our utmost to see that German-Israeli relations do not suffer.”⁶⁹

Meir was exceedingly pleased that the Chancellor, “in this situation,” addressed a personal message to her. She also wished to avoid harm being done to bilateral relations between the countries, and promised to do what she could to that end. Regarding the accusations in the Israeli media that raised the specter of the Nazi era, Meir reminded the German

⁶⁷ See Eva Oberloskamp: Das Olympia-Attentat 1972. Politische Lernprozesse im Umgang mit dem transnationalen Terrorismus, in: Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte 60 (2012), 3, pp. 321–352 (pp. 332–333).

⁶⁸ Bundeskanzler Brandt – Reden und Interviews (II), published by the Presse- und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung [Bonn 1973], p. 492.

⁶⁹ For the German text and an English translation of Brandt's message see <http://www.archives.gov.il/archives/#!/Archive/0b0717068001c167/File/0b07170684cc483a/Item/0907170684cd4ab1>.

Ambassador that the position taken by members of the Israeli press was not that of the Israeli government. At the same time, however, the Prime Minister asked for understanding of the Israeli reaction to the release of murderers who, upon arrival in Libya, had immediately declared their intention to carry out further acts of terrorism.⁷⁰

Thanks to Brandt's personal message to Meir, the suddenly frosty relationship between Israel and Germany gradually thawed once more. Ambassador Ben-Horin returned to Bonn on November 9th, 1972. Israeli envoy Yitzhak Ben-Ari underscored to SPD International Secretary Hans-Eberhard Dingels that this decision had been taken by Prime Minister Meir alone, and stemmed from her personal respect for the Social Democrats Willy Brandt and Herbert Wehner, for whom she did not want to cause difficulties immediately before the general election.⁷¹

The West German Position on the Conflict in the Middle East Ahead of Brandt's Voyage to Israel

After the election victory of the SPD and FDP and Brandt's reelection as Chancellor, plans for his previously postponed trip to Israel took shape. Toward the end of March in 1973, Brandt informed the Israeli government through the German Ambassador in Tel Aviv that he wished to visit Israel from the 6th through the 10th of June of that year.⁷² The visit was officially announced on April 2nd.

On the occasion of her 75th birthday on May 3rd, 1973, von Puttkamer delivered to Golda Meir a handwritten, personal letter from Willy Brandt in which he warmly congratulated his counterpart and praised her for her accomplishments on behalf of the state of Israel. Brandt's letter continued:

⁷⁰ See AAPD 1972, pp. 1685–1688.

⁷¹ See the letter from Hans-Eberhard Dingels to Wolf-Dietrich Schilling, the German Chancellor's personal aide, of November 10th, 1972, cited in: Hepperle 2000, pp. 120–121.

⁷² See the telegram from the Embassy in Bonn to the Israeli Foreign Ministry of March 28th, 1973, at <http://www.archives.gov.il/archives/#/Archive/0b0717068001c167/File/0b07170684cd4bda/Item/0907170684f2f773>. The visit eventually took place from June 7th through June 11th, 1973.

“My wife and I are looking forward to meeting you again (...) and with the expectation that it shall further deepen the ties between our countries.”⁷³ The impetus for this letter was provided by the German Ambassador, who used its delivery as an opportunity to discuss the pending visit of the Chancellor.⁷⁴ In light of an anti-German demonstration in front of the German Embassy on April 29th, the Holocaust Day of Remembrance, von Puttkamer expressed his concern over whether public opinion in Israel was really ready for such a visit, and whether similar protests could not be expected during Brandt’s stay. Meir reassured the Ambassador that there was nothing to worry about; the Israelis knew who Brandt was.⁷⁵ She warmly thanked the Chancellor for his birthday greetings in her own letter of May 22nd.⁷⁶

In the spring of 1973, some of Willy Brandt’s foreign interlocutors let it be known that the prospect of his trip to Israel filled them with a certain degree of hope. In a conversation in Bonn on March 1st, 1973, for example, the Special Advisor to the President of Egypt, Hafez Ismail, who had previously visited Moscow, London, Washington, and New York, explained that “the Chancellor has significant influence in certain political circles. Egypt hopes that [West Germany] is willing to use this influence with the goal of convincing the Israeli leadership to adopt a more flexible attitude.”⁷⁷ However, Brandt warned against excessively optimistic expectations of himself and the Europeans. While he concurred with Ismail’s opinion that the European Community should play a greater role in its neighboring region, he also said that there were reasons “that Europe played only a

⁷³ See the copy of Brandt’s letter to Meir of April 26th, 1973, in: AdsD, WBA, A 8, 53.

⁷⁴ See the telex from Tel Aviv to the German Foreign Ministry, No. 197 of April 16th, 1973, in: AdsD, WBA, A 8, 53.

⁷⁵ See the memorandum on the conversation between Meir and von Puttkamer on May 3rd, 1973, at <http://www.archives.gov.il/archives/#/Archive/0b0717068001c167/File/0b07170684cd4bda/Item/0907170684f9cb4d>.

⁷⁶ See Meir’s letter to Brandt of May 22nd, 1973, in: AdsD, WBA, A 8, 53.

⁷⁷ See “Vermerk über das Gespräch zwischen dem Bundeskanzler und Herrn Hafez Ismail, Sonderberater des Präsidenten der Arabischen Republik Ägypten, am 1. März 1973, 11.00 Uhr, im Bundeskanzleramt”, in: AdsD, WBA, A8, 53.

subordinate role in international politics". For Brandt, the idea of the Federal Republic playing a leading role in Europe was out of the question.

Describing the German position in the Middle Eastern conflict as "constructive neutrality" was not as simple as it sounded, he continued, acknowledging "certain burdens from the past". Nonetheless, the German government was "very interested in progress being made in resolving the problems of the Middle East", not least in the "Palestinian question", which the Chancellor described as the "primary source of the difficulties". The Federal Republic was "ready without hesitation" to bring to bear such – admittedly limited – influence as it had on Israel. A solution would have to be "implemented under the aegis of the United Nations. That need not mean that a solution could only operationally be arrived at through the UN."

Willy Brandt thus did not exclude the possibility of direct talks between Egypt and Israel. That he fundamentally endorsed such contacts can be concluded from the following evidence: the Chancellor described as "very important" Ismail's comment, made at the Foreign Ministry the day before, that Israel must see itself "as part of the Middle East". With regard to the rejection of interim solutions by the Egyptian government, however, Brandt expressed his "candid" doubts. "What is a 'permanent' solution?", he asked, noting his Ostpolitik and the difficult decisions it required: "There are intermediate steps between a bad current situation and an ideal solution." His counterpart would have none of it. Ismail responded that Brandt's "philosophy" was unlike the "Egyptian way of thinking", and added: "Perhaps it is because the Egyptians are a young people who watch over their territory with jealousy."⁷⁸ However, he welcomed Brandt's intention to visit Israel.⁷⁹

In the spring of 1973, positions in the Middle East were more entrenched than ever. Yugoslav President Josef Tito reported to Brandt on April 18th during a private conversation on the Adriatic island of Brioni that the situation was becoming particularly explosive. Tito claimed to have

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ See Harpprecht 2000, p. 138.

recently received information “according to which the Arabs are preparing to reclaim the lost territories by military force. (...) Things could go off at practically any moment.” For this reason, Tito had sent messages to the Soviet Union, the United States, and other countries, attempting to convince them “that it’s high time to do something”. Tito, who maintained close relations with Sadat, was “greatly concerned”, and feared “the worst”. “The Arabs are preparing for total war (...). They are ready to destroy Israel, and they have the means to do it,” he told Brandt. He urged especially that the Americans take action.

The German Chancellor took these warnings very seriously, and promised to discuss the situation in the Middle East at his next meeting with President Nixon, planned for early May, 1973, and to send Tito a letter afterward. Brandt underlined that it was the United States and the Soviet Union that mattered, and neither wanted a war. The Israeli position was “especially rigid” due to the pending elections in that country. The government had to deal with militant right-wing groups, and Golda Meir herself was “not particularly flexible”. The Chancellor wondered: “What do the Israelis want?” He was ready to exert his influence during his visit to Israel in June on behalf of a peaceful solution, but recognized that Europe’s leverage, and particularly Germany’s, was “very limited”. Even though there existed “a good relationship with the Arabs from ancient times”, the Federal Republic was, as Brandt explained once more while touching on Germany’s guilt for the murder of millions of Jews, “obligated to show particular balance with regard to Israel”.⁸⁰

When asked during a confidential background interview with journalists accompanying him on his trip to Yugoslavia whether he “was going to Israel on behalf of a specific agenda”, the Chancellor warned once more against overestimating the German role in the Middle East conflict. He pointed out that the most important actors were the United States and the U.S.S.R.,

⁸⁰ See the memorandum titled “Gespräch des Bundeskanzlers Brandt mit Staatspräsident Tito auf Brioni” from April 18th, 1973, in: AAPD 1973, edited by Matthias Peter, Michael Kieninger, Michael Ploetz, Mechthild Lindemann, and Fabian Hilfrich, München 2004, pp. 539–553 (citations from pp. 539–543).

and that, of the European powers, the United Kingdom and France had more influence in the region than did the Federal Republic. "We neither wish to obtrude, nor can we entirely avoid this, for, as part of European cooperation, we cannot escape the need to address this problem", was his Solomonic verdict.⁸¹ In an interview broadcast on Egyptian television a year earlier, Brandt had offered German and European support in searching for a solution to the problems of the Middle East.⁸²

At the White House on May 2nd, 1973, Brandt drew Nixon's attention to Tito's concerns about developments in the Middle East. The President, however saw American pressure as having "no real chance of success at the present time in light of the positions of the two sides", despite efforts to stay in contact with all parties involved.⁸³ In a letter to the Yugoslav President on May 7th, 1973, Brandt summarized the U.S. position as follows: Nixon was by no means unaware of the dangerous nature of the present situation, but America would only be able to bring its influence to bear once a process of negotiation had begun, which in turn could only happen if both sides dispensed with their preconditions. As long as Egypt insisted on assurances regarding certain matters before negotiations could be opened, little progress could be expected. Brandt therefore asked Tito for his aid: "I would consider it very helpful if you could make President Sadat aware of these aspects. (...) A positive attitude on the part of Cairo would also make it easier for me to conduct relevant discussions in June during my time in Israel."⁸⁴

⁸¹ The Israeli Embassy in Bonn learned of these comments. See the report by Ambassador Ben-Horin to the Israeli Foreign Ministry of April 26th, 1973, at <http://www.archives.gov.il/archives/#/Archive/0b0717068001c167/File/0b07170684cd4bda/Item/0907170684f9cb4f>.

⁸² Excerpts of this interview for the Egyptian news agency MENA are reprinted in: EMUNA. Horizonte zur Diskussion über Israel und das Judentum 7 (1972), pp. 159–160.

⁸³ See the "Aufzeichnung des Bundeskanzlers Brandt" of May 1st, 1973, in: AAPD 1973, pp. 615–617.

⁸⁴ See Brandt's letter to Tito of May 7th, 1973. Tito responded on May 22nd, 1973 that he had transmitted Brandt's message and the Yugoslav idea of mediation by the Four Powers to Sadat. The correspondence between Brandt and Tito is found in: AdsD, WBA, A 8, 55.

The Germans thus adopted wholesale the appraisal given by U.S. Secretary of State William P. Rogers to his German counterpart Walter Scheel during the Chancellor's visit to Washington. "Egypt apparently still maintains the completely unrealistic hope that the United States is in a position to force Israel to accept a treaty on the Arabs' terms. The basic problem with the Egyptian stance vis-à-vis Israel remains the demand that Israel accept the obligation to withdraw from all occupied territories before Egypt will consider negotiations", Rogers explained, adding that "Mrs. Meir is ready to join negotiations if the other side imposes no preconditions". He then advised Scheel, who was scheduled to visit Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon from the 20th through 25th of May, 1973, that it would be helpful if the Arabs could be made to understand that no third party – not the UN, not the United States, not the Four Powers, and not the Europeans – could solve their problems for them. The German Foreign Minister asked whether the Americans saw any prospect that "representatives of Israel and Egypt might meet informally at some location" in order, perhaps, to get negotiations going. As the conversation was interrupted at this stage, the question was not further explored. However, Rogers said to Scheel later that it would certainly be beneficial if he were to convey the Federal Republic's position "that any initiative would have to come from the parties themselves".⁸⁵

The German Foreign Minister attempted accordingly to convince the Egyptians to abandon their preconditions for negotiations. To Egyptian Foreign Minister Mohammed Zayyat, he emphasized that "a solution to the Middle East problem cannot be expected without 'preliminary talks'", and said that a distinction had to be made "between public declarations and discreet attempts at a practical rapprochement". Scheel's advice fell upon deaf ears. Zayyat flatly rejected "negotiations without preconditions". For Zayyat, the phrase was an "Israeli invention" to enable it negotiate on the basis of the "present ownership situation". He made clear that "Egypt was

⁸⁵ See Telex No. 1320 from "Ministerialdirektor van Well, z.Zt. Washington, an das Auswärtige Amt" of May 2nd, 1973, in: AAPD 1973, pp. 632–635.

not prepared to so much as discuss cessions of territory”, and that “any establishment of contact must be preceded by an Israeli withdrawal, or at least the promise of withdrawal”. He described direct talks in this context as “pointless”.⁸⁶ The Egyptian President was similarly unyielding. As Israel was “occupying Egyptian territory as a bargaining chip, (...) any negotiations would lead only to an ‘imposed solution’ by Israel”, Sadat declared in conversation with Scheel.⁸⁷

After his tour, the German Foreign Minister summarized his impressions of the Middle Eastern situation in a conversation on May 29th with Chancellor Brandt and British Prime Minister Edward Heath during the latter’s visit to Bonn. The Egyptians “feared nothing so much as direct talks”. Despite a renewed effort in the UN Security Council, they had “no specific ideas” for a peace settlement, but merely wanted to show that they would not stand in the way of such a settlement. Though Sadat and others “spoke time and again of the alternative”, Scheel did not think another war likely in the near future.⁸⁸

As the Israeli government learned, the Egyptians had also been explicitly warned by the German Deputy Chancellor against resorting to military action. Scheel had told one of Sadat’s advisors that he would regard an attack against Israel as a grave mistake, as the Egyptians had to understand that their positions after such a war would end up west of the Suez Canal. According to this information, which came from a conversation between the FDP politician and a colleague from Israel’s Liberals, Scheel thought he had detected signs of willingness in Cairo to engage in indirect negotiations with Jerusalem, which in turn might result in direct, secret contacts. For this reason, he considered it worthwhile for this question to be addressed during Willy Brandt’s visit to Israel. The German Foreign Minister

⁸⁶ See Telex No. 855 from “Botschafter Steltzer, Kairo, an das Auswärtige Amt” from June 5th, 1973 on the delegation talk on May 21st, 1973, in: AAPD 1973, pp. 921–925.

⁸⁷ See “Aufzeichnung des Vortragenden Legationsrats I. Klasse Redies” on Scheel’s visit to Cairo on May 30th, 1973, in: AAPD 1973, pp. 896–901 (p. 900).

⁸⁸ See “Gespräch des Bundeskanzlers Brandt mit Premierminister Heath” on May 29th, 1973, in: AAPD 1973, pp. 858–864 (p. 859).

also offered to return to the region to deliver to his Arab colleagues any offers put forward by the Israelis.⁸⁹

However, Scheel's own ambitions were significantly more modest by the time of his departure. "Sir Walter won't bring peace to the Middle East after all; he doesn't think he's capable of it", Brandt commented to Klaus Harpprecht on May 11th, 1973.⁹⁰ After his return, Scheel urged in conversation with Brandt and Heath that a new Middle East mission be set up under the aegis of the United Nations to jump-start through indirect negotiations a process which might yet lead to direct talks. The Foreign Minister had already asked Soviet General Secretary Brezhnev for his support on May 19th, for, as Scheel saw it, the parties directly involved in the Middle Eastern conflict would not take the necessary first step without external assistance.⁹¹

At his meeting with the British Prime Minister, the Chancellor responded favorably to the idea of a new UN initiative for the Middle East, and suggested with reference to Tito's letter of May 22nd, 1973, that the mission might consist of "a mediator and representatives of the Four Powers". Edward Heath introduced an entirely different concern into the debate. His primary concern was the energy supply of the Western world. "The situation could arise that the Arab states would supply no more oil to the United States as long as it supports Israel." By maintaining a common Western position, Heath hoped on the one hand to deter the Arabs from misusing their economic power for political ends, and on the other to push Israel to withdraw from the occupied territories. "As long as Israel believes the West is merely frightened of war, it will do nothing. If it realizes that the

⁸⁹ So reported the representative of the Independent Liberal Party of Israel, Estreicher, who spoke with Foreign Minister Scheel during the conference of the International Council of Liberal Parties in Stockholm and subsequently informed the Israeli Embassy in Sweden of his conversation. See the telegram from the Embassy to the Israeli Foreign Ministry of May 29th, 1973, at <http://www.archives.gov.il/archives/#/Archive/0b0717068001c167/File/0b07170684cd4bda/Item/0907170684f9cb4e>.

⁹⁰ Harpprecht 2000, p. 138.

⁹¹ See "Gespräch des Bundeskanzlers Brandt mit dem Generalsekretär des ZK der KPdSU, Breschnew" on May 19th, 1973, in: AAPD 1973, pp. 728–731 (pp. 728–729).

Americans and Europeans are thinking more of an oil crisis, it will change its position.” Brandt told Heath that he would “bring this up with the Israelis”. However, the Chancellor did not think that the Israelis would undertake anything before the pending Knesset elections. He added: “Mrs. Meir certainly won’t change her mind, as she does not want to be the Israeli leader who gave in.”⁹²

The Chancellor Visits Israel

Two weeks before his departure, Willy Brandt invited the Israeli Ambassador, Eliashiv Ben-Horin, to a private dinner at his residence in the Venusberg district of Bonn. The other guests included, among others, Egon Bahr, Hans-Jürgen Wischnewski, Walter Hesselbach, and the Permanent Secretary of the Foreign Ministry, Paul Frank. Ben-Horin was greatly impressed by his very friendly hosts and the stimulating company. Brandt gave a lively account of his recent discussions with Leonid Brezhnev: he had jokingly asked the Soviet leader whether the problems the Soviets were having with the Egyptians were due to the Egyptian officers who had been trained in the U.S.S.R. having been taught the Soviet doctrine of letting an enemy advance deep into the country and then waiting for winter to arrive. Brezhnev’s response was apparently one of noticeable annoyance.⁹³

After dinner, Brandt took the Israeli Ambassador aside for a one-on-one conversation in which the Chancellor provided some information about his upcoming visit. He said that he would be well-rested and relaxed upon his arrival in Israel, but was concerned that his packed schedule would allow little opportunity for quiet talks. If necessary, he would be prepared to meet the Prime Minister for a further hour of discussion after each of the two planned gala dinners. Brandt was pleased that Meir was interested in

⁹² See “Gespräch des Bundeskanzlers Brandt mit Premierminister Heath” on May 29th, 1973, in: AAPD 1973, pp. 858–862.

⁹³ See Telegram No. 352 from Ben-Horin to the Israeli Foreign Ministry of May 25th, 1973, at <http://www.archives.gov.il/archives/#/Archive/0b0717068001c167/File/0b07170684cd4bda/Item/0907170684f2f774>.

hearing his opinions about international affairs. While he did have a few things to say to her concerning the situation in the Middle East, he mainly wished to listen. He expressed cautious hope that the talks would not devolve into discussions of matters of which he was already aware, and of which the Prime Minister knew he was already aware.⁹⁴

In no way did this mean that Brandt wished to avoid or ignore German responsibility for the Holocaust and its consequences. That was particularly true of his request of Ben-Horin regarding the issue of the payment of compensation to victims of the Nazi regime: he asked that that conversation not be reopened during his visit, and not take the form of the presentation of a demand, as his public response would of necessity have to be more negative than was in reality the case. He underscored the importance of avoiding giving the impression in Germany that the Chancellor was being placed under pressure in the matter of reparations. Brandt also explained to Ben-Horin the background for this request: he was still considering how Israel's wishes might be accommodated, and discussions were underway. A categorical rejection of Israel's claims, as had been issued to Yugoslavia, was not appropriate. Perhaps, Brandt suggested, a foundation could be set up into which certain amounts would be paid each year, and which would be reserved for cases of exceptional hardship; later, two elder statesmen might be entrusted with finding a lasting solution.⁹⁵

The assertion in Wolffsohn's "WamS" article that the Chancellor showed "no trace of humility" in his discussions with the Israeli Ambassador on the question of reparations payments is thus untenable.⁹⁶ Brandt made earnest efforts behind the scenes to put in place a long-term solution to the problem for the period after the expiry of the three-year Dinstein Agreement of 1970. However, he could not ignore domestic political resistance in Germany, nor

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ See Telegram No. 355 from Ben-Horin to the Israeli Foreign Ministry of May 25th, 1973. This separate report intended for the Finance Minister is also available at <http://www.archives.gov.il/archives/#/Archive/0b0717068001c167/File/0b07170684cd4bda/Item/0907170684f2f774>.

⁹⁶ Note 1. No mention whatsoever is made therein of Brandt's suggestion of a foundation.

the official German legal position. Accordingly, he asked his Israeli counterparts to show restraint in public.

Brandt and his staff in the Chancellery were also devoting thought to his visit to the Holocaust memorial of Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, planned for the evening of June 7th, 1973, and particularly to the presumed Israeli expectation of some special gesture from Brandt at the site. A repeat of the genuflection of Warsaw was out of the question; from Klaus Harpprecht came the suggestion that, after laying a wreath at Yad Vashem, the Chancellor read aloud verses from the 103rd Psalm in German.⁹⁷ Only on the plane bound for Israel did Brandt finally settle on Harpprecht's idea.⁹⁸ In his diary, Harpprecht wrote of the moment of Brandt's reading of the psalm at the memorial: "There is no one in this room who does not bow to the force, indeed the might of claim and plea implied by the objectivization the biblical text contains. (...) This night, Jerusalem talks of the psalm."⁹⁹

On the afternoon of June 7th, 1973, the German Chancellor and his entourage, which included among other figures Günter Grass, Walter Hesselbach, and the Chairman of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, Werner Nachmann, landed at Lod Airport in Tel Aviv, where they were received with military honors by Prime Minister Meir and Foreign Minister Eban. After the strains of the national anthems died away, Meir and Brandt each delivered a short speech before boarding a helicopter and flying off to Jerusalem together. After the Yad Vashem visit, the two met at the Prime Minister's house that evening for a first private conversation. At the same time, the two delegations, led respectively by Permanent Secretaries Mordechai Gazit and Paul Frank, met for discussions.¹⁰⁰

During the talks between the delegations, Frank observed with regard to the progress in bilateral relations between the two countries: "(T)he debate

⁹⁷ See Harpprecht 2000, p. 171 and pp. 177–178.

⁹⁸ See Wibke Bruhns: *Nachrichtenzeit. Meine unfertigen Erinnerungen*, München 2012, p. 103.

⁹⁹ Harpprecht 2000, pp. 183–184. Brandt recited Verses 8 through 16.

¹⁰⁰ This consultative meeting came as a surprise to the Germans, as, according to Frank, it had not been included on the agenda for the visit. See Paul Frank: *Entschlüsselte Botschaft. Ein Diplomat macht Inventur*, Stuttgart 1981, pp. 264–265.

as to whether this constitutes a special relationship, a relationship with a special character, etc. becomes of less and less interest as compared with the specific content of the relationship.” In this context, he reiterated “emphatically” that “no one involved in a responsible capacity with relations between Germany and Israel remotely imagines that the past can be forgotten. However, it is time to conclude this debate.”¹⁰¹ Frank’s intention was not to “draw a line”¹⁰² and imply that the past should be put behind them; he wanted to bring to an end the debate on how to characterize German-Israeli relations and concerning the term “normalization,” which he considered unacceptably brusque with regard to Israel.¹⁰³ The Permanent Secretary further elucidated the efforts of the Federal Republic to achieve a balanced Middle Eastern policy, and the interest of the German and other European governments in a peaceful solution in the region. Gazit had no reservations about Bonn’s desire for cordial relations with the Arab states as well; indeed, he welcomed the Federal Republic’s dialog with the parties to the conflict. However, in contrast to Frank, the Israel Permanent Secretary neither saw a connection between the politics of détente in Europe and the conflict in the Middle East, nor did he consider the present situation in the Middle East particularly dangerous.¹⁰⁴

The only documentary evidence of the first private conversation between the two leaders consists of a brief, fragmentary Israeli summary¹⁰⁵ and Willy Brandt’s own handwritten notes.¹⁰⁶ At Meir’s request, the

¹⁰¹ AAPD 1973, pp. 956–965 (p. 957).

¹⁰² This is the interpretation of Wolffsohn and Tsoref (Note 1).

¹⁰³ See also Harpprecht 2000, p. 184. In the Israeli “Summary of the Brandt Visit” of June 20th, 1973, too, Frank is quoted as saying “everyone in the Federal Republic is aware that the relationship between us has a special background, and no one can forget that. For that reason, we should put an end to the discussion about the ‘special relations’.” Previously, at the airport, Chancellor Brandt had spoken of “normal diplomatic relations having a special character,” and also used this phrase during his stay. See the summary at <http://www.archives.gov.il/archives/#/Archive/0b0717068001c167/File/0b07170684cd4bda/Item/0907170684f9cb52>.

¹⁰⁴ See AAPD 1973, pp. 956–965 (pp. 958–959).

¹⁰⁵ See the Israeli memorandum on the talk between Meir and Brandt on June 7th, 1973, at <http://www.archives.gov.il/archives/#/Archive/0b0717068001c167/File/0b07170684cd4bda/Item/0907170684f2f775>.

¹⁰⁶ Brandt’s notes comprise only a few key words, and summarize both private

Chancellor apparently spoke of his discussions with Brezhnev, and gave his perspective of the constellations of power within the leadership circles in Moscow. The topic of Soviet Jewry was also raised. Despite Brezhnev's jokes on the subject, Brandt reported that the Soviet General Secretary would continue to devote his attention to these "humanitarian matters". He then informed the Prime Minister of the latest information he had received concerning the Middle East. One idea that had come to the Germans' ears was "sovereignty for security". Meir affirmed that she had heard of this, but that Sadat had already rejected the concept. Brandt also brought up Tito's suggestion for a new Middle East mission by the UN, to be supported primarily by the Four Powers. Additionally, he mentioned a comment made by Erich Honecker in a discussion with Herbert Wehner in the German Democratic Republic at the end of May, 1973; the SED General Secretary had said that Israel could not retain all the territory it had occupied.¹⁰⁷

Prime Minister Meir then provided her own perspective on the situation in the Middle East. She described at length the various attempts by the Israeli government to initiate a dialog with the Egyptians. The root of the problem, she underscored, was simply "that the Arabs don't want us here". Regarding the Palestinian problem, she explained, it really meant "that the Palestinians would replace us". Brandt responded tersely that he understood. This sentence meant nothing other than that the Chancellor had expressed his understanding and his support for the Israeli insistence on recognition by the Arabs of the Jewish state's right to exist.¹⁰⁸

The first private meeting between the two leaders brought two concrete results: Prime Minister Meir agreed that Brandt could announce at his press conference the next day that she had accepted his invitation to visit the

conversations with Meir on June 7th and June 9th, 1973. See "GMeir: 7. + 9. 6. 73", in: AdSD, WBA, A 8, 94. See the facsimile of the document and its English translation in the Annex of this issue.

¹⁰⁷ See the Israeli memorandum "on the talk between Meir and Brandt on June 7th, 1973" (Note 105).

¹⁰⁸ Wolffsohn and Tsoref on the other hand also seemingly do not exclude the interpretation that Brandt was understanding of the desire of the Arabs to destroy Israel, for the article in "WamS" (Note 1) reads: "What he understood, can be understood in one of two ways."

Federal Republic. Brandt and Meir also agreed to hold another private talk on June 9th, 1973, as the Chancellor had suggested to Ambassador Ben-Horin before his departure.¹⁰⁹

Aware of the profound significance of his visit to Jerusalem, Willy Brandt was under a great deal of tension. At the King David Hotel late in the evening, he gave journalist Wibke Bruhns his impressions of the first day, which, in Brandt's words, had to be a success. Of his own accord, he brought up his ambivalent relationship to Israel: on the one hand, he felt himself bound together with "the persecuted Jews"; on the other, he had reservations about "Israeli hubris." Brandt also gave Bruhns his unvarnished view of Golda Meir: "She thinks herself and her people to be in league with God, and arrogantly stresses their status as chosen people. Was he supposed to contradict her?! Raising no objection at all was equally unsatisfactory. Brandt was irritated at the balancing act he was being forced to perform."¹¹⁰

The two delegations met again the following morning.¹¹¹ On this occasion, the two leaders and the Israeli Foreign Minister also participated, the latter opening the discussion with the question of relations between the European Community and Israel. Brandt attempted once again to soothe Eban's worries that a common European stance on the Middle East would lead to a policy biased against Israel. The Chancellor favored an increased cooperation in foreign policy questions among the EC member states as part of the gradual development of a political union. However, as Eban reported to the Israeli Cabinet on June 10th, 1973, Brandt rejected the idea of an EC-led initiative for the Middle East, and claimed to have thwarted attempts aimed at such a goal.¹¹² With regard to economic cooperation, the Chancellor promised to continue to exert his influence within the EC to

¹⁰⁹ See the Israeli memorandum "on the talk between Meir and Brandt on June 7th, 1973" (Note 105).

¹¹⁰ Bruhns 2012, pp. 102–104.

¹¹¹ See AAPD 1973, pp. 960–965.

¹¹² The portions of the minutes relating to the Israeli Cabinet discussion of the Chancellor's visit are available at <http://www.archives.gov.il/archives/#/Archive/0b0717068031be30/File/0b0717068212cdf3/Item/0907170682de0943>.

ensure that its further expansion would have no negative repercussions for Israel, and to secure a mandate to negotiate a Mediterranean free trade zone desired by Israel. He also hinted at an attempt to dispel Italian objections to Israeli agricultural exports by means of compensatory payments to the Italians.¹¹³ Abba Eban thanked him for Germany's willingness to lend its support.

Significant differences of opinion arose, however, on the question of the role to be played by the United Nations in the Arab-Israeli conflict. While Meir and Eban insistently pointed to the anti-Israeli majority among the members of the General Assembly, Brandt nonetheless considered the aegis of the UN "especially suited to the initiation of measures aimed at achieving peace. In this way, perhaps the parties to the conflict could engage in an initial dialog, which could later blossom into direct negotiations."¹¹⁴ At the same time, the Chancellor signaled sympathy for the Israeli desire for direct talks, agreeing that, in the final analysis, that method would be best.¹¹⁵ But he considered the involvement of the United States and the Soviet Union helpful in inducing such a process of negotiation, and thus urged that the Jarring Mission be resurrected and reinforced with an advisory group with representatives of the two superpowers or additional countries.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ See *ibid.*, as well as the "Summary of the Brandt Visit" (Note 103). In a conversation with Finance Minister Sapir, Brandt repeated on June 10th, 1973, his promise to work within the EC toward a mandate for negotiations with Israel, and to participate in providing financial compensation for Italy. The Chancellor also promised to address the matter in his talks with French President Pompidou in June. Brandt also discussed with Sapir the question of individual compensation payments for survivors of the Holocaust. Brandt pointed out the legal difficulties involved and the restrictive German position on reparation claims from Eastern Europe. However, he held out the prospect of modifying the law to assist hardship cases among those Jews who had emigrated to Israel from the Soviet Union after 1965 and were thus not entitled to make claims according to the treaty then in effect. See the Israeli memorandum on the talk between Sapir and Brandt of June 10th, 1973, at <http://www.archives.gov.il/archives/#/Archive/0b0717068001c167/File/0b07170684cd4bda/Item/0907170684f2f777>. See also AAPD 1973, pp. 984–986.

¹¹⁴ AAPD 1973, pp. 962–963.

¹¹⁵ See "Summary of the Brandt Visit" (Note 103).

¹¹⁶ See AAPD 1973, pp. 962–963; see also Harpprecht 2000, pp. 190–191. According to the latter, Brandt brought up the "Four minus" idea, referring to negotiations between the United States, the Soviet Union, Israel, and the Arabs, but not including Great

The Israeli government firmly rejected this proposal. Prime Minister Meir worried that, if the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. got together, proposals might result which threatened Israel's vital interests: she was adamant that Israel would not cede to others the power to make decisions concerning its very existence. In addition, Abba Eban stressed Israel's powerful distrust of international guarantees, which, he said, had been in place in 1967, but had not been upheld by the United States, France, and Britain.¹¹⁷ When the chips were down, Israel stood alone, in the summary of Prime Minister Meir.¹¹⁸

Brandt then pointed out that the oil question would affect developments, and that the Middle East needed an "organized peace" settling more than simply negotiated borders. Was the pessimism that no Arab leader would be willing to allow Israel a place in the region really necessary?, he asked. Meir responded with unmistakable stridency that the Arab countries still harbored a desire to destroy Israel. Nonetheless, her country was ready to sign a peace agreement with Egypt, even if Israel did not believe that Sadat had fundamentally accepted the existence of the Jewish state. "However, Israel will only consider a peace agreement that respects all Israeli security concerns", Meir stressed.¹¹⁹ Confronted with this rigid stance, the Chancellor was silent, and simply gazed off into the distance.¹²⁰ The discussion was brought to a close, and ended appropriately with a sentence from the Prime Minister exemplifying precisely what perturbed Brandt about her: "It may sound presumptuous when a small country like Israel believes that it is always in the right, but that is actually the case."¹²¹

An Israeli Peace Initiative?

Britain or France.

¹¹⁷ AAPD 1973, p. 963.

¹¹⁸ See Harpprecht 2000, pp. 191–192.

¹¹⁹ AAPD 1973, p. 964.

¹²⁰ Klaus Harpprecht, who followed Meir's words with great empathy, found the situation uncomfortable, and could not understand why Brandt said nothing more. See Harpprecht 2000, p.193.

¹²¹ AAPD 1973, p. 965.

After the press conference and lunch at Abba Eban's residence, Willy Brandt could afford to relax a bit on the afternoon of June 8th. He visited Kibbutz Ginosar on the shore of the Sea of Galilee and gained an impression of life in the community. The Chancellor also spoke in passing with Deputy Prime Minister Yigal Allon, who immediately reported the gist of the conversation to Permanent Secretary Gazit by telephone.¹²²

According to Allon, Brandt informed him that he and Scheel were convinced that Sadat was searching for a path to a political solution and a peace settlement. The Egyptians were open to suggestions with regard to substantial security arrangements, as long as Egypt's sovereignty over the Sinai was respected. They were prepared to take significant steps on this subject, the Chancellor reported, who based his views on the statements of his Foreign Minister. It was a matter of dealing with regional problems and security arrangements without advance determination of borders. Brandt announced to Allon his intention to discuss this point with Prime Minister Meir. As the Israeli record also has it, Brandt further told Allon that, from his impression after his talks with Meir, Israel yearned for peace, but mistrusted the intentions of the Egyptians and other Arabs. This lack of trust was understandable, but ways to overcome it had to be found. The energy question was much more serious than Israel realized, and the Arab states would increase in economic and military power, Brandt warned. Allon responded that Israel's need for secure and defensible borders was thus all the more understandable.¹²³

¹²² Gazit summarized Allon's telephonic report in a letter dated June 10th, 1973, that he sent to Meir, Allon, Eban, Meroz, and Ben-Horin. See <http://www.archives.gov.il/archives/#/Archive/0b0717068001c167/File/0b07170684cd4bda/Item/0907170684f9cb51>. Wolffsohn erroneously has the private conversation between Brandt and Allon, which took place on June 8th, 1973, as occurring on June 10th, 1973 (Note 1). This mistake leads him to the incorrect conclusion that the second conversation between Brandt and Meir, which occurred on the evening of June 9th, 1973, took place prior to the discussion with Allon. The question of whether Brandt had "misheard, forgotten, or intentionally not mentioned" that which had been said by Prime Minister Meir "the day before," or whether he had been "lacking in concentration" or "thinking of something else," is thus entirely unfounded. This applies also to the polemical assessment that Brandt had seemed "strangely out of touch with reality" and "embarrassingly absent-minded" when speaking to Allon.

¹²³ See <http://www.archives.gov.il/archives/#/Archive/0b0717068001c167/File/0b071706>

The agenda for the second private meeting between the Chancellor and the Prime Minister, which took place the next day, was thus preordained, and revolved entirely about the problems of the Middle East. Unfortunately, no transcript or detailed record of the conversation appears to exist. Other than the previously mentioned notes handwritten by Brandt, in which he summarized his two meetings with Meir in bullet point form,¹²⁴ only a brief Israeli memorandum of the discussion on the evening of June 9th, 1973, has survived. It consists of a mere ten paragraphs, and records almost exclusively comments made by Prime Minister Meir. According to this document, Meir made clear that no one could be permitted to encourage the Arabs in their refusal to negotiate with Israel. Anyone giving them the illusion that a solution could be imposed by external forces would only complicate or prevent a peaceful rapprochement between the parties to the conflict. The memorandum also noted: "The Prime Minister opined to Brandt that he could tell Sadat that he, Brandt, was convinced that we really do want peace, for we do not want all of the Sinai, nor half of the Sinai, nor a majority of the Sinai." Furthermore "Brandt can explain to Sadat that we do not expect him to officially take up negotiations with us, and that we are ready to start secret talks, etc."¹²⁵ In his notes, Brandt wrote:

"We can let Cairo know:

- there is willingness to talk
- when, who, where ?"¹²⁶

Did Meir's statements constitute an Israeli "peace initiative", even one offering "land for peace", as Wolffsohn and Tsoref maintain? A closer examination of the available sources raises considerable doubt regarding

84cd4bda/Item/0907170684f9cb51.

¹²⁴ See Note 106.

¹²⁵ See the Israeli memorandum on the talk between Meir and Brandt on the evening of June 9th, 1973, at <http://www.archives.gov.il/archives/#/Archive/0b0717068001c167/File/0b07170684cd4bda/Item/0907170684f2f776>.

¹²⁶ See Note 106. In his book "Begegnungen und Einsichten," Brandt wrote: "Furthermore, we could let Cairo know – which I passed on – that Israel was ready for talks; all that needed to be specified was when, where, and who?" Brandt 1976, p. 595.

this thesis. The context in which the Prime Minister broached her idea favor a different interpretation.

It seems that – as previously announced to Yigal Allon – Willy Brandt returned during his second private meeting with Golda Meir to the impressions gleaned by the German Foreign Minister during his trip to Cairo, for the next day, June 10th, Meir recounted to her Cabinet at length Brandt's statements that Scheel was convinced "that Sadat wants to arrive at some sort of peace settlement without going to war". She answered her guest: "Certainly, we have no problem with that. (...) If that's the impression Mr. Scheel has of Sadat, then he should go back to Sadat and tell him that Israel is ready to meet, even if he is only one of many involving themselves in this matter and suggesting something other than a direct meeting."¹²⁷

"He" was apparently a reference to Brandt himself, as Meir had described her previous day's tête-à-tête with the Chancellor to Defense Minister Moshe Dayan immediately prior to the Cabinet meeting as follows: "I told him, summon Ismail to see you and tell him to talk to us." The point was, as she explained to Dayan, that Brandt should not form the impression that Israel was not willing to make peace.¹²⁸ The Prime Minister had made publicly clear how important she considered this message in her speech on the occasion of the dinner hosted by Chancellor Brandt at the King David Hotel on June 9th, 1973: "Indeed, we are ready to reach a compromise with anyone and about anything, with the single exception of our existence and our right to live in this nation and in this territory."¹²⁹

Addressing her ministers, Meir praised the German leader's courage in speaking of the past in Israel. She regretted, however, that less harmony reigned between them regarding the future. Looking back, Brandt assessed their personal conversations similarly: "I had the feeling that we were very

¹²⁷ See the excerpts from the minutes of the Israeli Cabinet discussion of June 10th, 1973, at <http://www.archives.gov.il/archives/#/Archive/0b0717068031be30/File/0b0717068212cdf3/Item/0907170682de0943> (see Note 112).

¹²⁸ See the minutes of the talk between Meir and Dayan of June 10th, 1973, at <http://www.archives.gov.il/archives/#/Archive/0b0717068001c167/File/0b07170684cd4bda/Item/0907170684cd6a33>.

¹²⁹ AdG 43 (1973), p. 17999.

close to one another, and emotionally that's probably correct. In our assessment of the situation and of the danger, though, we were quite some distance apart."¹³⁰

From Meir's presentation to her Cabinet, it is clear that her "request" of Brandt was not primarily an Israeli peace initiative, but a defiant Israeli response to the belief repeatedly expressed by the Germans that Egypt was willing to engage in talks and that, with international support, negotiations could possibly go forward if Israel were willing to soften its stance. The Prime Minister turned the tables: she stressed Israel's readiness to negotiate and invited the German Chancellor to let Cairo know exactly that, and thus put to the test the Egyptians' willingness to speak directly with Israel – and direct talks were the only ones she would consider. Meir reported to the members of her government that she made this clear to Brandt in the plainest language possible: if Sadat wanted peace, the Egyptian President should talk to Israel, even if secretly. On the other hand, if Brandt or the European Community gave Sadat a means for avoiding direct negotiations, this would only delay peace. Her German visitor agreed with her assessment, she added.¹³¹

Meir asked the Chancellor to transmit a message to Egypt. This did not constitute – and the distinction is an important one – active mediation between the two sides, which Brandt continued to reject. In any case, the Israeli Prime Minister placed little faith in the diplomatic efforts of third parties. When her guest told her of Tito's warnings of the increasing military strength of the Arabs and mentioned Yugoslavia's efforts at mediation and his concern for Israel, Meir grew sarcastic. To her Cabinet, she described her reaction to Brandt's words as follows: "Tito! Wonderful, but Tito hasn't spoken to a single Israeli since 1967. So then he named a Jew with whom Tito has spoken. I said to him: with all respect to this man, he may have every sterling quality in the world, but he has a single drawback: he does

¹³⁰ Brandt 1989, p. 447.

¹³¹ See the excerpts from the minutes of the Israeli Cabinet discussion of June 10th, 1973, at <http://www.archives.gov.il/archives/#/Archive/0b0717068031be30/File/0b0717068212cdf3/Item/0907170682de0943> (see Note 112).

not speak in the name of Israel. To this day, Tito has talked to no one who can claim to speak on behalf of Israel.”¹³² From Brandt’s notes, it appears that the reference in question was to Nahum Goldmann.

On this occasion, the Chancellor also learned that Cairo had not responded to previous Israeli attempts to establish contact using intermediaries such as the Romanian President and Communist Party General Secretary, Nicolae Ceausescu.¹³³ There was little reason to hope that a further attempt would have a different outcome. A comment by Abba Eban, who gave the Israeli Cabinet a detailed account of Brandt’s visit on June 24th, 1973, is further evidence that Israel’s objective was simply to shift the finger of blame to Egypt: “He [Brandt] says: why can’t you just come to an agreement with them now? As though we have some possibility of coming to an agreement with them now, and we’re the ones putting off an agreement because we supposedly have better options.”¹³⁴

While it would be possible to interpret Meir’s insistence that “we do not want all of the Sinai, nor half of the Sinai, nor a majority of the Sinai” as an offer of “land for peace”, Israel’s readiness – in this case, devoid of specifics – to give up some of the territories it had conquered was by no means new. As demonstrated above, the Prime Minister had already set out that Israel would have to retain Sharm el-Sheikh, and desired to renegotiate the course of the border near Eilat. Her position remained unchanged in 1973. Israel demanded “only” a small portion of the total area of the Sinai Peninsula. Her comments to Brandt thus merely reiterated the position repeatedly declared by Israel, of which the stipulation of direct negotiations was a part.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ See Note 106. In his book “Begegnungen und Einsichten,” Brandt wrote: “Golda Meir told me of her visit to Bucharest in 1972. Ceausescu had made an official visit to Egypt, after which he sent his Deputy Foreign Minister to Israel. Sadat had proclaimed himself willing to speak with a representative of Israel, perhaps even with the Prime Minister, but nothing further came of it.” Brandt 1976, p. 590. Meir’s visit took place in early May, 1972.

¹³⁴ See excerpts from the minutes of the Israeli Cabinet meeting of June 24th, 1973, at <http://www.archives.gov.il/archives/#/Archive/0b0717068031be30/File/0b0717068212cd f3/Item/0907170682de0944>.

Essentially, the Prime Minister laid a diplomatic smokescreen intended to deflect charges of Israeli intransigence in the face of an offer put forward in late February, 1973 by Hafez Ismail, the advisor to Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, during a secret meeting in the United States with Henry Kissinger.¹³⁵ The content of Sadat's proposal was for a multi-stage resolution of the conflict between Egypt and Israel as well as a general peace settlement involving all the countries in the region. At the core of this initiative was the same formula of "sovereignty for security" mentioned by Willy Brandt during his first meeting with Golda Meir on June 7th, 1973.

In repeated talks with Kissinger, Ismail had suggested the linkage of these two principles: "the sovereignty of Egypt related to the security of Israel". In return for an Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai, with Israeli security interests being taken into account, Egypt was ready to acknowledge the existence and the territorial integrity of Israel and end the state of war still in effect between the two countries. In principle, Ismail accepted the demilitarization of portions of the Sinai – Kissinger mentioned the region to the east of the passes of Gidi and Mitla – and had shown himself open to the stationing of international peacekeeping forces at one or two strategic points. Furthermore, Egypt would agree to crack down on guerrilla attacks against Israel originating from Egyptian soil and end the trade embargo against the Jewish state. The crucial stipulation for the Egyptians, though, was that Israel acknowledge Egyptian sovereignty over the whole of Sinai and agree to retreat to the borders of 1967. Cairo was pushing for an agreement mandating a complete Israeli withdrawal from the peninsula by the end of 1973.¹³⁶

The American and Israeli reaction to Sadat's initiative had been disenchanting, however, and indeed completely disappointing for the Egyptians. Kissinger, who informed the Israelis at once of Sadat's proposal,

¹³⁵ These talks are documented in: *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) 1969–1976*, Vol. XXV: Arab-Israeli Crisis and War, 1973, Washington D.C. 2011, pp. 80–84.

¹³⁶ See Uri Bar-Joseph: *Last Chance to Avoid War: Sadat's Peace Initiative of February 1973 and its Failure*, in: *Journal of Contemporary History* 41 (2006), 3, pp. 545–556 (pp. 547–548).

described it as insufficient as a basis for talks. He also wanted to avoid negotiations before the Israeli general election scheduled for late October of 1973, and thus stalled for time with Sadat and Ismail. Visiting Washington in early March of that year, the only modicum of flexibility shown by Golda Meir in her discussions with the Americans concerned piddling details of a potential interim agreement with Egypt on the withdrawal of troops from the Canal Zone. Her primary objective in Washington was to secure deliveries of aircraft from the United States.¹³⁷

The Israeli Prime Minister did not even bother to inform most of her Cabinet of the Egyptian proposal. Even after receiving intelligence reports in mid-April 1973 suggesting that Egypt had made the decision to go to war with Israel once again, Meir and her closest advisors were still unwilling to reach out to Sadat. Yisrael Galili, Minister without Portfolio, identified the crux of the Egyptian offer: “(T)he starting point is that they are ready for peace and a system of agreements and international guarantees etc. – all these on condition that we fully return to the former border.”¹³⁸ However, a return to the borders of 1967, and therefore the complete return of the Sinai, was completely out of the question for Meir and Defense Minister Dayan. They were unwilling to pay such a price for peace, and instead played for time. The possibility that war might ensue was recognized; Israel did not want war, but the army was instructed to redouble its preparations for battle. Otherwise, Israel waited, confident in its own strength and its feeling of military superiority.¹³⁹ And indeed, nothing happened – for the time being. The warning of an Egyptian attack in May of 1973 was a false alarm.

Meir’s promise to Brandt that Israel had no intention of keeping “all of the Sinai, nor half of the Sinai, nor a majority of the Sinai” was

¹³⁷ See FRUS 1969–1976, pp. 99–116.

¹³⁸ Cited in: Bar-Joseph 2006, p. 553.

¹³⁹ See *ibid.*, pp. 552–556. The same conclusions are reached by Yigal Kipnis in his book published in Hebrew in 2012, the title of which reads in translation “1973: The Road to War”. See the review by Raphael Cohen-Almagor in: *Israel Affairs* 19 (2013), 3, pp. 580–582.

unquestionably not meant as a concession to Egypt. Rather, it was the familiar – and, for the Egyptians, absolutely unacceptable – Israeli demand for border changes. Speaking with the Chancellor, the Prime Minister left him in no doubt of her fundamental position: for Israel, there could be no withdrawal to the borders with Jordan, Syria, and Egypt in place prior to the 4th of June, 1967. While Israel would not insist that the cease-fire demarcation line in existence since the end of the Six-Day War be made permanent, its future borders would have to lie between the old lines and the new. The precise course of those borders was a matter which Israel was willing to negotiate.¹⁴⁰

This message was so important to Meir that she requested Defense Minister Dayan on June 10th, 1973 to add his efforts in conveying to Brandt Israel's position on the topic of borders. The Prime Minister further told Dayan that the Chancellor did not question Israel's determination to refuse to return to the former borders, and that he shared the Israeli interpretation of UN Resolution 242.¹⁴¹ "He in no way criticized the Israeli position, and made no suggestions for a solution of his own. He merely emphasized that time was not working in our favor", as Foreign Minister Eban summarized Brandt's position on the border question before the Israeli Cabinet.¹⁴² On this topic, then, the German Chancellor held a distinctly pro-Israeli position, while his British colleague Edward Heath for example opined in a letter to President Nixon on June 14th, 1973, that the best hope for progress toward an agreement would be an unequivocal Israeli declaration that the border between Israel and Egypt was the old border of Mandatory Palestine.¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ See the Israeli memorandum on the talk between Meir and Brandt on the evening of June 9th, 1973, at <http://www.archives.gov.il/archives/#/Archive/Ob0717068001c167/File/Ob07170684cd4bda/Item/0907170684f2f776>.

¹⁴¹ See the minutes of the talk between Meir and Dayan of June 10th, 1973, at <http://www.archives.gov.il/archives/#/Archive/Ob0717068001c167/File/Ob07170684cd4bda/Item/0907170684cd6a33>.

¹⁴² See the excerpts from the minutes of the Israeli Cabinet meeting of June 24th, 1973, at <http://www.archives.gov.il/archives/#/Archive/Ob0717068031be30/File/Ob0717068212cdf3/Item/0907170682de0944>.

¹⁴³ Cited in: FRUS 1969–1976, p. 242, Note 10.

Dayan, who met with the visitor from Germany shortly before his departure on June 11th, 1973, broached the matter of the border only indirectly. Despite his reputation as a hawk, he was in favor of compromise, the Defense Minister told Brandt. Dayan was “willing to swap military lines for much less advantageous political lines. He was ready to exchange military security for political security”. This statement sounded even more conciliatory than Meir’s, and seems to have made a considerable impression on Brandt.¹⁴⁴ In the final analysis, though, Dayan’s position was the same as that of his Prime Minister: returning the whole of the Sinai to Egypt was out of the question.

As no convergence between the Israelis and Arabs regarding the border issue was likely in the immediate future, and Brandt asked him for other ways to reconcile Israel’s demand for direct negotiations with the interests of the superpowers, Dayan suggested another “point worthy of being addressed: the permanent resettlement of refugees”. The Palestinian question – a taboo formulation in Israeli eyes, since Golda Meir had denied in April 1973 the very existence of a Palestinian people – should, in Dayan’s opinion, be resolved by settling and integrating the Palestinian refugees in those countries to which they had fled in 1948. Jordan was already doing this, Dayan claimed. He emphasized that the refugee problem could be addressed without waiting for the border dispute to be resolved, though he expected the resettlement process to take a decade. Brandt found these remarks interesting, not least because the West German experience with Ostpolitik had led him to believe it possible “to put off the most difficult questions and deal with other problems in the interim”. The Chancellor even declared the Federal Republic’s willingness to contribute funds for the reintegration of refugees, in company with other donors.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ See AAPD 1973, p. 1032, and see Brandt 1976, p. 596.

¹⁴⁵ See the transcript of the most significant contents of the talk between Dayan and Brandt at <http://www.archives.gov.il/archives/#!/Archive/0b0717068001c167/File/0b07170684cd4bda/Item/0907170684f9cb50>. The memorandum was composed by Ambassador Ben-Horin on June 12, 1973.

To understand why Dayan's plan received such a sympathetic hearing from Brandt, it is necessary to realize that the Israeli Defense Minister's reference to Jordan as a model for dealing with the refugees corresponded with a disclosure Meir had made in confidence to her German guest: the Prime Minister had established secret lines of communication with King Hussein of Jordan.¹⁴⁶ That Brandt had been informed was highly unusual, in fact extraordinary, as this constituted a state secret of the highest order. Meir clearly wished to prove to her guest that Jerusalem did not merely speak of direct talks with its Arab neighbors, but actually engaged in them when the opportunity arose.

The importance the Israeli government placed on convincing Willy Brandt of its genuine desire to peace is indicated by a request made of Klaus Harpprecht by Permanent Secretary Mordechai Gazit on the evening of June 10th, 1973. Gazit noted what he considered "a certain noncommittal quality in the speeches and statements of the Chancellor", and reminded Harpprecht that "even Nixon clearly recognized Israel's willingness to make peace". The Prime Minister's confidant also remained unhappy with the German formulation of "normal relations with a special character" when Golda Meir herself spoke of "friendship". Gazit then desired that the Chancellor "on some occasion" suggest to Prime Minister Meir that he "would welcome a direct correspondence with her", without the involvement of the Foreign Ministry.¹⁴⁷

Shortly before his departure, Brandt acceded to the Israeli request. On the way to the airport, he asked his Israel colleague "how he should best

¹⁴⁶ The Israeli memorandum on the second private meeting on June 9th, 1973 (Note 125) states: "The Prime Minister told Brandt of the special relationship with the neighbor. She reported to him that ... [omission in source text] and that excellent relations existed between us." From Brandt's handwritten notes (see Note 106), the "neighbor" and the omission can be clearly identified:

"Inform[ation] concerning]: Hussein „ – contacts
Iran – „

See the facsimile and the English text of the notes included in the Annex of this issue. According to these, Meir also told Brandt of the relations between Israel and Shah Reza Pahlavi of Iran. In his book "Begegnungen und Einsichten", Brandt wrote: "There was presumably also direct contact between the Israeli government and King Hussein." Brandt 1976, p. 595.

¹⁴⁷ Harpprecht 2000, p. 203.

proceed if he had something sensitive to tell her, and whether there was some way of bringing things to her notice directly without going through the bureaucracy". Meir responded by telling Brandt that everything said directly to the Ambassador in Bonn "reached her and only her, and the same was true in the reverse case".¹⁴⁸ During the farewell ceremony on the runway, the Chancellor slipped into his brief speech the sentence his host particularly yearned to hear: "I have heard and I have seen that Israel wants peace." To the hope expressed by Golda Meir in her speech that West Germany would pursue "a policy of lasting friendship toward Israel", Brandt answered that it need no longer be taken as a misunderstanding "when one speaks even of friendship in the relations between our two countries, as you have just done".¹⁴⁹

Willy Brandt was distinctly satisfied with the course and the results of his visit. The trip was perhaps the most difficult he had made as Chancellor, he confided to French President Pompidou a few days later. "However, the responsible parties in Israel made his task infinitely simple, for which he was very thankful."¹⁵⁰ As Klaus Harpprecht told the Israeli Ambassador in Bonn, Brandt had returned with a feeling of much greater intimacy with Golda Meir than previously. He was greatly impressed by her personality, Ben-Horin reported to the Foreign Ministry in Jerusalem, as he also was by Abba Eban. The visit had deepened Brandt's understanding of the problems faced by Israel, even if the Chancellor did not identify with every position taken by Israel, as the Ambassador correctly surmised. For example, due to his experience in Europe, he held the view that additional parties should be involved in a Middle Eastern peace, and not only the states directly affected.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁸ See the Israeli memorandum "Brandt Visit – Various Items" at <http://www.archives.gov.il/archives/#/Archive/0b0717068001c167/File/0b07170684cd4bda/Item/0907170684f2f778>.

¹⁴⁹ AdG 43 (1973), p. 17999.

¹⁵⁰ AAPD 1973, pp. 1032–1033.

¹⁵¹ See the telegram from Ben-Horin to the Israeli Foreign Ministry of June 22nd, 1973, at <http://www.archives.gov.il/archives/#/Archive/0b0717068001c167/File/0b07170684cd4bda/Item/0907170684f37fb6>. Ben-Horin met with Harpprecht on June 20th, 1973. On this meeting, see Harpprecht's "Notiz für BK" of June 21st, 1973, in: AdsD, WBA, A 8,

On June 18th, 1973, Brandt delivered before the Bundestag an official account of his voyage. He regarded the trip as one of the “critical experiences” of his political career, and thanked Prime Minister Meir and Foreign Minister Eban for his time in Israel. His friendly reception demonstrated Israeli “trust in the democratic character of a renewed Germany”. At the same time, it was clear that both peoples would have to live with the shadows of the past, and that their relationship could not exist in a historical vacuum. Given the historical background, the Prime Minister’s offer extending the friendship of Israel to the German people represented an “act of spiritual and moral drama”, Brandt emphasized. He again explicitly noted Israel’s desire for peace and its openness to compromise; that the country yearned for peace had been impressed upon him “with great urgency”. Acting on its balanced Middle Eastern policy, the West German government was prepared to do its part in contributing to the establishment of peace between Israel and its Arab neighbors. Brandt reiterated that Bonn could not take on the function of a mediator.¹⁵² However, he had suggested immediately after landing at Cologne/Bonn Airport on June 11th, 1973, that “we could perhaps help with the transmission of information and the methods of building peace. That would be something, and we would not overstep the boundaries of our political and moral responsibilities.”¹⁵³

Communication of Israel’s Willingness to Engage in Direct Talks with Egypt

Willy Brandt wasted no time in informing Germany’s most important international partners of the impressions he had formed in Israel. On June 13th, 1973, he sent nearly identical letters to U.S. President Richard Nixon and Soviet General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev, who were due to meet

10. See also Harpprecht 2000, p.228.

¹⁵² Berlin Edition, Vol. 6, No. 76, pp. 484–485. Brandt’s statements in the Bundestag were carefully noted in Jerusalem. See the excerpts of the minutes of the Israeli Cabinet meeting of June 24th, 1973, at <http://www.archives.gov.il/archives/Archive/0b0717068031be30/File/0b0717068212cdf3/Item/0907170682de0944>.

¹⁵³ AdG 43 (1973), p. 17999.

shortly.¹⁵⁴ The German Chancellor wrote: “I am encouraged by the numerous and earnest professions of Israel’s desire for peace. The responsible parties in Israel continue to firmly support direct negotiations with their Arab neighbors.” He had indicated to his hosts that the opening of a dialog could be eased by other countries – in particular, the United States and the Soviet Union – and hoped that his hints would meet with a positive response in Israel. This, however, turned out to be wishful thinking, as was the prospect of peace Brandt thought within reach. He thought it significant that his Israeli interlocutors, including in particular Golda Meir, had spoken in favor of an Israeli participation in a regional economic framework for the Middle East in the event of peace. The Chancellor regarded that as an “expression of willingness, critical for future progress, to be integrated as a part of the Middle East”.

Though the road might be a long one, Brandt saw cooperation between Israel and the Arab states as representing the only chance of reaching a peace settlement. He also remembered in this context the statement of President Sadat that “one should put aside the territorial questions for the moment and first determine more generally a vision for the future of the region in the coming decades”.¹⁵⁵ Brandt also continued to place his faith in the influence of the superpowers, to whom he appealed at the close of his letter: it would be very helpful for future progress if they could “work toward the initiation of a process of negotiation in the very near future”.¹⁵⁶

Brandt gave President Pompidou a confidential verbal account of his visit on June 21st, 1973: he had been “surprised how strong a will existed in

¹⁵⁴ Additional, almost identical letters were also sent to British Prime Minister Heath and Yugoslav President Tito. See AdsD, WBA, A 8, 52, 55, and 58.

¹⁵⁵ It was apparently Brandt who made Golda Meir aware of this comment by Sadat, for reference to it is made in a handwritten note prepared by the Chancellor for his meetings with the Prime Minister and summarizing the positions of the international actors regarding the Middle Eastern conflict in a single page of bullet points. For “Cairo,” he had written: “Verhandeln (sprechen) unter Beiseite lassen der territ[orialen] Probleme.” [“Negotiating (talking) while avoiding for the present the territorial problems.”] See “7-6-73 Jerusalem” in: AdsD, WBA, A 8, 94. Regarding this document, see also Brandt 1976, p. 595.

¹⁵⁶ See Brandt’s letter to Nixon of June 13th, 1973, in: Berlin Edition, Vol. 6, No. 75, pp. 482–483.

Israel – not only in Golda Meir – to reach a settlement if at all possible. Mrs. Meir had said to him semi-publicly that Israel was ready to compromise”. Brandt had rejected the idea suggested to him of serving as an “intermediary”, but “declared his willingness to transmit the views of the parties to one another. Mrs. Meir said that she did not know whether such actions would have much of a response. (...) He [Brandt] himself was not overly optimistic on the subject.”¹⁵⁷

Despite these muted expectations, Brandt promptly complied with the Israeli Prime Minister’s request to convey to the government in Cairo Israel’s readiness to undertake direct talks. On the very evening of his return to Germany, he invited Foreign Minister Scheel for a discussion at his home in Bonn.¹⁵⁸ Four days later, on June 15th, 1973, Permanent Secretary Paul Frank instructed the German Ambassador to Egypt, Hans-Georg Steltzer, to propose to Hafez Ismail, President Sadat’s advisor on national security matters, a meeting with Frank in Switzerland for the purpose of informing him of the results of the Chancellor’s trip to Israel. The meeting was planned to be held at Frank’s vacation home. On June 18th, Steltzer reported that Ismail was willing in principle to meet in early July, but had reservations about Switzerland as a location, as he worried that his arrival in the country would not go unnoticed. Discretion would be more easily maintained were they to meet in West Germany or in Egypt. In Steltzer’s opinion, it was important to Ismail that third parties not get wind of the matter, thus the Ambassador internally suggested that the talks be held in Egypt. This would be most conducive to maintaining secrecy, “as Ismail rarely leaves the country, and then only on missions of the highest political significance. A foreign trip at this juncture, which would hardly escape notice, would immediately give rise to wide-ranging speculation”, Steltzer wrote to his superiors at the Foreign Ministry.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ AAPD 1973, p. 1033.

¹⁵⁸ See Harpprecht 2000, p. 211.

¹⁵⁹ AAPD 1973, p. 1098, Note 2.

With this knowledge, Wolffsohn's allegation that Brandt transformed the "peace initiative" put forward as a "top priority" by Meir into a "noncommittal procedure of civil servants and public agencies" cannot hold.¹⁶⁰ A meeting between the German Chancellor and the Egyptian presidential advisor, which protocol would have required be held in Bonn, was as much out of the question as a trip to Cairo by the German Foreign Minister. Both would have been even more impossible to keep under wraps than a meeting between Frank and Ismail, which the Egyptians already feared might be difficult to keep out of the public eye. In the final analysis, Cairo was the only feasible option for a meeting. However, the Permanent Secretary was unable to attend, as his doctors advised him not to interrupt the vacation which they had prescribed him. Not wishing to waste a moment's time, the director of the Political Section in the Foreign Ministry, Undersecretary Lothar Lahn, stood in for Frank; he had also served as part of the German delegation during Brandt's visit to Israel. A very experienced diplomat, Lahn was quite familiar with the situation in Egypt from his time as Chief of Mission ("Dienststellenleiter") in Cairo from 1966 through 1969. The claim that he was lacking in knowledge of the region is therefore as baseless as it is inaccurate.¹⁶¹

On June 28th, 1973, Willy Brandt informed Golda Meir in a letter that "a communication to a high-ranking personality in Cairo" was intended to be transmitted "in the near future".¹⁶² Brandt referred here to the mission on which Undersecretary Lahn was dispatched the following day. The Chancellor also reported to the Israeli Prime Minister that he had been able

¹⁶⁰ Note 1.

¹⁶¹ This is Wolffsohn's assertion (Note 1).

¹⁶² See the German original and the attached English translation of Brandt's letter to Meir of June 28th, 1973, at <http://www.archives.gov.il/archives/#/Archive/0b0717068001c167/File/0b07170684cd4bda/Item/0907170684f37fb8> (see also the English translation of the letter in the Annex of this issue). Wolffsohn cites this letter incorrectly. In the "WamS" article (Note 1), it is stated that Brandt informed Meir that "'in naher Zukunft' werde eine 'hochstehende Persönlichkeit in Kairo eine Mitteilung übergeben'" ["a highly placed person in Cairo will transmit a message in the near future"]. The German letter was not used as the source for this statement; instead, it appears that the attached English translation of Brandt's letter was erroneously translated back into German.

on his return, as he had already hinted, “to convey to both President Nixon and Secretary General Brezhnev as well as some other friendly Statesman [sic] my favourable impressions of your Government's will for peace”, and mentioned his conversation with President Pompidou. Brandt also had glad tidings of the meeting of the European Council in Luxembourg: the European Commission had been granted a mandate to promptly start negotiations on a new treaty with Israel as part of a comprehensive concept for the Mediterranean region – at German insistence, as he made clear. The Chancellor additionally mentioned that he had also been able “to take up, from humanitarian points of view, the problem of Jewish inhabitants of neighbouring Arab States with which I was approached during my visit”. This was presumably a reference to the emigration of Syrian Jews, who had been subjected to increased persecution by the regime of Hafiz el-Assad since the beginning of the 1970s.¹⁶³

Did Brandt inform the superpowers of Israel's readiness to make peace against the will of the Israel government? Was this “sabotage, thoughtlessness, carelessness, incompetence, even idiocy”? Did Brandt thus “objectively deceive” the Israel government?¹⁶⁴ Such an assessment, which clearly attempts to create the impression that Chancellor Brandt was duplicitous and a dilettante, could not be more absurd, as shown not least by the Israeli responses. Prime Minister Meir expressly thanked Brandt for bringing Israel's desire for peace to international attention.¹⁶⁵ As early as the Cabinet meeting of June 24th, 1973, Foreign Minister Eban reported that Brandt, as the Chancellor had said shortly earlier in conversation with a delegation from the Israeli Labor Party in Berlin, had been “so enthusiastic”

¹⁶³ At the request of the Israeli government, Spain, despite having no diplomatic relations with Israel, had previously exerted its efforts to aid those persecuted in Syria as well as Jews imprisoned in Iraq. The Spanish efforts, which ended in February of 1973, were in some cases successful. Thanks are due to my colleague Dr. Bernd Rother for this information.

¹⁶⁴ Wolffsohn reaches this verdict in his “WamS” article (Note 1).

¹⁶⁵ See Meir's letter to Brandt of July 29th, 1973 (“Confidential”), in: AdsD, WBA, A 9, 22. A copy is published at <http://www.archives.gov.il/archives/#/Archive/0b0717068001c167/File/0b07170684cd4bda/Item/0907170684f37dde>. The letter is also included in the Annex of this issue.

after his visit “that he had even written to Brezhnev and Nixon to let them know that Israel was striving for peace”. This action should not be underestimated, Eban stressed, “for this man has an extraordinary personal characteristic. He is considered an expert in matters of peace, indeed, a professor in the department of readiness for peace”.¹⁶⁶

However, as Undersecretary Lahn’s talks in Cairo were to show, the Egyptian leadership was utterly unimpressed with Brandt’s seal of approval regarding Israel’s desire to make peace. The German emissary joined Ambassador Steltzer on June 30th, 1973, for an exchange of views with Hafez Ismail.¹⁶⁷ During the meeting, Lahn mentioned that “Prime Minister Golda Meir asked the German Chancellor to inform the Egyptian government of Israel’s readiness for talks and personal contacts, regardless of where they might take place. (...) Golda Meir also underscored her willingness to compromise, and expressed her conviction that a solution to the Middle Eastern conflict could only be arrived at by those directly involved, and not by the United Nations (...)”.

Lahn and the German Ambassador thus left it in no doubt that the message they brought had come from the highest level. There was not the remotest sign or reason to believe that the Egyptians doubted or could have doubted the Germans’ sincerity, because the message was conveyed by a departmental head of the Foreign Ministry.¹⁶⁸ Though Lahn emphasized his function as a messenger and did not take a position, this was not a sign of a lack of interest in the subject or of insufficient zeal, but simply the neutrality expected of a diplomat. Indeed, Ismail was most concerned to ensure that the discussion “in no way constituted the initiation of indirect talks with the other side”. The Egyptian national security advisor thanked

¹⁶⁶ See the excerpts from the minutes of the Israeli Cabinet meeting of June 24th, 1973, at <http://www.archives.gov.il/archives/#/Archive/0b0717068031be30/File/0b0717068212cdf3/Item/0907170682de0944>.

¹⁶⁷ See the telex from Undersecretary Lahn to the German Foreign Office of July 1st, 1973, in: AAPD 1973, pp. 1098–1101. All following quotations are from this report, which was intended for Permanent Secretary Frank, Minister Scheel, Chancellor Brandt, and the Director of the Middle East bureau, Helmut Redies.

¹⁶⁸ Wolffsohn (Note 1) faults Brandt for having “thrown away” the prospect of peace in the Middle East “by the use of political lightweights”.

the diplomats for the manner in which the message was transmitted, and for the additional information he had already received in outline form from the German Ambassador. Neither Lahn nor Steltzer was in any way responsible for Ismail's contemptuous assessment of the Israeli proposal. The Egyptian viewed it as merely a request for "talks about talks", and questioned how it constituted evidence of Israeli willingness to compromise. Lahn recorded Ismail as responding with the observation that, thus far, the only concessions had been made by Egypt.

The government in Cairo gave no sign of interest in direct talks. Quite the contrary: when, on the evening of June 30th, 1973, the talks with Lahn resumed for another three-hour session, Ismail vented his frustration. He accused the West, and also the Soviet Union, "of gradually losing interest in the conflict in the Middle East". If Europe and the Soviet Union could be permitted to settle their own differences, "one should not then prevent the Arab countries from resolving their own existential problem, if need be by military means". In other words, Ismail was openly threatening war, and plainly stated the alternatives: "Talks with Israel would only have a purpose if either the occupied territories were to be returned, or if, simultaneously, hostilities were to resume along the Suez Canal."

Lahn described this exchange of opinions as "candid" – a diplomatic euphemism for heated argument. The German's reminder that "no one in the world would welcome renewed hostilities and view them with indifference" was brusquely dismissed by Ismail. Lahn's summary of the conversation in his report to the Foreign Ministry was not calculated to induce optimism: "On the whole, given the hopeless prospects for a solution in accordance with Egypt's objectives, perplexity and bitterness were clearly discernible from Hafez Ismail's statements, as well as an inclination to appeal to force, even against all logic, and even if that should not be possible for many years to come." Foreign Minister Zayyat, to whom the German envoys paid a courtesy call the following day and whom they also informed of the Israeli message, was more moderate in his response than

Ismail. With regard to the possibility of a political solution, however, Zayyat's assessments were also marked by skepticism, as Lahn noted.

Upon his return, Undersecretary Lahn was tasked with informing the Israeli Ambassador in Bonn of the results of his mission. Ambassador Ben-Horin composed a memorandum on the topic which he sent on to Permanent Secretary Gazit on July 3rd, 1973.¹⁶⁹ Lahn's verbal report to Ben-Horin was apparently even more explicit than his written summary for the Foreign Ministry. Briefed by Lahn, Ben-Horin recorded Ismail as having said: "As long as Israel refuses to declare its willingness to withdraw, negotiations are pointless, as it is obvious that they would only serve to entrench the status quo." In response to Lahn's statement that the Israeli Prime Minister had emphasized to Brandt her readiness to make concessions, Ismail asked what concessions were meant, and added that the meeting with Lahn itself constituted a compromise on the part of Egypt, or at least a concession. Ismail made clear that Lahn was welcome to pass on to Israel what he had said. According to Ben-Horin's memorandum, specific territorial questions were not addressed. That the Israeli willingness in principle to withdraw from much of the Sinai, as professed to Willy Brandt by Golda Meir and not in itself novel, was not discussed and was of no account in the shaping of Egyptian opinion. Israel had not budged from its familiar stance on the border issue, and Ismail had repeated in his talks with the German diplomat the Egyptian position that negotiations could only ensue once Israel had given up the Egyptian territory it had captured, as Lahn told Ben-Horin.

The prospect of giving up any part of the Sinai, however small, remained anathema to the Egyptians. The Israeli demand for a shifting of borders was not reconcilable with Egypt's insistence on a full withdrawal from its territory by Israel. This was all the more true in light of Egyptian Foreign Minister Zayyat's repeated public statements in mid-June of 1973 that even an Israeli withdrawal to the borders in effect before the 1967 Six-Day War

¹⁶⁹ See the report of July 3rd, 1973, at <http://www.archives.gov.il/archives/#/Archive/0b0717068001c167/File/0b07170684cd4bda/Item/0907170684f37ddd>.

would not resolve the underlying problem, and that the only borders which had ever been recognized and would fulfill Palestinian demands were those of 1947.¹⁷⁰

It could not be overlooked in the summer of 1973 that the chasm separating the Egyptian and Israeli positions was simply unbridgeable. However, this is not the only reason to consider it utterly absurd to blame Chancellor Brandt for eventually instructing the Foreign Ministry “to undertake nothing further in this matter for the time being”.¹⁷¹ What else should Brandt have done? After Ambassador Ben-Horin had been briefed by Undersecretary Lahn, the ball was in the Israelis’ court; whether or in what manner the good offices of the German government might further be required as Middle Eastern courier was up to Jerusalem. A report in the Israeli newspaper “Haaretz” from mid-July 1973 revealing that Bonn had sent a special envoy to Cairo may have contributed to the termination of the effort.¹⁷² While the German Foreign Ministry promptly denied the claim, the strict secrecy surrounding the effort had clearly been violated by someone.

The far more important reason, however, appears to have been another: Golda Meir was apparently not interested in prolonging the attempts at making contact. In her letter of July 29th, 1973, thanking Brandt for publicizing to the various international statesmen his impression of Israel’s desire for peace, the Prime Minister mentioned the mission to Cairo only in passing. She welcomed the German Chancellor’s decision to inform Egypt of his assessment of Israel’s efforts and objectives, and added: “I am of course sorry that the immediate Egyptian reaction to your initiative was so negative. I do hope, however, that it will serve as a contribution in convincing the Egyptians that a negotiated peace with Egypt and all other

¹⁷⁰ Abba Eban brought these statements by Zayyat, which Jerusalem interpreted as a radicalization of the Egyptian position, to the attention of the Israeli Cabinet on June 24th, 1973. See <http://www.archives.gov.il/archives/#/Archive/0b0717068031be30/File/0b0717068212cdf3/Item/0907170682de0944>.

¹⁷¹ Note 1.

¹⁷² See the telegram from the Israeli Foreign Ministry to Ambassador Ben-Horin of July 17th, 1973, at <http://www.archives.gov.il/archives/#/Archive/0b0717068001c167/File/0b07170684cd4bda/Item/0907170684f9e413>.

Arab countries is a central goal of Israeli national policy, even if the differences regarding the terms of peace still remain very wide.”¹⁷³

And with that, the matter was closed, as far as the Israeli leader was concerned. Meir’s explicit characterization of the attempt to initiate contact with Egypt as “your initiative” is an even clearer indication that talk of an Israel peace initiative is simply wrong. It is less credible still in light of the guidelines for the occupied Arab territories passed in early September 1973 at the party conference of the Israeli Labor Party (the “Galili Plan”), which envisioned the construction of new Jewish settlements particularly in the West Bank – but not only there. The plan also provided for a city and an enclave of Jewish settlements in the northeastern Sinai, thereby severing the Gaza Strip from the remainder of Egypt’s territory. The American Ambassador to Israel, Kenneth Keating, described the intended measures as “creeping annexation”, and President Nixon referred to it internally as “an enormous mistake”. In Nixon’s view, the Israelis would “hurt their cause” and “jeopardize the support” they received from the United States “by such brutal tactics”.¹⁷⁴

The Secret Correspondence Between Meir and Brandt in Summer, 1973

The Israeli government was fundamentally less interested in Germany’s services as a go-between in the Middle East than in instrumentalizing the German government on behalf of Israeli policies. This is made plain by another letter from Meir to Brandt of July 29th, 1973, which was once again conveyed via the Israeli Ambassador and initialed by Brandt on August 1st, while still on holiday in Norway. As she wrote, the Prime Minister ventured with this letter “to raise a problem of greatest importance for the future of peace and stability in our area”. She referred again to the information she had privately revealed to Brandt, namely that “good and special relations with our neighbours to the East”, clearly implied as being Jordan. “This is a

¹⁷³ See Meir’s letter to Brandt of July 29th, 1973 (“Confidential”), in: AdsD, WBA, A 9, 22 (Note 165).

¹⁷⁴ FRUS 1969–1976, pp. 259–260.

most encouraging fact”, Meir continued, reporting that the political leaders of that country were “fully determined to embark on a course of economic development, thereby rehabilitating and settling the hundreds of thousands of refugees who reside in their country and who are at the present time only semi-employed.” In her most recent meeting with the head of state of this country, she said, he had admitted to having ignored the refugee problem for twenty years.¹⁷⁵ “They believe that in order to make significant progress, a large-scale building programme in new locations must soon be started.” The minister responsible for this matter was the brother of the country’s head of state, who had recently presented the proposal to the Israeli Minister of Development.¹⁷⁶

The Prime Minister further mentioned that the neighboring country was placing its hopes in receiving financial aid from Germany, both on a direct, bilateral basis and through German efforts to convince the European Community to provide long-term loans at low rates of interest. Mrs. Meir was anxious to be able to convey Brandt’s response to this request for aid to the neighboring head of state, with whom she was again scheduled to meet shortly. “I feel certain that I am addressing you in a matter of momentous importance and hope it evokes a positive response in your heart”, she wrote to the Chancellor.¹⁷⁷

Meir thus continued to pursue the same idea raised by Defense Minister Moshe Dayan in his conversation with Brandt on June 11th, 1973, namely the resolution of the refugee question, i.e. the Palestinian problem, through their permanent resettlement in Israel’s neighboring states, primarily Jordan. The confidence placed in the German Chancellor by the Israeli Prime Minister was indeed extraordinarily great. Brandt responded quickly in a short letter of August 3rd, in which he stated that he had discussed the matters raised in Meir’s letter with Foreign Minister Scheel. The latter would have the opportunity that fall to “discuss the specifics of the matter” with the

¹⁷⁵ The reference was to King Hussein of Jordan.

¹⁷⁶ The reference was to Jordanian Crown Prince Hassan bin Talal.

¹⁷⁷ See Meir’s letter to Brandt of July 29th, 1973 (“Strictly Confidential”), in: AdsD, WBA, A 9, 22.

responsible party mentioned by Meir, and whose visit was pending.¹⁷⁸ “I hope that it will then be possible to find a solution within the scope of our possibilities”, the Chancellor added.¹⁷⁹ As he had previously done with Dayan that June, Brandt thus raised the prospect of German aid for Jordan. Golda Meir was very pleased with the quick response her letter had generated. As she informed Brandt on August 9th, 1973, the news had arrived just in time for her meeting with the neighboring head of state. “I conveyed your answer to him and I know that he was very glad to have it. This meeting¹⁸⁰ convinced me again that he and the other leaders of his country are unwavering in their policy to develop their country and to rehabilitate the refugees. (...) I am certain that you will be delighted to hear that our relations with them are very cordial.”¹⁸¹

Once more, then, Willy Brandt had granted an Israeli wish. Wolffsohn, by contrast, accuses the Chancellor of responding coolly and noncommittally to the hopes expressed by Israel of German support in its negotiations with the EC – a flagrantly mistaken interpretation of the letter of August 3rd, 1973, on which Wolffsohn bases his claim.¹⁸² In actual fact, Brandt’s actions were again distinctly friendly toward Israel. Nor did he hold back on his support in the context of the Socialist International. When, in a further letter dated August 9th, 1973, Golda Meir called Brandt’s attention to extremely anti-Israeli remarks made by Maltese Prime Minister Dom

¹⁷⁸ The reference was to Jordanian Crown Prince Hassan bin Talal.

¹⁷⁹ See the draft of Brandt’s letter to Meir of August 3rd, 1973, in: AdsD, WBA, A 9, 22. Foreign Minister Scheel received a carbon copy of this letter, as well as a copy of the corresponding letter of Meir to Brandt of July 29th and August 9th, 1973, respectively.

¹⁸⁰ Meir and Hussein met repeatedly for secret talks in 1973. Their last meeting took place on September 25th, 1973, when the Jordanian King warned the Israeli Prime Minister of an impending attack by the Syrians and Egyptians. See Abraham Rabinovich: *The Yom Kippur War. The Epic Encounter That Transformed The Middle East*, New York 2004, pp. 49–50.

¹⁸¹ See Meir’s letter to Brandt of August 9th, 1973 (“Strictly Confidential”), in: AdsD, WBA, A 9, 22.

¹⁸² Unaware of the fact that there exist two letters from Meir to Brandt with the same date, Wolffsohn (Note 1) mistakes Brandt’s letter of August 3rd, 1973 (Note 179) for his response to Meir’s letter of July 29th, 1973 (Note 165), which in turn was the response to the Chancellor’s letter of June 28th, 1973. Brandt’s letter of August 3rd, 1973, on the other hand, as demonstrated above, was a response to Meir’s letter of July 29th, 1973 (Note 177) requesting German aid for Jordan.

Mintoff, who was scheduled to host the next meeting of SI party leaders that November, the SPD Chairman exerted his influence to ensure that the meeting was shifted elsewhere.¹⁸³

The sources provide as little justification for questioning Willy Brandt's solidarity with Israel as they do for doubting his constant readiness to make an active contribution to reaching a peaceful outcome in the Middle East. In his speech before the UN General Assembly in New York on September 26th, 1973, the German Chancellor again stressed the Federal Republic's desire for a peaceful settlement. Brandt hoped for that "the international community does not capitulate before the possibilities of negotiation." At the same time, the West German government was of the opinion that "direct peace talks between the relevant parts of the Arab world and Israel would be best suited to ensure a balancing of the fundamental interests of both sides".¹⁸⁴ Even this cautious plea for direct negotiations triggered protests by the Arabs, who – erroneously – thought they detected therein pro-Israeli partisanship on the part of the Chancellor. The Foreign Ministry in Bonn promptly issued a denial of any change in the West German position on the Middle East.¹⁸⁵

With regard to the permanent resettlement of Palestinian refugees in Jordan, however, Willy Brandt came perilously close to allowing himself to be harnessed to a politically very dubious Israeli scheme. Viewed in isolation, the project put forward by Golda Meir constituted a humanitarian measure. Unquestionably, though, it was also intended to ensure that the

¹⁸³ See Meir's letter to Brandt of August 9th, 1973, in: AdsD, WBA, A 8, 53. In it, Meir cited passages from a speech in Parliament by Mintoff on July 13th, 1973. The Maltese Prime Minister had said that, were he Palestinian, he would also hijack airplanes. Mintoff also compared Israel to Hitler. Meir thus announced to Brandt her attention to boycott the SI conference scheduled to take place in Malta in early November of 1973. At the same time, she wished that the session of the SI council in late August would discuss moving the conference. Brandt wrote a comment on Meir's letter for the SPD's International Secretary, Hans-Eberhard Dingels, with the command: "Suggestion!" And, indeed, the SI council decided on August 29th, 1973, to postpone the meeting of party leaders, which instead was held in London on November 11th, 1973. See *Socialist Affairs* 23 (1973), No. 5, p. 94, and No. 6, p. 106.

¹⁸⁴ Berlin Edition, Vol. 6, No. 80, p. 508.

¹⁸⁵ See Fink 2009, p. 201.

Palestinian question continued to be understood and addressed only through the Israeli lens, namely as a simple refugee problem. The proposal was also clearly linked to the planned expansion of Jewish settlements in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. With its unconditional financial support of the refugee project, West Germany would essentially have supported and affirmed the policy of the Israeli government at the time, which rejected not only the right to self-determination, but even the existence of the Palestinian people. Moreover, “no fair-minded observer could claim” that the contacts between Israel and Jordan “had speeded up the process of settlement”, as Henry Kissinger later wrote in his memoirs.¹⁸⁶

Whatever the outcome might have been, the meeting between Foreign Minister Scheel and the Jordanian Crown Prince intended for the fall of 1973 never took place. With the outbreak of the Yom Kippur War in October 1973, all plans for the region were rendered moot. Crown Prince Hassan bin Talal did not visit Berlin until July 16th of the following year.¹⁸⁷ By that time, Brandt, Scheel, and Meir had all been replaced in their respective offices, and the situation in the Middle East, and not least international attitudes toward the Palestinian question, had undergone a fundamental shift.

The Role of the Federal Republic During the Yom Kippur War in October 1973

On October 6th, 1973, the Jewish High Holy Day of Yom Kippur, Egyptian and Syrian forces attacked Israel on two fronts. The German government officially maintained a position of neutrality during the conflict. Willy Brandt nonetheless acted to secretly help the beleaguered Jewish state, as Klaus Harpprecht revealed in 2000. The Chancellor mentioned to his speechwriter, who had expressed great concern over Israel’s heavy losses in the first few days of the war, that he had given instructions that an important electronic device be delivered to the Israeli military, replacing

¹⁸⁶ See Henry A. Kissinger: *Years of Upheaval*, London 1982, p. 221.

¹⁸⁷ See EA 29 (1974), p. Z 185.

equipment destroyed in Arab air strikes which the United States was unable to provide at short notice.¹⁸⁸ Exactly what equipment was provided is unknown, and one can only speculate as to its importance to the outcome of the war.¹⁸⁹ In making this decision, one in which Defense Minister Georg Leber (SPD) was undoubtedly involved, Brandt was violating German law, which barred the delivery of military equipment into regions of military tension. Brandt's actions were driven by his sense of obligation to help Israel in its time of need. On November 9th, 1973, the Chancellor proclaimed to the Bundestag: "I have often emphasized – and my purpose here is to confirm – that for us, there is not and cannot be a neutrality of heart and conscience."¹⁹⁰ His act of solidarity with Israel remained hidden at the time. To British Prime Minister Edward Heath, however, Brandt mentioned on November 12th, 1973, that "the actual degree of support was greater than could be publicly admitted".¹⁹¹

Publicly announced was a resolution of the executive committees of the SPD of October 13th, 1973, which made clear the allegiance of the German Social Democrats during the conflict. "In this hour, the SPD salutes, united in solidarity, its Social Democratic friends in Israel, led by Golda Meir." The resolution proclaimed that there could be only one basis for a permanent peace in the Middle East: the recognition and respecting of the right to exist and the security of all countries in the region. Necessary as a complement to the UN Security Council resolution of 1967 were "binding and credible guarantees for the ongoing existence of Israel, particularly on the part of the superpowers".¹⁹² In response, Golda Meir on October 17th sent an urgent

¹⁸⁸ See Klaus Harpprecht: *Der falsche Verdacht. Eine geheime Episode in der Geschichte deutsch-amerikanischer Beziehungen*, in: *Die Zeit*, No. 18 of April 27th, 2000.

¹⁸⁹ This may have been a radar device for aircraft. See Peter Merseburger: *Willy Brandt 1913–1992. Visionär und Realist*, Stuttgart/München 2002, p. 686.

¹⁹⁰ Plenarprotokoll der 65. Sitzung des Deutschen Bundestages [Transcript of the 65th Session of the Bundestag] of November 9th, 1973, 7. Wahlperiode, p. 3849. See <http://dipbt.bundestag.de/doc/btp/07/07065.pdf>.

¹⁹¹ AAPD 1973, p. 1808.

¹⁹² SPD Pressemitteilungen und Informationen [SPD Press Releases and Information], No. 365/73 of October 13th, 1973.

telegram to Willy Brandt thanking him for “the strong and understanding position” and for his solidarity.¹⁹³

The Chancellor was also understanding of the American operation to rush military aid to Israel, at least as long as the Jewish state was in danger and no cease-fire had been agreed. The government in Bonn was aware by mid-October that the Federal Republic was a transit point for shipments of war materiel to Israel, and tolerated this until the announcement of a cease-fire by the UN on October 22nd, 1973.¹⁹⁴ The Foreign Ministry only issued an official protest three days later, after two Israeli-flagged freighters had been loaded with U.S. equipment by a company in German government ownership and the media had gotten wind of the story.¹⁹⁵ Chancellor Brandt, on holiday in France and kept in the loop by telephone by Foreign Minister Scheel, decided that loading would have to stop immediately and the Israeli ships leave German territorial waters. The assurances of neutrality repeatedly given by Bonn to the Arab states, which threatened to impose an oil embargo against the Federal Republic and other European countries if they lent their support to Israel, would otherwise have lost whatever shred of credibility they still possessed.

Willy Brandt was particularly annoyed that no other ships had supposedly been available and that Israeli-flagged ships had been used, and in addition that the German government had not been consulted, or even informed. In his opinion, the U.S. government, which had also failed to consult with its NATO allies before putting NATO on its highest alert level on October 25th, 1973, was treating the Federal Republic like a colony. However, the Chancellor considered it a mistake for the Foreign Office to have made public its protest to the Americans.¹⁹⁶ In the end, he let the duplicity continue: the Israeli ships weighed anchor and departed, while a

¹⁹³ See Meir's telegram to Brandt of October 17th, 1973, in: AdsD, WBA, A 8, 53.

¹⁹⁴ See Daniel Gerlach: *Die doppelte Front: die Bundesrepublik Deutschland und der Nahostkonflikt 1967–1973*, Münster 2006, pp. 191–192.

¹⁹⁵ On these events, see in particular AAPD 1973, pp. 1638–1643 and pp. 1662–1668.

¹⁹⁶ See Harpprecht 2000, p. 369 and p. 403. This disclosure was probably accidental. The contents of an Foreign Ministry's internal document were unintentionally released to the press. See Frank 1981, pp. 268–269.

third vessel which there had been no time to even start loading left completely empty. Nonetheless, with the explicit permission of Bremen's Mayor, Hans Koschnik, and with Brandt's full knowledge, U.S. military aid continued to flow through Bremerhaven.¹⁹⁷ On October 30th, Permanent Secretary Frank confirmed to U.S. Ambassador Martin Hillenbrand that the West German government viewed the loading and unloading of American vessels as "a normal transportation matter having to do with the American forces stationed in the Federal Republic."¹⁹⁸ In other words, the Americans were free to do as they wished.

Despite this sub rosa pliability, Bonn's official statements met with sharp criticism in the United States and in Israel. The Chancellor's letter to his American counterpart of October 28th, 1973, in which Brandt protested being kept in the dark and justified his own actions while emphasizing West Germany's ongoing commitment to the transatlantic alliance, met with a brusque response from the White House two days later.¹⁹⁹ President Nixon especially disapproved of Chancellor Brandt's opinion that the crisis in the Middle East and the military supplies to Israel were "not a case of common responsibility for the alliance". Nixon rejected this perception, for the Soviet Union – in his words – "was and is so deeply involved". He and Secretary of State Kissinger viewed Moscow as part of the problem and a cause of instability in the Middle East, one whose influence they wished to roll back. Brandt, on the other hand, continued to view the U.S.S.R. as an essential element of any solution for the region.²⁰⁰

Symptomatic of the mood in Israel was an article in the newspaper "Ma'ariv," which wrote in early November of 1973 that the German Chancellor would presumably soon be photographed "genuflecting before

¹⁹⁷ See Hepperle 2000, pp. 138–140. This fits entirely with what Klaus Harpprecht recorded in his diary on October 28th, 1973: "Chancellor remembers that, had he only been asked, he would have urged the Americans to undertake the loading as rapidly as possible into American ships, or even German, but definitely not Israeli ones." Harpprecht 2000, p. 375.

¹⁹⁸ AAPD 1973, pp. 1676–1677, Note 22.

¹⁹⁹ Both letters are reprinted in: Berlin Edition, Vol. 6, No. 81–82, pp. 512–516.

²⁰⁰ See Merseburger 2002, pp. 685–686.

an oil derrick”.²⁰¹ In order to counter the bitter accusations leveled at the Federal Republic in the U.S. and the Israeli media for its alleged blockade of weapons shipments meant for Israel, Brandt dispatched Klaus Harpprecht on a secret mission to New York. There he spoke with a small group of influential representatives of Jewish organizations and informed them of Brandt’s efforts on behalf of Israel. The attacks in U.S. newspapers then ceased, according to Harpprecht, who publicly revealed the episode not until the year 2000.²⁰² The assertion that the policy of the Brandt/Scheel government in October 1973 “showed the United States and Israel the first stirrings of a new German Wilhelminism” is thus completely incomprehensible.²⁰³

The West German government rejected unilateral action. It attempted to bring about a common European position on the Middle Eastern conflict in order to overcome the divisions within the EC on the subject. Of the nine EC members, only the Netherlands had openly supported Israel during the Yom Kippur War. However, the declaration of the Nine approved by their foreign ministers in Brussels on November 6th, 1973, further burdened relations between Germany and Israel. Jerusalem was particularly unhappy with two points of the EC declaration which it interpreted as pro-Arab: first, Israel was called upon to end the territorial occupation it had maintained since 1967, which seemed to imply that the EC had adopted the French text of Security Council Resolution 242, requiring withdrawal from all occupied territories. In addition, the Europeans for the first time agreed to recognize “that in the establishment of a just and lasting peace account must be taken of the legitimate rights of the Palestinians”.²⁰⁴ This was the first step on the road to recognition of a Palestinian right to self-

²⁰¹ Cited in: “Ölkrise. Kein Verlaß auf Großmütter,” in: *Der Spiegel*, No. 45 of November 5th, 1973, pp. 23–27.

²⁰² Note 188.

²⁰³ This is another proposition put forward by Michael Wolffsohn. See “Für Erdöl setzte Bonn 1973 das Bündnis aufs Spiel,” in: *Die Welt* of October 21st, 2013. See <http://www.welt.de/geschichte/article121069722/Fuer-Erdoel-setzte-Bonn-1973-das-Buendnis-aufs-Spiel.html>.

²⁰⁴ AdG 43 (1973), S. 18321.

determination. From this point onward, the EC members no longer viewed the Palestinian question as simply a problem of refugees.

Though he was “not entirely happy” with its phrasing, Willy Brandt defended the joint statement.²⁰⁵ On the morning of November 9th, 1973, he said during a debate in the Bundestag: “It is not that a keystone was placed in Brussels, but rather than a path was sought. (...) It is our conviction that no solution can last that does not secure the right to exist of all nations and peoples in this region.”²⁰⁶ In the same surroundings a few weeks earlier, on October 26th, Brandt had underscored the Federal Republic’s “vital interest” in the establishment of a peace “which can be accepted as just by all peoples of that region, or even approved”.²⁰⁷ When Brandt in an interview with the French news agency AFP, which was released on the afternoon of November 9th, 1973, was asked whether he had also had the Palestinian people in mind, the Chancellor responded with the sentence: “No one can seriously believe that the creation of a peaceful order in the Middle East is possible without the involvement of the Palestinians.” At the same time, however, he emphasized the necessity for the existence of Israel as a state to be recognized by “crucial Arab actors”.²⁰⁸ Some particularly pro-Israeli figures within the SPD had previously complained that the EC foreign ministers had failed to clearly state this point.²⁰⁹ In a speech before the Bundesrat also delivered on November 9th, Brandt once again proclaimed the “special character” of the relationship with Israel, which the Federal Republic would not permit to be compromised in the face of “threats and blackmail”.²¹⁰

²⁰⁵ Brandt 1976, p. 598.

²⁰⁶ Plenarprotokoll of November 9th, 1973, p. 3850 (Note 190).

²⁰⁷ Plenarprotokoll der 62. Sitzung des Deutschen Bundestages [Transcript of the 62nd Session of the Bundestag] of October 26th 1973, 7. Wahlperiode, p. 3630. See <http://dipbt.bundestag.de/doc/btp/07/07062.pdf>.

²⁰⁸ The interview with AFP is documented in: Bulletin der Bundesregierung, No. 145 of November 13th, 1973, pp. 1438–1439. See also AdsD, WBA, A 3, 534.

²⁰⁹ See Hepperle 2000, pp. 184–185.

²¹⁰ See the Plenarprotokoll der 398. Sitzung des Bundesrats [Transcript of the 398th Session of the Bundesrat] of November 9th, 1973, p. 341, at https://www.bundesrat.de/SharedDocs/downloads/DE/plenarprotokolle/1973/Plenarprotokoll-398.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=2.

This pledge, along with its implicit rebuke of the Arab oil boycott, were intended to mute the indignation the EC's declaration on the Middle East had aroused in Israel. As Klaus Harpprecht told Willy Brandt on November 7th, 1973, after a conversation with Ambassador Ben-Horin, "Brussels was a deep shock for Israel".²¹¹ Once more, Israel was particularly disappointed with the German Foreign Ministry. Ben-Horin was initially satisfied with Brandt's speeches to the Bundestag and Bundesrat on November 9th, but the AFP interview altered the situation. The next day, the Ambassador, presumably relaying the disquiet of his hard-pressed Prime Minister at home, expressed his discontent to Harpprecht: "the Federal Chancellor had promised G[olda]M[eir] in Jerusalem that he would not support any actions by the EC aimed at Israel."²¹²

The extent to which the European position had angered, embittered, and depressed the Israeli Prime Minister became clear at a meeting of party leaders of the Socialist International in London on November 11th, 1973, a meeting she had requested Brandt by telephone to arrange at very short notice after the cease-fire in the Middle East.²¹³ Meir decried an absence of solidarity with Israel, and compared the position of her country with that of the Spanish Republic in 1936 and of Czechoslovakia after the Munich Agreement in 1938. She was particularly angry that most European countries – including ones with Social Democratic governments – had refused to grant overflight and landing permission to the U.S. aircraft delivering military supplies to Israel from October 14th, 1973. Meir also sharply criticized the EC's declaration on the Middle East for its mention of the problem of the Palestinians, "as, in the Arab understanding, the term Palestine means the destruction of the state of Israel".²¹⁴ The assembled

²¹¹ See the handwritten note by Klaus Harpprecht for Willy Brandt ("BK – VS") of November 7th, 1973, in: AdsD, WBA, A 8, 10.

²¹² See Harpprecht's "Notiz für BK" ("nur für BK") ["Note for Federal Chancellor" ("only for Federal Chancellor")] of November 10th, 1973, in: AdsD, WBA, A 8, 10.

²¹³ See Golda Meir: *My Life*, London 1975, p. 446.

²¹⁴ See the memorandum of Hans-Eberhard Dingels "Betr.: Konferenz der sozialdemokratischen Parteien in London am 11.11.1973" of November 16th, 1973, in: AdsD, SPD-Parteivorstand, 11381.

party leaders received her grave accusations with shock and embarrassed silence. The host of the meeting, British Labour Party leader Harold Wilson, then adjourned the session for ten minutes.²¹⁵ It was probably the Israeli Prime Minister herself, rather than a bystander as claimed in her autobiography, who commented on the silence that greeted her outburst with the words: "Of course, they can't talk. Their throats are choked with oil."²¹⁶

It was Willy Brandt who spoke first when the group reconvened. Klaus Harpprecht describes this speech at length in his diary. As Harpprecht portrays it, Brandt assured Meir of "deep sympathy and deep respect," but warned her against an "isolation complex". He believed that the Middle East declaration of the EC could also be read "offensively", and provided his own unconventional interpretation: "The Brussels formulation could permit for example that Israel transform militarily occupied territories into territories under civil administration." Regarding the Palestinian question, Brandt made clear that it could not simply be talked out of existence. "It will need to be ensured that the Palestinians find a home once more, but nowhere and at no time has it been said that they must once again be settled in their original homeland. The Brussels Declaration also in no way supports the establishment of a Palestinian state." On behalf of the Federal Republic, the Chancellor also underscored that, except for the United States, it was "the country which had unconditionally done the most for Israel in this crisis". Bonn had only protested the U.S. shipment of weapons via Bremerhaven once a cease-fire was in place.²¹⁷

The memorandum on the London conference prepared by the International Secretary of the SPD, Hans-Eberhard Dingels, reflected Willy

²¹⁵ See Brandt 1976, p. 598.

²¹⁶ Meir 1975, p. 447. These words, she writes, were spoken by a man behind her, whose face she never saw. By contrast, Willy Brandt noted in the drafts to his memoirs that Meir had said at the meeting in London that "she could sense oil in the throats of European Social Democrats." See the manuscript in: AdsD, WBA, B 25, 173. In the book as published, the line is given as: "(...) she later put into the mouth of one of her staff members that one could sense oil in the throats of the European Social Democrats." Brandt 1989, p. 447.

²¹⁷ Harpprecht 2000, pp. 402–404.

Brandt's central points, albeit in a less dramatic tone. The Chancellor is quoted as saying that the declaration of the EU foreign ministers in no way reflected the interests of only one side, but rather represented a "substantial improvement" as compared with Resolution 242, particularly regarding the question of Israeli security and a withdrawal from the occupied territories. Dingels also recorded Brandt's views on the Palestinian problem: the fact could not be avoided that, "by any realistic assessment of the situation today, something like a Palestinian identity has been created". The memorandum on the London meeting drawn up by Brandt aide Wolf-Dietrich Schilling confirms these statements.²¹⁸ Austrian Chancellor Bruno Kreisky and Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme supported Brandt, as did those Social Democratic heads of government of European Community member states present; only Labour leader Harold Wilson was more inclined to back Golda Meir.²¹⁹ To her great disappointment, even the Prime Minister of the Netherlands, Joop den Uyl, agreed with the German Chancellor.²²⁰

The era in which the Socialist International unreservedly advocated the positions taken by Israeli governments was over, once and for all. 1973 marked a turning point in the Middle Eastern policy of the SI, which in the coming years would move to seeking a dialog with Arab partners, and eventually also with the PLO.²²¹ The Arabs, however, and particularly the Egyptian government, initially remained suspicious. With regard to the meeting of the Socialist International, it was feared that the Israeli Prime Minister would make Brandt and the European Social Democrats to side

²¹⁸ Schilling's report states, among other things, that "the Brussels declaration leaves open for example whether a withdrawal or a civil administration for the occupied territory should be negotiated. In addition, no mention is made of where the Palestinians are supposed to stay. If the Palestinians are named in the declaration, in contrast to Resolution 242, that is because they have since developed into a factor of independent political weight." Cited in: AAPD 1973, p. 1807, Note 3.

²¹⁹ See Note 217.

²²⁰ See AAPD 1973, p. 1813.

²²¹ See Hans Krech: *Die Nahostpolitik der Sozialistischen Internationale. Unter besonderer Beachtung der Politik gegenüber arabischen Parteien und Bewegungen in den Jahren 1951 bis 1980*, Berlin 1996, pp. 20–21.

with her. To allay these concerns, the Chancellor dispatched Minister for Economic Cooperation Erhard Eppler to Cairo, where on November 20th, 1973, he recounted the proceedings of the London conference to President Sadat. The Egyptian President bitterly criticized West Germany's actions since the Six-Day War, charging that it had "given Israel everything" and "done nothing for the Arab side".²²²

Ironically, both sides in the conflict were unhappy with the government in Bonn, and felt it favored their opponents. The Israeli Prime Minister had had no further comment on Brandt's speech in London. That Golda Meir had made "no sign of recognition" and had spoken "not a word of thanks for the assistance" was plainly a source of great disappointment for Willy Brandt, as can be discerned from his comments to Klaus Harpprecht on November 12th, 1973. His friend and speechwriter recorded Brandt as saying the following: "It does nothing to change my position, but that is how things are between Germans and Jews, and here I am just one amongst all the other Germans. Once again: that doesn't change my position at all, but one has to reckon that way."²²³

Harpprecht used the flap in London as an occasion to speak "for a very long time and with great urgency" with Ambassador Ben-Horin a few days later, drawing his attention to "the danger of a resignation on the part of the Chancellor with regard to his relationship with Golda Meir and with Israel". Ben-Horin assured him that Meir viewed Brandt "as a sincere friend of Israel", but wanted to transmit Harpprecht's concerns directly to the Prime Minister, without naming their source. Harpprecht closed by emphasizing "with the appropriate explicitness: Israel has no better friend in Europe than the Federal Republic of Germany, and Israel has no better and more steadfast personal friend in Europe than the German Chancellor".²²⁴

That Golda Meir shared this view is supported by the extremely warm personal letter she composed on May 13th, 1974, on the occasion of Willy

²²² See AAPD 1973, pp. 1869–1871.

²²³ Harpprecht 2000, p. 404.

²²⁴ Ibid., p. 405.

Brandt's resignation as Chancellor. The Prime Minister, who had herself resigned on April 11th and was replaced as Prime Minister on June 3rd, 1974, wrote:

"Dear Friend,

I received the news of your resignation with sincere regret. As a friend and colleague I have been thinking much about the distress you must have gone through in making your decision to step down from office. But I take some comfort in the thought that you are not retiring from political life and that the SPD under your leadership will continue to benefit from your idealism, talents, wisdom and statesmanship, as will our whole movement.

History will surely record the profound contribution you, as Chancellor, made to the reconstruction of a better Europe and hence to world peace. Likewise, we in Israel shall always appreciate your concern and efforts to help bring about understanding between ourselves and our neighbours.

I recall your visit to Israel last year which gave me the opportunity and pleasure to greet a true friend in the Land of Israel. Over the many years of our association, I have come to cherish our relationship because it is marked by a genuine trust and friendship. It is in this spirit that I extend to you now my sincere good wishes for the future. I hope it will not be too long before we will meet again.

With warm personal regards,

Yours, Golda"²²⁵

Willy Brandt responded three days later and thanked Golda Meir for writing "such lines of friendship." He wrote: "The relations between our two countries and parties were always a matter of special significance to me, one to which I will in future continue to devote my energies. I have attempted together with my friends to make a contribution to overcoming the chasm which has so terribly divided the German and the Jewish people.

²²⁵ See Meir's letter to Brandt of May 13th, 1974, in: AdsD, WBA, A 11.15, 9.

Like the visit I made together with my wife in the autumn of 1960, my stay in your country early last summer will always remain vivid in my mind. I hope that the path to a secure peace will not be made too difficult for you.

I thank you and all friends in your country for the understanding you have shown for my policies.

With best regards

Yours, Willy Brandt²²⁶

Summary

The claim that Willy Brandt could have prevented war in the Middle East in 1973 is baseless, and indeed absurd. The power to prevent the war lay primarily in the hands of those countries which chose trial by combat over negotiation. The only parties responsible for the outbreak of violence were the two aggressors, Egypt and Syria; they had jointly planned their military action, and commenced it with a surprise attack against Israel.

Chancellor Brandt had done everything possible within the limits of his influence to maintain peace. He emphasized time and time again that his government did not wish to impose itself as an arbitrator in the Middle East, but was prepared to function as a relay station for messages between the opposing parties. The basis for this position was the “balanced Middle Eastern policy” of the German Federal Government, which made possible the resumption of diplomatic relations between West Germany and the Arab states in the early 1970s.

Willy Brandt accepted and promptly carried out the task of messenger the Israeli Prime Minister had pressed upon him in the summer of 1973, informing Egypt through the most suitable channels available that Israel desired to open direct talks. It is therefore ludicrous to ascribe to Brandt a culpable failure to act. The allegation that he had “fundamentally no particular interest in close relations with Israel” is unfounded; indeed, the reverse is true, and well documented. Equally untenable is the claim that

²²⁶ See the copy of Brandt’s letter to Meir of May 16th, 1974, in: AdsD, WBA, A 11.15, 9.

Meir was misled by Brandt. He agreed with the Israeli Prime Minister that direct talks between Israel and Egypt were an essential element in arriving at a peace settlement, but never disguised his conviction that the involvement of the two superpowers in particular would be necessary to secure a solution. If any external powers were capable of mediating the dispute and possessed the necessary power to exert pressure on the parties to the conflict, it was the United States and the Soviet Union.

Given the historical baggage of the relationship between Germans and Israelis, the Federal Republic was incapable of acting as a mediator in the Middle Eastern conflict. Willy Brandt always underscored the “special character” of his country’s ties with Israel, which had its origins in the guilt and responsibility of the Germans for the murder of six million Jews. No German Chancellor has ever done more to signify Germany’s full acceptance of its guilt and responsibility for the Holocaust, and – like all governments of the Federal Republic before and after his – the Brandt/Scheel government rightly felt an obligation to support the Jewish state of Israel in every way it could. This was especially the case during the Yom Kippur War, when Bonn studiously overlooked deliveries of U.S. weapons to the hard-pressed Israeli military and indeed secretly provided assistance itself, in contravention of the official watchwords of “neutrality” and a “balanced Middle Eastern policy”. It was a very difficult balancing act, and one which almost could not fail to produce misunderstandings and hurt feelings.

The personal relationship between Willy Brandt and Golda Meir also contained a degree of ambivalence. While she thought his Ostpolitik naive, her obdurate and argumentative manner in any discussion of matters pertaining to the Middle East could drive Brandt to frustration. This did not lessen the profound mutual respect between the two leaders. Meir continually praised the acknowledgment by the former opponent of Nazism of his country’s responsibility for the crimes of Hitler’s regime. She also seems to have personally held Brandt, with whom she shared the vision of a democratic socialism, in high esteem, and even affection, as her letters

show. The Chancellor in turn never forgot Meir's biography and the history of her people, and showed great deference for the concerns of his discussion partner and correspondent when she energetically defended the interests of her country. When confronted with a choice, Willy Brandt always came down on the side of Israel, as Golda Meir acknowledged. The claims and accusations made against him in the articles published in "Welt am Sonntag" and "Die Welt" in 2013 are incorrect and entirely unwarranted.

The Middle East went to war in 1973 not because the German Chancellor had somehow failed, but because the political positions staked out by Egypt and Israel at the time were irreconcilably opposed to one another. The Egyptians demanded a full Israeli withdrawal from all occupied territories, or at least from the Sinai. The government in Jerusalem was unwilling to accept this requirement, and President Sadat of Egypt saw military force as the only means capable of forcing an Israeli retreat. It remains a matter of conjecture whether the thesis of the realist school of international relations that the war of 1973, in which the myth of Israeli military invincibility suffered a severe setback, was the necessary precondition for direct peace talks is in fact correct. In light of the thousands of casualties on both sides, it may seem a cynical argument. It is striking, however, that only with the Camp David Accords of 1979 did Israel finally commit itself to returning the whole of the Sinai to Egyptian control: Golda Meir had implacably resisted this concession. For this reason as well, the assertion is wrong that President Sadat could have received from her already in 1973 what was finally agreed by treaty six years later.²²⁷

²²⁷ This is another thesis put forward by Wolffsohn (Note 1).

ANNEX

From the Speech of German Chancellor Willy Brandt at the Opening Ceremony of the “Week of Brotherhood 1971” on March 21st, 1971, in Cologne¹

[...]

When I stood in Warsaw at the beginning of December [1970], there rested on me the burden of recent German history, the burden of a criminal racial policy. I did what people do when words fail them, and thus, also on behalf of my compatriots, I commemorated the millions murdered. But I also remembered that fanaticism and the suppression of human rights have not ceased, despite Auschwitz. Those who wished to understand me could understand me; and many in Germany and elsewhere have understood what I wished to say without words. Some, even on that occasion, had only disparaging remarks to make, but I ask: Where, if not there where the Warsaw Ghetto stood, would be the place for a German Chancellor to feel the burden of responsibility, and, from this responsibility, redeem such guilt!

[...]

Let me now address the rebuke sometimes leveled against us that this government – in contrast to previous governments – no longer emphasizes our special relationship with Israel, but our normal relations with Israel. And some then add that this must be related to what is referred to as our Ostpolitik.

Now, I made it clear to all in connection with the signing of the Moscow Treaty of August 12th [1970] that an improvement in our relations with the Soviet Union may not be at the expense of third countries. This applies fully to Israel. The Israeli government sees this no differently. It has rejected the supposition that the Ostpolitik of the German Federal Government negatively affects its relations with Israel. It has, incidentally, also never

¹ The German text of the speech is found in: Bundeskanzler Brandt – Reden und Interviews, published by the Presse- und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung [Bonn 1971], pp. 446–455.

criticized for our efforts to maintain good relations with the Arab countries to the extent possible.

On the other hand, even the objectively reasoning leaders of the Arab peoples do not fail to note the specific factors that determine our relationship with Israel. Indeed, it continues to be characterized by a unique element: the indelibility of the murder of millions of the Jews of Europe – all the more horrifying for us and our descendants for the astonishing productivity demonstrated by the symbiosis of Jewish and German culture animated by the spirit of the Enlightenment. Nevertheless, we have endured – and must endure – the proof that hell on Earth is possible. It was reality.

The name of Auschwitz will remain a trauma for generations. We can hold no illusions: the wounds inflicted in those dozen years of darkness to the soul of the nation of the victims and to the soul of the nation of the perpetrators will not heal quickly, for the image of man was violated, of man we perceive as the likeness of God. This experience – the real catastrophe of mankind, more than all wars and their horrors – weighs upon the Jewish people, not only in Israel; and it weighs upon us Germans.

One may not point here to the younger generation and speak of its freedom from inhibitions. No one is discharged of the obligations of history. Israel is – and the slogans of radical groups can do nothing to alter this – the magnificent attempt to create a secure homeland for a long homeless people. It is bitter that the birth of this state had as its price new victims, and new suffering. Who would wish to deny this? Who would wish to deny the misery of the Palestinian Arabs? But in this as well, we have no right to appear as the arrogant moralists of the world. Rather, we must follow the chain of causality of suffering and injustice back to its origin: here in the heart of Europe. The Federal Republic, the more fortunate of the two German states that rose from the wreckage of the year 1945, acknowledged its obligations to the survivors. The reparations agreement reached then with Israel is an accomplishment of Konrad Adenauer and the Social Democratic opposition of the time that we view as a cornerstone of our self-

image as a state. The German Democratic Republic will not, in the long run, look back with satisfaction on its abandonment of the collective German obligation to the Jewish victims of Nazism around the world. It will presumably yet learn what it has thereby missed.

We believe we can fulfill the mission of our people and our unique responsibility if, with the appropriate humility, we do what we are able to encourage a will toward peaceful reconciliation in the tense landscape of the Middle East. It would be presumptuous to say much more on this topic. We are convinced, however, that our determined policy of peace in Europe can be a factor in global détente. Not only tension, but détente can be catching. Not only strife, but the desire for peace can be infectious.

Today, despite its geographical distance, Israel has become our close neighbor. Business and technological exchanges have intensified, and become more balanced. Cultural relations have also intensified, here as well as there. The courage has been found to rediscover our shared heritage, to accept it with fewer reservations, and to examine what is new with sympathy, or even with interest. Modern tourism – as dubious as it may sometimes seem when the will to understand the Other is supplanted by the import and export of prejudices – has a salutary effect for Germany and Israel, for it is primarily the young who come to know one another in this way. It is important we encounter in Israel not only the new realities, but the ancient truths: in the land of origin of the great religions. The Christian churches have now finally included Judaism in their dialog of faith with that realism and openness, indeed with that brotherhood which could have spared us the tragedy of this century had they been prepared to do so earlier. Perhaps Christianity is now beginning more clearly to recognize in that of Judaism its own fate, as it also realizes its position today as a minority of the world's population.

I admit that the term “normalization” must be used with care. Respect for others admonishes us to exercise patience, and quiet modesty. Incidentally, an honest assessment of mutual interests forms in even the most fraught relationship the most solid basis on which to reconcile and harmonize them.

As for our position on the conflict in the Middle East, I stand by what I said in an interview on July 8th of last year with a Yugoslav news agency. I quote: "It is our belief that – particularly in light of the recent history of my country – we cannot be indifferent in the face of this crisis, and we also cannot permit that Israel's right to exist be placed in doubt. However, we strive to do justice to the legitimate interests of all parties, and also to improve our relations with the Arab states." We continue to support the resolution of the UN Security Council of November 22nd, 1967, and we hope that, through negotiation, a just and lasting settlement for ending the conflict may be found. I see to my gratification that significant figures in the Arab world no longer question Israel's right to exist, and acknowledge that its people also desire to live within secure borders. All those involved will have to do their bit, and an ungrudging resolution of the refugee problem will have to play no inconsiderate part in that. It will require international support, and the Federal Republic of Germany – which has already provided aid for refugees – will not shirk its responsibilities.

[...]

**Letter of Chancellor Willy Brandt to Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir,
January 26th, 1972¹**

Madame Prime Minister,
dear Mrs. Meir,

thank you very much for your kind letter of November 29th.

I was pleased to hear that you found the visits of Alex Möller and of Günter Grass useful.

Günter Grass told me of your suggestion to hold an informal meeting of socialist leaders to talk about the situation in the Middle East. I think it a good idea. Perhaps the meeting to be held in June in Vienna would be a suitable occasion. If you prefer an earlier date, please let me know. I shall then think of another opportunity.

As for the recent developments in your region, I hope to be right in thinking that present efforts could help to bring the situation a little bit nearer to a solution. I am well aware of the difficulties lying ahead; but I am not without hope.

We ourselves continue to work hard to establish a *modus vivendi* between the two German states. We also started the ratification-procedure of the treaties signed in Moscow and Warsaw. I am confident they will become law as planned.

Forgive me for not writing earlier. I had a heavy schedule in December – including the meeting with President Nixon – before going on a two weeks-holiday from which I just returned.

¹ See the archival references of this letter in Note 36.

With warm personal regards,
yours sincerely
<Willy Brandt>²

² Handwritten signature.

**Letter of Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir to Chancellor Willy Brandt,
February 20th, 1972¹**

My dear Chancellor Brandt,

Thank you for your letter of <22 January 1972>².

I am glad to hear that my suggestion to Günter Grass to hold an informal meeting of socialist leaders to discuss the Middle Eastern situation is acceptable to you.

I plan to be in Singapore at the end of May 1972 to attend the conference of the Asia-Pacific Socialist Bureau. Later on, in June, while in Vienna for the International Socialist Conference, we may perhaps find the opportunity to hold our discussions on the Middle East. But this, of course, has to be planned in advance.

Thank you for the interest you show in our problems. Like many others in the world, I follow with great interest your activities which are always permeated with vision, daring and hope for a better world.

With warm personal regards and best wishes,

Sincerely yours,

<Golda Meir>³

Golda Meir

¹ See the archival references of this letter in Note 37.

² It must read correctly: "26 January, 1972." .

³ Handwritten signature.

Facsimile of the handwritten Notes of Chancellor Willy Brandt on his Discussions with Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir in Jerusalem, June 7th-9th, 1973¹

W.B.

GM mit: 7. + 9.6.73

Kairo hat auf bish. Höhe
Kontaktsverhältnisse nicht reagiert:
- Lammert
- Goldmann / Tito

Wie könnten Kairo weiter lassen:
- in beiden Hauptstädten
- wann, wo, wie?

Unklar. können hier GM Medien
geben, Dargestellt ist: auch,
auf neuen Wegen auf Hauptstädte
beide Städte eintragen.

Supra. Info: Mission - Kontakte
Iran -

Notizen: - Fides nicht für Exilisten 2.2
- Erwägungen in Rahmen
des 4. und 5. in London
2.2 geben. 43

¹ See the archival references of this document in Note 106.

English Translation of the handwritten Notes of Chancellor Willy Brandt on his Discussions with Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir in Jerusalem, June 7th–9th, 1973

W[illy] B[randt]

G[olda]Meir: 7. + 9. 6. 73

Cairo has not responded to previous contact attempts:

- Ceaucescu
- Goldmann/Tito

We could let Cairo know:

- there is a willingness to talk
- when, where, who?

Indep[endently] of this G[olda]M[eir] has asked Italians to tell Bourguiba: ready to take up his indication of being ready to talk.

Inform[ation] conc[erning]: Hussein – contacts
Iran – "

Distrust: – Sadat continues to oppose existence of I[srael]
– Discussions in the context of
the 4 would be at I[srael]'s expense.

**Letter of Chancellor Willy Brandt to Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir,
June 28th, 1973¹**

Madame Prime Minister,
dear Mrs. Meir,

since returning from Israel I have, as I suggested to you in our talks, been able to convey to both President Nixon and Secretary General Brezhnev as well as some other friendly Statesman [sic] my favourable impressions of your Government's will for peace. With President Pompidou I had a detailed talk about the situation in the Middle East during the recent consultations in Bonn. It is moreover intended to transmit a communication to a high-ranking personality in Cairo in the near future.

I hope that all this can serve common aim of initiating peace talks.

The Council of the European Community in Luxembourg has – not least as a result of German insistence – given the commission a mandate to negotiate with Israel at an early date a new agreement within the framework of a comprehensive Mediterranean concept.

I am convinced that this has been the first step towards embedding Israel in a constructive common Mediterranean polity of the community which by including additional States of the Middle East, might favourably influence the emergence of regional co-operation.

I have also been able to take up, from humanitarian points of view, the problem of Jewish inhabitants of neighbouring Arab States with which I was approached during my visit, but surely I need not tell you how hard it often is for humanity to prevail.

¹ See the archival references of this document in Note 162.

I was pleased to welcome the delegation of your party in Berlin. On that occasion I again felt deep satisfaction over the fact that as a result to the talks I had with you and other members of your Government during my visit to Israel and thanks to my contacts with the people in your country, we have been able, mindful of the burden of the past, to open up a new chapter in the relations between our two peoples. Let me use this opportunity to express to you once again my warm thanks for this.

With warm regards,
signed
Willy Brandt.

**Letter of Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir to Chancellor Willy Brandt,
July 29th, 1973¹**

Dear Mr. Chancellor,

Thank you for your letter of 28 June, 1973.

I am very pleased that you departed from Israel convinced of our will for peace. Knowing how dedicated you are to the cause of peace, your readiness to bear witness to this fact is of great importance and a source of deep satisfaction to me.

I am grateful to you for conveying to President Nixon and Secretary General Brezhnev, as well as to other statesmen, your impressions of Israel's aims and aspirations in this respect. Your decision to inform Egypt of these feelings was particularly welcome. I am of course sorry that the immediate Egyptian reaction to your initiative was so negative. I do hope, however, that it will serve as a contribution in convincing the Egyptians that a negotiated peace with Egypt and all other Arab countries is a central goal of a Israeli national policy, even if the differences regarding the terms of peace still remain very wide.

Now that the European Community has instructed the Commission to open negotiations with Israel, we hope that these negotiations will lead to a new agreement in the near future. The helpful attitude of the Federal Republic is greatly appreciated.

Let me add a special word of thanks for your humanitarian efforts on behalf of the Jews in Arab lands. I know the difficulties full well, but I also know that persistence often yields results in the end, and I trust that you will not be discouraged by the initial lack of response.

¹ See the archival references of this document in Note 165.

The Secretary General of the Israel Labour Party, Mr. Aaron Yadlin, spoke very warmly of his meeting with you together with his delegation.

I was touched by the sentiments expressed by you for the need to open a new chapter in the relations between our two peoples. We must certainly persist in our efforts to bring together our peoples in a spirit of friendship and understanding based on frankness and honesty so that a new structure of a meaningful relationship may be created.

Thank you for your warm regards. I very much reciprocate them.

<Golda Meir>²

Golda Meir

² Handwritten signature.