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The Cold War, the Arab world, and West Germany's 'Mediterranean moment', 1967–73

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ABSTRACT

After 1967, West Germany started to develop its own 'Arab policy'. Its initial focus was not the Arab peninsula, but North Africa, particularly Algeria and Libya. The main reasons were what Bonn perceived to be strategic necessity in the face of a Soviet advance there and convenience, as the North African states seemed more open to West German overtures in the late 1960s. But Bonn's strategy failed. By 1973 it re-calibrated its policy towards the Arab peninsula. Overall, this West German 'Mediterranean moment' illustrates how this 'Arab policy' was motivated by the dynamics of the Cold War in Central Europe.

KEYWORDS

Détente; West Germany; Middle East; Ostpolitik; East-West relations

I. A non-traditional Mediterranean power

Germany is not traditionally considered a Mediterranean power of the sort that France, Britain, or the United States are.[1] The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) featured in German imperial schemes and aspirations during the First and Second World War, but it never was the main theatre of operations for Berlin.[2] After 1949, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG, or West Germany) did not initially pay much attention to the region. For Adenauer, the MENA's role was mostly limited to reconciliation with Israel (*Aussöhnung*).[3] North Africa did not carry great

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[1]For British post-war policy towards the MENA see Wm. Roger Louis, "Britain in the Middle East after 1945," in *Diplomacy in the Middle East: The International Relations of Regional and Outside Powers*, ed. Carl Brown (London: IB Tauris, 2001), 21–58. For France, see Effie Pedaliu, "Fault Lines in the Post-War Mediterranean and the 'Birth of Southern Europe', 1945–75," in *Détente in Cold War Europe: Politics and Diplomacy in the Mediterranean and the Middle East*, ed. Elena Calandi, Daniele Caviglia and Antonio Varsori (London: IB Tauris, 2016). For the USA, see David Lesch, *The Middle East and the United States: History, Politics and Ideologies* (London: Routledge, 2018). For the Soviet Union see Alex Vasiliev, *Russia's Middle East Policy: From Lenin to Putin* (London: Routledge, 2018); or Galia Golan, *Soviet Politics in the Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

[2]On German relations with the Middle East during the First World War, see Sean McMeekin, *The Berlin-Baghdad Express: The Ottoman Empire and Germany's Bid for World Power* (London: Penguin, 2010). For the same topic in the context of the Second World War, see David Motadel, *Islam and Nazi Germany's War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014); or Ralf Georg Reuth, *Entscheidung im Mittelmeer: Die südliche Peripherie Europas in der deutschen Strategie des Zweiten Weltkriegs, 1940–1942* (Koblenz: Bernard&Graefe, 1985).

[3]On early West German-Israeli relations, see most recently Carole Fink, *West Germany and Israel: Foreign Relations, Domestic Politics, and the Cold War, 1965–1974* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019); or George Lavy, *Germany and Israel: Moral Debt and National Interest* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013). On East Germany and Israel see Lorena De Vita, "Overlapping Rivalries: the Two Germanys, Israel and the Cold War," *Cold War History* 17, no. 4 (2017): 351–66.

importance.[4] West Germany only slowly started to reassert itself as a sovereign and independent actor on the international plane in the 1950s on the back of strong economic growth.[5] Notably, this process culminated in the New Eastern Policy (*Ostpolitik*) by Willy Brandt, starting in 1969.

But Brandt's change in foreign policy was not limited to Eastern Europe. His style was also one of more generally engaging with countries and regions previously neglected by West German diplomacy.[6] One of those was the Middle East and therein particularly the Arab states, which by 1969 largely did not enjoy diplomatic relations with Bonn. Brandt set about to change this with a new Middle Eastern policy termed 'the policy of even-handedness'.[7] However, as this paper shows, already after the 1967 June War the FRG had started to turn its eye towards a part of the Arab world with which Germany has not usually been connected after 1945: the Western Mediterranean, and more specifically the Maghreb.

In this paper, I therefore turn to the question of West Germany's policy towards the Maghreb during the Cold War, focusing on the late 1960s and early 1970s. For this, I am relying on new and largely unpublished primary source material from West German government archives and archival editions.[8] These have not been available to the vast majority of authors writing on West German policy towards the Arab states.[9]

Ultimately, I will be making two broad arguments: firstly, that Cold War dynamics and therein the perceived need to engage with the Soviet Union in the Mediterranean played a larger role in West German strategic considerations towards the MENA region than often asserted.[10] The crucial event in this context was the Six-Day War of 1967. To the FRG, it had conveyed a sense of a Soviet advance in the Mediterranean, particularly in Algeria, which had negative impact on West Germany's security within Europe. The FRG thus viewed the Cold War in the Middle East and Europe as connected and interrelated.

[4]This is worked out well in a recent publication by von Bülow in a rare piece of historical research on Germany and North Africa after 1945, focusing on the FRG's role as FLN sanctuary during the Algerian war for independence in the 1950s: Mathilde von Bülow, *West Germany, Cold War Europe and the Algerian War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

[5]Marc Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement, 1945–1963* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

[6]Carole Fink and Bernd Schaefer, *Ostpolitik, 1969–1974: European and Global Responses* (Washington, DC: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

[7]Friedemann Buettner, "Germany's Middle East Policy: The Dilemmas of a 'Policy of Even-Handedness' (Politik der Ausgewogenheit)," in *Germany and the Middle East: Past, Present and Future*, ed. Haim Goren (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Press, 2003), 115–59.

[8]A large part of the documents used for this paper – and most of the thus far unpublished ones – come from the Political Archive of the German Federal Foreign Office (Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts – PA/AA) . Key documents from those archives are also regularly published and available in the editions on German foreign policy making (Akten der Auswärtigen Politik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland – AAPD). Another source is the minutes of the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs in the German parliament.

[9]As examples for this, see Peter Hünseler, *Die außenpolitischen Beziehungen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland zu den arabischen Staaten von 1949–1990* (Frankfurt am Main: Europäische Hochschulschriften, 1990); Karl Kaiser and Udo Steinbach, *Deutsch-arabische Beziehungen: Bestimmungsfaktoren und Probleme einer Neuorientierung* (Munich: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 1982). Hünseler, in *Die außenpolitischen Beziehungen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland,* states that some of his claims might have to be reconsidered once relevant archival material becomes accessible (Ibid., 11). There are two exceptions, but they focus on Egypt and the topic of the Arab-Israeli conflict respectively. See Dalia Abu-Samra, "Deutschlands Außenpolitik gegenüber Ägypten. Abbruch und Wiederaufnahme der Beziehungen" (PhD Thesis, Berlin: Freie Universität, 2002); and Daniel Gerlach, *Die doppelte Front: Die Bundesrepublik Deutschland und der Nahostkonflikt, 1967–1973* (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2006).

[10]See Rolf Steininger, *Deutschland und der Nahe Osten: von Kaiser Willhelms Orientreise bis zur Gegenwart* (Reinbek: Lau Verlag, 2015); Gerlach, *Doppelte Front*; or Buettner, *Dilemmas of a 'Policy of Even-Handedness.'*

My second point is an interconnected one: that in response to 1967 the FRG attempted to re-engage with the Arab states through a specific 'Arab policy' and for this took a rather unusual route: it focused on the Maghreb, namely Algeria and Libya, as the Arab peninsula was largely closed off to a stronger West German engagement.[11] There, countries like Egypt, Syria, or Iraq had strengthened their ties to the Soviet Union as well as East Germany and were thus unsympathetic towards West German advances. As a result, Bonn initially focused on improving its relations with Algeria and strengthening its position in Libya. To a large extent, therefore, convenience drove this new, West German strategy in the Western Mediterranean.

But this strategic calculus was not met with success. Focusing too much on Cold War dynamics, Bonn misread Algerian and Libyan interests, proved unable to balance the necessities of its Mediterranean strategy with its policy towards East Germany (*Deutschlandpolitik*), and overestimated the potential of its 'chequebook diplomacy'.[12] Then, after the 1973 oil crisis and Anwar al-Sadat's opening towards the West, the FRG shifted attention away from the Maghreb towards the Levant and the Gulf, removing the element of convenience and necessity from Bonn's policy focus on the Maghreb.

Overall, this was a rather short and unsuccessful moment for the FRG in the Western Mediterranean. But this does not make it by any means irrelevant. It is remarkable as it illustrates the extent to which West Germany did, after 1967, consider itself a political actor in the MENA region. It thus highlights that the FRG's interests therein went beyond reconciliation with Israel or mere oil interests, but were instead more closely related to the Cold War politics than previous scholarship has asserted.[13] In its focus on a West German 'Arab policy', this article also builds on previous scholarship on relations between Germany and the Arab as well as Islamic world, none of which, however, covers the period after 1967.[14] Moreover, it leads on from where von Bülow finished her study of the role of Algeria and its war for independence during the 1950s.[15] Her excellent book showed what has been missed out by the widespread neglect of North Africa in previous scholarship on German foreign policy. Finally, this paper also challenges claims by Buettner and Gerlach that Germany did not have a specific policy towards the Arab states.[16] Such a policy was planned and executed by Bonn in the late 1960s and early 1970s, albeit with limited success. But lack of success should not be confused with lack of strategy.

[11]Notes by Gehlhoff, 11 February 1970, Document 48, AAPD. Here, Foreign Minister Walter Scheel explicitly talks about an "Arab policy" (*arabische Politik*).

[12]On economics as a tool for foreign policy, see Ullrich Damm, *Die Bundesrepublik Deutschland und die Entwicklungsländer* (Geneva: Graphischer Betrieb Hans Biehl, 1965). For a more recent take, see Hans Kundnani, "Germany as a Geo-Economic Power," *The Washington Quarterly* 34, no. 4 (2011): 31–45.

[13]See, for example, the characterisation of West German Middle Eastern policy by Joffe, who sees *moralpolitik* pushing Bonn to Israel and *realpolitik* pulling it towards Arab markets and oil, while the Cold War is merely a backdrop before which this engagement plays out: Josef Joffe, "Reflections on German Policy in the Middle East," in *Germany and the Middle East: Patterns and Prospects*, ed. Shahram Chubin (London: Pinter, 1992), 195–209.

[14]Examples are Francis Nicosia, *Nazi Germany and the Arab World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Motadel, *Islam and Nazi Germany's War*; McMeekin, *Berlin-Baghdad Express*; or von Bülow, *West Germany, Cold War Europe and the Algerian War*. Also, a large amount of work understandably deals with Germany's relations with Israel after 1945, stressing questions of guilt and reconciliation (see n. 3). That does, however, leave aside other important topics, such as the impact of Cold War dynamics on West German foreign policy in the MENA region.

[15]Von Bülow, *West Germany, Cold War Europe and the Algerian War*.

[16]Gerlach, *Doppelte Front*; and Buettner, *Dilemmas of a 'Policy of Even-Handedness'*.

Maybe Buettner's and Gerlach's view is understandable. Germany is not classically understood as a Mediterranean and Middle Eastern power. However, being a state in the centre of Europe it is directly affected by events in Europe's adjacent MENA region. Thus, and in light of the above-mentioned examples of German meddling in Middle Eastern politics, Germany clearly does have interests, of one sort or another, in its dealing with the Arab states as well. Ultimately, the West German 'Mediterranean moment' demonstrates the extent to which the geopolitics of Central Europe shaped and emanated towards West German Middle Eastern policy.

II. 1967: the Six-Day War and its impact on West German foreign policy

The main reason for the increased importance of the Middle East in West German foreign policy making after 1967 was the Six-Day War. To paraphrase Segev, it transformed the Middle East and thereby also fundamentally changed the West German perception of Middle Eastern politics.[17]

Before the war, the FRG had shown a restrained attitude towards the region. In fact, politically it was mostly excluded from it. The region had proved to be a diplomatic minefield for the young West German state. In early 1965, Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser had invited East German head of state Walter Ulbricht to a private visit to Egypt. It was Nasser's angry reaction to media reports about West German weapons deliveries to Israel. When, in turn, the FRG publicly discussed ceasing developmental assistance for Cairo and then opened diplomatic relations with Israel in May 1965, Nasser was furious and immediately cut diplomatic ties with West Germany.[18] All Arab states – except Morocco, Libya, and Tunisia – followed suit. After this crisis, Germany, both West and East, was no longer a political presence in large parts of the Arab world.[19]

Bonn's reaction to this was rather reserved. Trade with the Arab states remained largely 105unaffected by the break-up of diplomatic relations, and the West German government did not feel that it had significant political interests in the region which would be hurt by the breakup of diplomatic relations.[20] Political interests, the West German government pondered, it had few in the region in any case. Thus, the FRG's official stance on the Middle East was one of non-interference, not delivering weapons to any state in it.[21] Bonn did not even care to formulate a concrete position towards the Arab-Israeli conflict.

But after the Six-Day War, the West German government decided that this restrained attitude was no longer tenable. On a regional level, the conflict heralded the failure of Arab nationalism of a Nasserist flavour, demonstrated Israel's military superiority in the region, and led to a geographic expansion of Israel's size with significant consequences

[17]Tom Segev, *Israel, the War, and the Year that Transformed the Middle East* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 2008).
[18]see Hünseler, *Deutsch-arabische Beziehungen*.
[19]On the competition between the FRG and GDR in the Middle East, see Massimiliano Trentin, "'Tough Negotiations': The Two Germany's in Syria and Iraq, 1963–1974," *Cold War History* 8, no. 3 (2008): 353–80; de Vita, *Overlapping Rivalries*. On the same topic in general, see William Glenn Gray, *Germany's Cold War: The Global Campaign to Isolate East-Germany, 1949–1969* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); and Werner Kilian, *Die Hallstein-Doktrin: Der diplomatische Krieg zwischen der BRD und der DDR, 1955–1973* (Berlin: Dunckler&Humblot, 2001).
[20]Abu-Samra, *Deutschlands Außenpolitik gegenüber Ägypten*, 179; see also comments by ministerial director Meyer-Lindenberg, cited in Yeshayahu Jelinek, *Deutschland und Israel 1945–1965: Ein neurotisches Verhältnis* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 2004), 798.
[21]Memorandum by Meyer-Lindenberg, 27 July 1967, Document 283, AAPD.

for both its internal makeup and the Palestinian question.[22] But on an international level, the war's most important effect was to enshrine the Middle East conflict in the landscape of the Cold War.[23] Amongst the Western alliance there was a feeling that the war had, from a global perspective, worsened the situation in the Middle East.[24] Arab reliance on Soviet weaponry and support became even more apparent and the Western powers identified a continuous expansion of Soviet influence in the Mediterranean, be it in Egypt, Syria, Iraq, or Algeria. This feeling was also prevalent in Bonn. It is this closer connection between East-West competition and the Arab-Israeli conflict that convinced the FRG, which after all was one of the Cold War's key battlegrounds, of the need to engage more strongly in the Middle East.[25] As soon as the war ended, Bonn started to formulate its interests in the region increasingly through the lens of the Cold War. A memorandum written in June 1967, only two weeks after the Six-Day War, specifically names 'protection of the South-Eastern flank of Europe from increasing Soviet penetration' as a key West German interest in the Middle East.[26] Why did the West German government, previously rather content in its role as bystander in the MENA region, feel affected by the conflagration of the Cold War in the Middle East?

Firstly, the Six-Day War ended a policy perception in the West German foreign office (Auswärtiges Amt). After 1965, the attitude in German political circles had been that over time the issue of re-establishing diplomatic relations with the Arab states would more or less sort itself out.[27] But it soon became clear that Bonn had miscalculated, as no quick re-establishment of diplomatic relations followed. The Six-Day War made matters even worse. The foreign office in Bonn observed an anti-West German campaign by Moscow and East Berlin in the Arab states. There were claims that the FRG, which had sent 20,000 gas masks to Israel when the war started, had directly aided the Israeli effort through weapons and mercenaries.[28] As a result, there were even rumours of GDR (German Democratic Republic, or East Germany) recognition by all Arab League states at their summit in Khartoum of August that year, but this was just about averted by a well-coordinated campaign by the Auswärtiges Amt.[29] Overall, however, the war and its aftermath had weakened the FRG's stature in the Middle East as well as its ability to re-establish diplomatic relations with most of the Arab states.

Secondly, Bonn's worries about this were directly linked to the Cold War and the strength of the Soviet Union in the region. At the time, the clear Arab defeat was interpreted by the West as cause for an increase rather than a decrease of Soviet influence over its Arab allies and client states.[30] Now more than ever, the NATO partners ventured,

[22]Nigel Ashton, *The Cold War in the Middle East: Regional Conflict and the Superpowers 1967–1973* (London: Routledge, 1997), 1.

[23]Ennio Di Nolfo, "The Cold War and the Transformation of the Mediterranean, 1960–1975," in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War, Vol. 2*, ed. Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 247; see also George Lenczowski, *American Presidents and the Middle East* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), 113.

[24]Grewe (NATO) to Auswärtiges Amt, 14 June 1967, Document 220, AAPD.

[25]Frank Costigiola, "US Foreign Policy from Kennedy to Johnson," in *Cambridge History of the Cold War, Vol. 2*, ed. Leffler and Westad, 119.

[26]Memorandum by Meyer-Lindenberg, 23 June 1967, Document 232, AAPD.

[27]See, for example, "Prestige ist nicht so wichtig," *Handelsblatt*, 19 October 1966.

[28]Grewe (Paris/NATO) to Auswärtiges Amt, 30 June 1967, Document 242, AAPD.

[29]Confidential telegram to embassies in Ankara, Teheran, Islamabad, Kabul, and Mogadishu, 28 July 1967, B130 2575A, PA/AA; Memorandum by Söhnke, 8 August 1967, B130 2575A, PA/AA.

[30]Di Nolfo, *Cold War and Transformation of the Mediterranean*, 247.

the Arab states depended on Soviet weapons deliveries.[31] In a memorandum from October 1967, the Middle Eastern unit in the Auswärtiges Amt (IB 4) wrote: 'There can be no interest in the [Middle Eastern] crisis smouldering on, as this will inevitably impede a rapprochement between the West and the Arab states. Only the Soviet Union would profit from such a development.'[32] The states most affected by this trend were considered to be Syria and Egypt.[33] Another worrying development was the encroachment of the Soviet Union towards the Western Mediterranean. Algeria was considered an important target in Soviet grand strategy and the West was worried that Moscow might be able to establish a naval and air force base in the former French colony.[34] This would have represented an increase in reach for the Soviet Mediterranean fleet, called the *Eskadra*, which did not have any aircraft carriers at its disposal.

The *Eskadra* had been a presence in the Mediterranean since 1964 but had grown significantly in size after the Six-Day War. While it was checked by the US 6th Fleet, its presence 'underlines that the Soviets are considering taking over the military supremacy of the West, in particular of the US, in the Mediterranean'.[35] Thus, the perceived strength of the Soviet Union in the Middle East after the Six-Day War was considered through a genuine Cold War lens by the FRG, rather than just seen as another dimension of Middle Eastern politics, only. After all, as the central battleground for the Cold War the FRG was almost automatically affected by any development in the superpower contest. After the Six-Day War, therefore, Bonn did not view events in the Middle East as separate from events in Central Europe, but as increasingly interconnected. For example, West German Chancellor Kurt-Georg Kiesinger worried about a negative spill-over effect of the defeat of Moscow's allies to the situation in Europe. Shortly after the war, he told the US ambassador to Bonn: 'One would not know which step the Russians would take next. After all, there were other potential sources of danger, such as Berlin etc.'[36]

The third and final reason for West Germany's shift of focus towards the Middle East related to its antagonistic relationship with the GDR. The late 1960s certainly were a time when West German foreign policy evolved largely around the question of *Alleinvertretung*, the struggle between Bonn and East Berlin over which of the two would be the one, internationally recognised Germany.[37] West German foreign policy until 1969 was characterised by the Hallstein Doctrine, which considered the recognition of the GDR by a third state as a hostile act. Now, there was a fear in the Auswärtiges Amt that, in Moscow's wake, East Berlin might enter the vacuum that the FRG had left in the Arab states in 1965.[38] Thus, concerns about the stronger Soviet position in the Mediterranean also related to Bonn's competition with the GDR. These worries were, in fact, not unsubstantiated, as it would be in the Arab states where the GDR achieved its global, diplomatic breakthrough. In the aftermath of the Baathist coup of 1968 it continued to improve relations with Iraq, and

[31]Memorandum by Gehlhoff, 20 July 1967, B130 2646A, PA/AA.
[32]Speaking notes by IB 4 on the situation in the Middle East, 9 October 1967, B130 2569A, PA/AA.
[33]Lahn (Cairo) to Auswärtiges Amt, 13 March 1968, Document 95, AAPD.
[34]Grewe (Paris/NATO) to Auswärtiges Amt, 21 June 1967, Document 229, AAPD.
[35]Memorandum by Ministry of Defence, 22 September 1967, B130 2578A, PA/AA.
[36]Conversation of Kiesinger with US ambassador McGhee, 19 June 1967, Document 225, AAPD.
[37]See n. 19 for international German-German relations and antagonism.
[38]Memorandum by Meyer-Lindenberg, 23 June 1967, Document 232, AAPD.

ultimately managed to gain recognition by Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and South Yemen in the summer of 1969.[39]

Overall, then, three reasons necessitated a stronger focus by Bonn on the Arab states after the Six-Day War: its overly optimistic attitude towards the Arab states before June 1967; Cold War dynamics and the perceived strengthening of the Soviet Union in the Mediterranean, both Western and Eastern; and the threat of a GDR advance in the left-leaning Arab states. At the same time, the FRG found itself in a difficult situation. While both the governments and the German public's sympathies had been with Israel at the Six-Day war's outset, it was now worried by the outcome of the struggle as far as its relations with the Arab states were concerned.

Bonn therefore intended to gain a stronger and more visible political position in the Arab states, to prevent a recognition of the GDR and, within the Western alliance, contain a Soviet advance in the Mediterranean. But the Near East was largely closed off for any such effort due to effective East German propaganda efforts and Moscow's strong position in Cairo, Damascus, and Baghdad. Instead, Bonn's focus now turned to a region which has not usually been considered a priority of West German foreign policy: the Maghreb.

III. 1968–69: discovering North Africa

In November 1967, West German MP Hans-Jürgen Wischnewski travelled to New York for something of a back-channel meeting. Wischnewski was not a member of the West German government, but party manager of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD). At that time, the SPD was the junior partner in Bonn's governing Grand Coalition with the larger, conservative CDU/CSU (Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union in Bavaria). SPD leader Willy Brandt, however, occupied the Foreign Office.

Wischnewski was not only a senior SPD party functionary; he was also the SPD's man for the Arab states. In the early 1960s, he had been a leading member of an FLN friend group within the SPD during the Algerian war of independence.[40] He was extremely well connected in the Arab world and over the next two decades became an important point of contact in the relations between the FRG and the Arab states.

Wischnewski flew to New York to meet with Abdelaziz Bouteflika on 27 November 1967. At the time, Bouteflika was Algerian foreign minister. Their meeting lasted for four hours. It did not start well. In the words of West German diplomat and note-taker Walter Gehlhoff: 'The conversation [...] initially was very sluggish and was conducted by Bouteflika in an often very hesitant and taciturn way.'[41] But over time, tensions eased and both sides opened up increasingly. Halfway through the conversation, when Wischnewski pointed towards the issue of the Palestinians, Bouteflika stated that Algeria had never been as compassionate about the topic as the East Arab states. Ultimately, Algeria would put its own national interest first. Bouteflika added: 'We [the West Germans] should consider whether we would not want to make Algeria the linchpin of our efforts to re-establish

[39]On the Baathist coup and Arab politics, see Eberhard Kienle, *Ba'th versus Ba'th: The Conflict between Syria and Iraq, 1968–1989* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1991).

[40]von Bülow, *West Germany, Cold War Europe and the Algerian War*, 232–4.

[41]Memorandum by Gehlhoff, 29 November 1967, Document 410, AAPD.

diplomatic relations with the Arab world [...].'[42] Then, he turned to economic questions. He ended the conversation by asking for a second meeting later that day, where he hoped to hear more about the FRG's view on the future development of its relations with Algeria.

Wischnewski got the cue. That second meeting in the evening of the same day only lasted 90 minutes but must have been markedly different. Instead of taciturnity, Gehlhoff now noted Bouteflika's 'cordiality'.[43] Wischnewski stressed the great political, as well as, importantly, economic potential of West German-Algerian relations and Bonn's interest in establishing diplomatic relations with Algiers. He indicated that the exchange of ambassadors would be rewarded by economic aid and increases in trade, a deal that the Auswärtiges Amt continuously prohibited its envoys to offer to other Arab states.[44] But apparently Algeria was important enough a case to make an exception from this principle. Bouteflika seemed content and both sides agreed to engage in further discussions. The scene, it seemed, was set for a stronger German engagement in the Western Mediterranean.

Libya, the state from which the FRG imported almost half of its entire oil supplies, became another focal point of West German policy in the Maghreb.[45] Bonn could ill afford the country to switch from the Western to the Eastern camp but had worries regarding the stability of King Idris' rule.[46] Bonn framed its foreign policy interests in Cold War terms. For example, while the FRG generally strictly refused to deliver weapons into the MENA region, Brandt personally supported the sale of armoured vehicles to Libya in July 1967 in a letter to Kiesinger, as 'there is a danger that [the Libyans] will buy in the East if we do not deliver.'[47]

Of course, the FRG also had to take its allies into consideration when it came to engaging in the Maghreb, particularly the French. 'The Southern Coast of the Mediterranean was in a way "complementary" to Europe', a senior West German diplomat told French colleagues in January 1968.[48] At the time, the relationship to Paris regarding the Mediterranean seems to have been a complicated one, as the West Germans recognised France's special relationship with Algeria due to its colonial past. Algeria itself became a recurring topic of discussion in the regular political consultations the West Germans held with France.[49] And in October 1968, the topic of the Mediterranean was officially included as recurring talking point for West German-French political consultations.[50]

But at the same time, Bonn was distrustful of French president's Charles de Gaulle's policy in the MENA region as a whole. The French, Bonn felt, diverged too much from the main Western line in their greater openness towards Moscow. An internal Foreign Office memorandum states:

[42]Ibid.
[43]Ibid.
[44]See, for example, Bente (Beirut) to Auswärtiges Amt, 14 October 1967, Document 353, AAPD.
[45]Memorandum by Bismarck-Ohnken, 9 June 1967, B52 337, PA/AA.
[46]Telex from Tripoli embassy, 5 July 1967, B36 260, PA/AA.
[47]Brandt to Kiesinger, 24 July 1967, Document 279, AAPD.
[48]Memorandum by Caspari, 26 January 1968, B36 379, PA/AA.
[49]See, for example, German-French consultations on North Africa, 26 January 1968, B36 379, PA/AA; or Franco-German political consultations (political directors), 2 December 1968, B36 379, PA/AA.
[50]Memorandum by Frank, 21 October 1968, B36 379, PA/AA.

> The French government imposes a very passive line on itself as far as its statements to the Soviet presence in the Mediterranean goes. It probably is not too unhappy that thereby a counterbalance to American influence in the Mediterranean has emerged.[51]

Only later, under de Gaulle's successor Georges Pompidou, did Bonn recognise France's more active anti-Soviet posture in the Mediterranean and attempted to coordinate its Mediterranean policy more closely with Paris.[52]

The Prague Spring in 1968 led to a general increase in tensions and mistrust towards the Soviet Union in the West German government. In this context, the advance of the Soviets in the Mediterranean, Europe's soft underbelly, was more worrisome than ever, and was viewed by Bonn as part of a more general trend in Soviet foreign policy. As a memorandum by the foreign office's unit dealing with NATO policy from May 1968 states:

> The Soviet military presence in the Mediterranean is not an isolated phenomenon, but an indicator for a change in Soviet defence policy, thus far focusing on continental defence. [...] She [the Soviet Union] has in particular realised the potential of a fleet as instrument of foreign policy in peace times and is currently trying to get used to wielding it.[53]

In the Western Mediterranean, Algeria was identified as a target of Soviet activity, a conclusion corroborated by rumours in October 1968 that the Soviets had been granted the Algerian naval base of Mers El-Kebir, although these ultimately turned out to be unsubstantiated.[54]

Two further documents show the extent to which towards the late 1960s relations with the Maghreb started to be dominated by Cold War thinking in Bonn. One of them is a negotiation instruction to Wischnewski for another meeting with Bouteflika. In it, the Auswärtiges Amt identifies an active role for the FRG in checking the Soviets within Algeria. At the outset it states:

> In the past years the Soviet Union has succeeded in establishing itself firmly in the Eastern Mediterranean. It is clearly intending to extend its dominant role into the Western Mediterranean as well, where Algeria offers the best point of entry. It is the political and strategic interest of the Federal Republic as well as of the entire West to close this gap and prevent that North Africa too becomes subject to Soviet domination.[55]

Why was Algeria of such importance both in West German and Soviet strategic thinking? One reason lay in Algeria's hard-power potential, as 'it represents the coast opposite of Spain, allows from its territory the control of traffic between Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean and extends deep into Africa.'[56] The other more likely relates to the

[51]Memorandum by Behrends, 7 February 1968, B130 4313A, PA/AA. That Bonn was not satisfied with De Gaulle's *laissez-faire* attitude on the issue is also illustrated by explicit West German support for the tougher Italian stance on the issue during NATO meetings: Ohncken (Brussels/NATO) to Auswärtiges Amt, 7 March 1968, B130 4313A, PA/AA.

[52]Von Braun (Paris) to Auswärtiges Amt, 24 March 1970, B26 421, PA/AA; Conversation of Brandt with Pompidou, 26 January 1971, AAPD. In the early 1970s, foreign policy coordination with France was further expanded by adding a European dimension to it through the European Political Cooperation (EPC). One of its key areas of application was the Middle East. On the first years of the EPC, see Daniel Möckli, *European Foreign Policy during the Cold War: Heath, Brandt, Pompidou and the Dream of Political Unity* (London: IB Tauris, 2009).

[53]Memorandum by Behrends, 9 May 1968, B130 4313A, PA/AA.

[54]Ibid.; on the Mers El-Kebir rumours, see Strenziok (Algiers) to Auswärtiges Amt, 16 October 1968, B36 308, PA/AA.

[55]Memorandum by departments I and III, Document 193, 9 June 1969, AAPD.

[56]Memorandum by Behrends, 9 May 1968, B130 4313A, PA/AA.

North African country's soft-power role, which – having recently won its sovereignty in one of the world's most prominent struggles for post-colonial independence – at the time was still perceived not only as that of a leading Arab, but also non-aligned state in the early days of 'Third Worldism'. A strong position in Algiers, the 'Mecca of Revolutionaries', was worth more than just the sum of its geographic position, economic value, or military strength to both East and West.[57]

The second document illustrating West Germany's Cold War lens on the Western Mediterranean by the late 1960s was Bonn's reaction to the 1969 Libyan coup which gave power to Ghaddafi. The coup, brought about by a Free Officer's Movement similar to that of Nasser in Egypt in 1952, stressed themes of national independence, Arab unity, and anti-Westernism.[58] In his assessment of the event's consequences, one of the Foreign Office's most senior diplomats, Paul Frank, focused almost solely on this latter aspect:

> The case of Libya once again shows the extent to which the unsolved Middle Eastern crisis affects the domestic situation in the Arab states, opens new channels of influence to the Soviet Union and endangers the position of the [Western] alliance.[59]

Thus, a mix of convenience and necessity motivated the West German turn of focus towards the Maghreb. There were strategic interests involved, relating strongly to the Soviet advance in the Mediterranean, as well as to the struggle with the GDR and oil. But, significantly, the Maghreb was attractive for stronger West German engagement simply because the Mashreq was not. As previously mentioned, the Arab states in the latter were difficult for Bonn to engage in, leaving the states in the former for the Auswärtige Amt to focus on if it really wanted to leave a bigger West German footprint in the Arab world.

In view of this, it is probably unsurprising that Bonn's diplomats started to tackle the topic of the Mediterranean more coherently. In October 1968, the secretary of state in the Auswärtiges Amt briefed cabinet on the situation in the Mediterranean. It begins as follows:

> The Mediterranean can be viewed less than other geographic regions as coherent unit. [...] This complicates [the] conception of general Mediterranean policy, which thus far is largely mostly sum of different bilateral relations and developments, but does not absolve West, in particular Western Europe and thereby Germany, too, of the necessity, to formulate Mediterranean policy and act thereby.[60]

He concluded: 'Elaboration of a detailed German Mediterranean policy should be aimed for.'[61] Shortly after, an internal working group in the Amt was convened for that very reason, bringing together various divisions and units concerned by the topic.[62] But less than 12 months away from national elections in the FRG, the timing for such a profound endeavour was hardly ideal. West German politics was already in campaign mood. In late September 1969, the West Germans voted and for the first time in the FRG's history the

[57]For a recent take on Algeria's role in the Non-Aligned movement, see Jeffrey James Byrne, *Mecca of Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

[58]Dirk Vandewalle, ed., *Libya since 1969: Qhadafi's Revolution Revisited* (Palgrave Macmillan: New York, 2008).

[59]Memorandum by Gehlhoff, 8 September 1969, Document 281, AAPD.

[60]Notes by Frank, 14 October 1968, B41 54, PA/AA. While not explicitly stated in the document, the secretary of state carrying out the briefing was most likely Duckwitz, who oversaw, amongst others, policy towards the Mediterranean.

[61]Ibid.

[62]Notes by IA 4, 5 December 1968, B36 401, PA/AA.

Social Democrats won. Brandt became chancellor and the Auswärtige Amt went to the new junior partner in the coalition, the Free Liberals (FDP) under Walter Scheel.

IV. 1970–73: unfulfilled hopes

Brandt's new government had a strong foreign policy focus, as it 'was prepared to acknowledge the consequences of World War II'.[63] This included a de facto recognition of the German territorial losses in Poland and the existence of another Germany in the East. In the MENA region, the Hallstein Doctrine had reached an impasse with the recognition of the GDR by Iraq, Syria, and Egypt in the summer of 1969. With no West German embassy in either of these countries, Bonn could not even consider the doctrine's most extreme consequence, the severance of diplomatic relations. Moreover, the new West German government also saw a close link between events in the Mediterranean and its policy of *détente* in Europe, fearful that full-scale war in the former would spill over to the latter and terminate *rapprochement* to the Soviets.[64] As a draft speech by Scheel in the German parliament states: 'The Mediterranean, too, has to become part of the concept of a European peace policy. Progress of the latter will help to reduce tensions in the former as well.'[65]

Brandt had already shown his willingness to engage more directly in the Middle East as foreign minister and Scheel's FDP was generally considered the most pro-Arab party in West German parliament.[66] Shortly after assuming office, Brandt therefore announced that his government aimed to establish even-handed relations with all states of the MENA region, signalling the FRG's intent to take the Arab world more into consideration.

Even more than before, the new administration purposefully chose the route via the Maghreb for its improvement of relations with the Arab world. On 10 February 1970, the heads of the social liberal coalition, together with senior civil servants, met for an almost three-hour-long discussion of what their new Middle Eastern policy should look like. Brandt was there, of course, as was Scheel, Wischnewski, Minister for International Development Eppler, Foreign Office mandarins such as Secretary of State Duckwitz or Ministerial Director Frank, to name the most important ones. Brandt opened the meeting with a commitment to a balanced Middle Eastern policy which was to improve relations with the Arab without neglecting the FRG's relationship to Israel. He then added: 'In any case, our relationship to the Arabs can probably be strengthened in the Maghreb first.'[67] Again, convenience played a key role in Bonn's turn towards the Mediterranean.

Almost immediately, then, another push was made to talk to the Algerians, as 'for the establishment of the closest possible bond between Europe and the North African region

[63]Fink and Schaefer, *Ostpolitik*, 2.

[64]See comments by then Minister of Defence Helmut Schmidt to the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, 25th session on the 12 November 1970, where he told CDU parliamentarians: 'The treaty [of Moscow] does not have to fail because the CDU/CSU wants to stop it. […] But it could fail because, for example, SALT fails dramatically, it could fail because a new war starts in the middle east.' Wolfgang Hölscher, ed., *Auswärtiger Ausschuss des Deutschen Bundestags: Sitzungsprotokolle 1969–1972* (Düsseldorf: Leinen, 2007), 423.

[65]Notes by Hansen, 20 February 1970, B26 471, PA/AA. See also a conversation of Parliamentary Secretary of State Moersch with Tunisian ambassador Mestiri, Notes by ZA 5, 15 March 1971, B36 438, PA/AA.

[66]Hünseler *Deutsch-Arabische Beziehungen*, 188; Gerlach, *Doppelte Front*, 29.

[67]Notes by Gehlhoff, 11 February 1970, Document 48, AAPD.

that we are envisaging together with the other European countries to counter Soviet influence, Algeria holds a key position'.[68] In early 1970, first Brandt himself and then twice Scheel directly met Bouteflika for talks.[69] The last meeting between Scheel and Bouteflika in Rome ran over an entire seven hours. By then, Wischnewski was no longer required to serve as backchannel. He had played an important role as facilitator, in particular of West German-Algerian contacts. However, one would go too far to consider Bonn's focus on the Maghreb merely his own project. As the documents from the Foreign Office quoted earlier show, a closer West German focus on the Arab states was very much in line with the broader thinking within the Auswärtige Amt.

Broadly, the lines of argument in the talks between Algiers and Bonn were as follows: both sides were in principle interested in re-establishing diplomatic relations, but there would be a price tag for it. This, the West Germans accepted in principle. But how much would it be? The Algerians were thinking of 400 million Deutsche Mark (DM) aid per year, whereas the Auswärtige Amt was willing to consider the same amount only over a time span of five years.[70] Also, there was a political dimension to the issue. Algeria, Bouteflika told Brandt in January 1970, had to consider its special relationship to other socialist countries of the world.[71] A month later, it became clear what he meant by that. In Brussels, he told Scheel that it would be difficult for Algeria to establish diplomatic relations only with West Germany, now that other Arab states had embassies in East Berlin. Algeria should be allowed to simultaneously engage in relations with both Germanys.[72] So Algiers considered this question through the lens of Arab, rather than Cold War politics. This went against the West German strategy, which was that first Bonn and East Berlin should settle their respective relationship, before other countries would do the same with the GDR. Bonn, at the time in talks with the East Germans about a Basic Treaty (Grundlagenvertrag), wanted to keep pressure high on East Berlin internationally.[73]

It is noteworthy how even under the Brandt-Scheel administration there were still traces of the Hallstein Doctrine's logic. While in Europe, Ostpolitik had almost immediately led to a change in attitude towards the Warsaw Pact states, in the Middle East such changes only happened with a delay. Scheel's logic to keep pressure on the GDR to normalise relations with the FRG by upholding the principle that in any Arab states there could only be one German embassy in fact meant that little changed for the countries of the region. Only after the normalisation of German-German relations in 1971 would the latter fully replace the former in the Middle East. Ultimately, there was little immediate tension between Hallstein Doctrine and Ostpolitik right after Brandt became chancellor. The

[68]Notes by Frank, 6 April 1970, B130 4533A, PA/AA.

[69]Conversation of Brandt with Bouteflik, 8 January 1970, Document 4, AAPD; Scheel's meetings were in February (Conversation of Scheel with Bouteflika, 11 February 1970, Document 47, AAPD; Notes by Gehlhoff, 26 February 1970, Document 78, AAPD).

[70]Memorandum by Gehlhoff and Hauthal, 18 June 1969, B130 10084A, PA/AA.

[71]Conversation of Brandt with Bouteflika, 8 January 1970, Document 4, AAPD.

[72]Conversation of Scheel with Bouteflika, 11 February 1970, Document 47, AAPD.

[73]Secretary of state in the Auswärtiges Amt Duckwitz mused whether the FRG should still open an embassy in Algeria, even despite the GDR embassy there. Brandt and Scheel did not reject the idea outright, though ultimately they decided that their policy on German-German rapprochement would need to take priority. Still, the episode illustrates the weight Algeria was given in West German government circles at the time (Duckwitz to Brandt, 25 March 1970, Document 133, AAPD).

Hallstein Doctrine might have been pronounced 'dead' officially in 1969, but it nonetheless lived quite an afterlife outside of Europe.[74]

Moreover, the atmosphere of the talks with Algiers seemed to have been a strained one, with the German note-takers complaining about unrealistic demands and stubbornness on the part of the Algerians.[75] There was no significant movement on either side regarding the financial dimension of the deal, and while Scheel conceded that the FRG would not open an embassy in Egypt, Syria, and Iraq until Algeria would have had the chance to open one in the GDR, Bouteflika continued to demand complete freedom of movement in Algiers' relations to East Berlin.[76] In a conversation with a US colleague, a West German diplomat conceded that the Algerians remained tough interlocutors.[77]

Ultimately, the negotiations led nowhere. In April 1970, Brandt met with Scheel and the head of his chancellery, Horst Ehmke, to make a final decision on the Algerian issue. They would not agree to Bouteflika's demand to open two German embassies in Algiers simultaneously.[78] Already a month earlier, Brandt had told Britain's Prime Minister Wilson that 'the Federal Republic could recently have established diplomatic relations with Algeria but had not done so as it would have been too expensive for us.'[79] On 20 May 1970, Algeria announced the establishment of diplomatic relations with East Germany. As a report by the Middle Eastern unit in the Auswärtige Amt written shorty thereafter notes:

> Disappointed hopes for massive West German economic aid despite broken-off relations, consideration of Arab-progressive solidarity and undisturbed economic relations to the Eastern bloc, a final opportunity for rewarding GDR recognition before the 'great push' [for global recognition], but also the ambition to engage actively in European détente will have motivated this decision [by Algiers].[80]

Similarly, relations with Libya turned increasingly difficult after the 1969 coup. The regime around its leader Muammar Gaddafi did not, as was feared initially in the West, become a Soviet marionette in the Mediterranean straight away or quickly recognise East Germany.[81] But West German diplomats certainly felt the difficulty in dealing with the new government and its sympathies for socialist ideology. A sense of pessimism was acknowledged by the West German ambassador in Tripoli.[82] Typical for the new style of West German-Libyan relations is a conversation between the Foreign Office's Parliamentary Secretary of State Karl Moersch and two Libyan ministers, Jalloud and el-Mabruk. It is full of Libyan accusations and threats, with Moersch mostly on the defensive. The very beginning of their meeting is illustrative of that, as Jalloud welcomed Moersch with the 'polemic remark that the "great German nation", represented by Moersch, apparently could no longer decide for itself and no longer stood on the right side, but instead pursued aims

[74]Der Spiegel, "Hallstein-Doktrin: Durchlöcherter Anspruch."
[75]Notes by Gehlhoff, 26 February 1970, Document 78, AAPD.
[76]Ibid; Conversation between Scheel and Bouteflika in Brussels, 11 February 1970, Document 48, AAPD.
[77]Notes by Gehlhoff, 31 March 1970, B36 281, PA/AA.
[78]Notes by Gehlhoff, 17 April 1970, Document 164, AAPD.
[79]German-British government negotiations in London, 3 March 1970, Document 86, AAPD.
[80]Country briefing Algeria, 17 August 1970, ALGI 17936, PA/AA.
[81]Turnwald (Tripoli) to Auswärtiges Amt, 7 September 1969, B130 2191A, PA/AA.
[82]Report on Libya and the situation in the Mediterranean, 30 April 1970, B36 413, PA/AA.

directed against the interests of the Arabs'.[83] While in substance West German-Libyan relations might still have been intact, the style of communication had become frosty. The nationalisation of the Libyan oil industry by the new regime further illustrated that Tripoli was now much more difficult to deal with than it had been under Sanusi rule.[84]

One country in the Maghreb that the West Germans had little to no problems with was Tunisia. While the smallest one, at the time its relative pro-Western tendencies and role as a mediator within the Arab camp under the rule of Habib Bourguiba made it a worthwhile point of contact for the West Germans.[85] It had been one of the few countries that did not break up diplomatic relations with the FRG in 1965 and was therefore held in high regard in Bonn. Tunisia, too, had been a focus of Brandt's new government's North African strategy in early 1970. 'In the course of our efforts to activate our policy in the Mediterranean, we have in particular strengthened our relations to Tunisia over the past few months,' Frank noted.[86] As a result, West German developmental assistance to Tunis was more or less immediately increased in 1970.[87] But, of course, the country's relevance for the FRG was limited due to its small geographic and economic size. Also, it is noteworthy that in Tunisia's case it was the Tunisians rather than the West Germans who continuously pushed for a stronger FRG engagement in the Mediterranean. A conversation of Tunisian Foreign Minister Mohammed Masmoudi with Scheel in December 1971 is telling in this regard:

> [Masmoudi] acknowledged the intelligent and courageous foreign policy of chancellor Willy Brandt, which significantly contributed to détente in Europe and to the keeping of world peace. But peace was indivisible, and therefore it would be necessary to also find a solution to hot spots such as the Near East. This area just as much as the Mediterranean in its entirety could not be left to the two superpowers.[88]

But the real focus of the West German policy towards the Maghreb had been Algeria. Only in late 1971, after Brandt had achieved the Four Power Agreement on Berlin and the Transit Agreement with the GDR, did the West German government revisit the question of diplomatic relations with Algiers. In December 1971, embassies were re-opened in Algiers and Khartoum. However, relations with the Algerians remained cool under the surface, with Algiers not sending an ambassador to Bonn until 1974 and delaying political consultations for several years.[89]

Also, with the left-overs of the Hallstein Doctrine out of the way, the West Germans were in any case about to re-establish themselves in the Arab states as a whole by late 1971. Crucially, there were new developments in Egypt. Unlike Nasser, who had died in 1970, his successor Sadat showed much more sympathy to the FRG. By June 1972, West Germany managed to open an embassy in Cairo. Only a month later, Egypt expelled all Soviet military advisors, changing the entire

[83]Conversation of Moersch with Jalloud and el-Mabruk in Tripoli, 8 March 1971, Document 83, AAPD.
[84]See Vandevalle, *Libya since 1969*.
[85]The West German view that Tunisia was an important dealmaker within the Arab League comes out, amongst others, in a Foreign Office briefing from summer 1971: Memorandum by Redies, 10 August 1971, B36 440, PA/AA.
[86]Frank to Scheel, 11 March 1970, B36 438, PA/AA.
[87]Ibid.
[88]Moltmann (Tunis) to Auswärtiges Amt, 21 December 1970, B36 438, PA/AA.
[89]Interministerial meeting for preparation of Brandt's visit to Algeria, 5 March 1974, B36 104702, PA/AA.

calculus of the West in the Mediterranean. Now, the Soviet advance in the region seemed less of a certainty than previously expected.[90] The Soviet strategy in the Mediterranean seemed to fail, making a German one less urgent. The Auswärtiges Amt immediately decided to bring Egypt, the country which Bonn had always regarded as leader of the Arab world, more into the focus of West German policy in the MENA region. A year later, the October War of 1973 and the ensuing oil crisis led to a final shift of West German focus away from the Maghreb, towards the Mashreq and the Gulf. The Soviet Union seemed to be excluded from Middle Eastern geopolitics for good, and oil politics circled around the Arab peninsula, not the Maghreb.

Bonn's Mediterranean strategy had failed. Its perspective on the Western Mediterranean through the lens of the Cold War and an overestimation of the potential of its 'chequebook diplomacy' had led the FRG to misunderstand the local dynamics of Algerian and Libyan politics. West Germany did not manage to shape events and instead struggled to react to them as they unfolded on the ground. That sense of convenience for Bonn's shift of policy towards North Africa had, therefore, disappeared. After all, building up a political relationship with both Algiers and Tripoli had proven much more complicated than initially envisaged in the Auswärtige Amt. On top of that, the strategic necessity to engage in the Western Mediterranean was waning, as by 1972 it transpired that Moscow would not manage to gain a strong foothold there after all.

There is also a noteworthy linguistic dimension as to how usage of the term 'Mediterranean' changed during the course of the 1960s and 1970s. West German policy documents on the Mediterranean after 1967 largely evolve around the Maghreb or the Arab-Israeli conflict. This, however, changed fundamentally in the 1970s. Democratic change in Greece, Spain, and Portugal, the escalation of the Cyprus dispute between Greece and Turkey, and euro-communism in Italy now dominated debates on the Mediterranean in Bonn. The memorandum titles might have looked similar, but their meaning was entirely different.[91]

But there remained echoes of the social-liberal coalition's initial focus on the Western Mediterranean. In 1974, Willy Brandt was the first West German chancellor to visit an Arab country. His first destination was Algiers, followed by Cairo. The relevance of Algeria for the FRG was thus still visible, but by now the political dimension of the relationship had diminished significantly. Economics and energy security dominated the agenda.[92] Ultimately, the Auswärtiges Amt noted a 'loss of illusions' from the late 1960s onward, both on the Algerian and West German sides, giving a succinct assessment of the process of West German engagement in the Western Mediterranean.[93]

[90]Memorandum on the situation in the Middle East after the withdrawal of Soviet military advisors from Egypt, 31 July 1972, B26 472, PA/AA. Ginor and Remez show that Soviet support for Egypt remained significant even after the retreat of the military advisors in 1972, with Soviet fighter pilots taking part personally in the 1973 October War of Egypt and Syria with Israel: Isabella Ginor and Gideon Remez, *The Soviet-Israeli War, 1967–1973: The USSR's Intervention in the Egyptian-Israeli Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). But nothing in the German archives indicates that the Auswärtige Amt was aware of such covert support at the time.

[91]To give just two examples: a report for Brandt in 1968 mentions, when discussing the Mediterranean, Syria, Egypt, Algeria, or Iraq (Frank to Secretary of State, B130 8826A, PA/AA). A few years later, in mid-June, a situation report on the Mediterranean deals solely with Greece, Portugal, Turkey, and Cyprus, Notes by IA 4, 15 November 1971, B26 471, 434ff, PA/AA.

[92]Lahn to chancellery, 13 March 1974, B36 104702, PA/AA.

[93]Interministerial meeting for preparation of Brandt's visit to Algeria, 5 March 1974, B36 104702, PA/AA.

V. Conclusion: West Germany's 'Mediterranean moment' and its link to Central European politics

Ultimately, this is the story of a policy failure. The FRG had hoped to repair its relations with the Arab world after 1967. For reasons of opportunity and strategy it chose a route via the Maghreb: opportunity, as the Arab peninsula and Egypt as 'key' to the Arab world seemed closed off to West German advances; and strategy, as the West Germans saw their presence in the Maghreb necessitated by the advance of the Soviet Union in the Western Mediterranean, particularly in Algeria.[94] This advance was ultimately seen as a threat to the position of the West and thus the FRG in Europe.

Why did the FRG's strategy fail? To begin with, the rather narrow West German perspective on the Maghreb though the lens of the Cold War led Bonn to misunderstand dynamics on the ground, such as the relevance of the Libyan coup. West German diplomats struggled to make sense of Gaddafi's new policy of anti-imperialism without a simple attachment to Moscow. The same applied to Algeria's path of non-alignment. Moreover, the West German assessment of their potential role in the Maghreb was unrealistic and overly confident. Algeria was not, it would appear, as sympathetic to closer relations with West Germany as Bonn had thought, and was mostly interested in economic aid without strong political conditionalities. In Libya, the 1969 coup removed a pro-FRG monarchy from power and relations with Gaddafi's regime were complicated to say the least. These complications can explain why, despite its intentions, the West German government did not manage to open an embassy in Algiers until 1971. But that event did not boost relations between Algiers and Bonn immediately, and soon afterwards the FRG's Western Mediterranean focus had mostly outlived itself due to questions of oil security and changes in Egypt.

One further question arising from this is to what extent the West German focus on Algeria under a social democratic government from 1969 onwards was also motivated by the ideological affinity of the German Left with 'Third Worldism'. After all, this was the time of the non-aligned movement, of Vietnam and anti-colonial struggles. In his memoirs, Wischnewski makes no secret of his sympathies for anti-imperialism at the time, and the chapter about his first engagement with international politics is entitled, 'Everything Started with Algeria'.[95]

Based on initial research into this area I would argue that one should not overestimate the policy impact of such links. As mentioned earlier, it was not only Wischnewski and the SPD who pushed a stronger focus on the Maghreb by the FRG, but also the Auswärtiges Amt, with influential diplomats such as Paul Frank. Also, during that time it was in fact the FDP rather than the SPD which was considered the most 'pro-Arab' party in Bonn, due to the perceived potential of Arab markets for the FRG's export-oriented economy.[96] Finally, a first glance through the transcripts of meetings by the board of the SPD parliamentary party group in the West German parliament (Fraktionsvorstand) showed that, to take just one example, Algeria as a country was discussed only three times in the period 1966–72. This indicates that at least in this important party committee, the issue

[94]Memorandum by Ahlers, Document 159, 16 May 1969, AAPD.
[95]Hans-Jürgen Wischnewski, *Mit Leidenschaft und Außenmaß* (Munich: Bertelsmann, 1989), 105.
[96]See n. 74.

took up very little space and importance.[97] However, this initial impression should by no means preclude further research, and it would be worthwhile for further studies to establish how widespread and coherent the link between European socialism and left-wing, anti-imperial movements in the so-called Third World was. Did such networks substantially impact the policy-making of left-wing governments in Western Europe at the time, or were they largely limited only to personal sympathies?[98] It also worthwhile to ask whether in this there is a link to research on perceptions of colonial loss and foreign occupation in West Germany.[99]

Ultimately, then, the West German Mediterranean strategy in the late 1960s did not pay off. Yet, it tells us something more about the role of the Mediterranean and the Middle East in West German foreign policy thinking after the Second World War. It illustrates Bonn's earnest attempt to actively formulate and carry out a genuine 'Arab policy'.[100] West German policy in the Middle East, this account indicates, not only focused on Israel, oil, or *Alleinvertretung*. It shows the challenge of a middling power, which the FRG was turning into at the time, to juggle the complex dynamics of Cold War hierarchies.[101] It indicates that the challenge for the FRG in the MENA region was not only how to square its relations with Israel and the Arab states, but also how to manage the various inter-Arab tensions, alliances, and enmities. It demonstrates how, motivated by the developments of the East-West conflict in Europe, the Cold War shaped West German policy in the MENA region. This started in 1967 and increased during the early years of *Ostpolitik*, as there was a fear that *détente* in Europe was undermined by an advance of the Soviet Union in the Mediterranean, and that an escalation of the Arab-Israeli conflict could evolve into a global superpower war. More than anything, therefore, this West German 'Mediterranean moment' shows how the FRG's Middle Eastern policy has been shaped and determined by the geopolitics of Central Europe, which is probably as true today as it was during the Cold War.[102]

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[97]The *Kommission für Geschichte des Parlamentarismus und der politischen Parteien* has made West German parliamentary party group transcripts available online (https://fraktionsprotokolle.de).

[98]An excellent study on 'Third Worldism' and its relation to the FRG from a bottom-up, student-centred perspective is provided by Quinn Slobodian, *Foreign Front: Third World Politics in Sixties West Germany* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012). See also Joseph Ben Prestel, "Palästina-Solidarität. Bruchstelle einer globalen Linken," *Merkur* 73, no. 839 (April 2019): 61–7.

[99]See Jared Poley, *Decolonisation in Germany: Weimar Narratives on Colonial Loss and Foreign Occupation* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2005).

[100]Notes by Gehlhoff, 11 February 1970, Document 48, AAPD.

[101]The role of hierarchy in international relations has been a focus of IR recent scholarship. See, for example, Ayşe Zarakol, ed., *Hierarchies in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); or, in a Cold War context, Tony Smith, "New Wine for New Bottles: A Pericentric Framework for the Study of the Cold War," *Diplomatic History* 4, no. 1 (2000): 567–91.

[102]For an excellent study on Germany's Mediterranean policy in the more recent past, see Edmund Ratka, *Deutschlands Mittelmeerpolitik* (Baden-Baden: Nomos/CAP, 2014).

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