



## **Determinants of German Foreign Policy toward the Arab-Israeli Conflict**

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### **Abstract**

*The purpose of this paper is to examine the German foreign policy toward the Arab-Israeli conflict. It particularly focuses on the driving forces in the making of this policy. It first briefly reviews German interests and priorities in the region which include, economic interests related to safe access to energy sources and boosting German exports to regional markets; security interests related to avoiding risks emerged from the Arab-Israeli conflict, terrorism and the proliferation of the weapons of mass destructions, and preventing any further increase in refugees from the region; and finally political interests which is related to the peace process between Palestinians and Israelis, and enhancing stability in other regional areas such as Lebanon. These interests generally represent a pragmatic approach in German foreign policy towards the region. However, and in spite of increasing German interests there, pragmatism is not the driving force behind German Middle East foreign policy. Still, the special relationship with Israel is the guideline in making this policy. The analysis of both pragmatism and the special relationship with Israel as main determinants of German foreign policy toward the Arab-Israeli conflict shows that the interplay of these factors leaves Germany with a dilemma, because they 'do not always push in the same direction.' This in turn affect negatively German political role and influence in the Middle East. Therefore, and in the light of its growing national interests in the region, Germany needs a policy of maintaining economic ties with the Arab countries, and concurrently preserving its special relationship with Israel. If Germany succeeds in striking a balance between its strong commitments to Israel's security, and its acceptance to the Palestinian right of self-determination and interest in boosting economic and trade exchange with Arab countries, then it will be able to play a more active role in the region and may influence the attitudes of parties involved in the Arab-Israeli conflict.*

**Keywords:** *German foreign policy, Arab-Israeli conflict, historical factor, pragmatism, national framework, European framework.*

## INTRODUCTION

Germany's political engagement in the Middle East has been historically low compared to other European main powers such as Britain and France. Although this was positively perceived by most of the peoples in the region, as Germany was not a colonial or an imperial nation in this part of the world,<sup>1</sup> this situation led to a limited German political role in the region. This limited role remained almost till the beginning of 1990s until the German foreign policy started to expand gradually after the reunification.<sup>2</sup> But the transformations in inter-national politics after the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks on the US have significantly contributed to the expansion of the basic framework of the German foreign policy toward the Middle East and other regions in the world as well. Germany is now not only concentrated on the political and economic interests at national level, expansion of European Union at regional-continental level, or enhancement of transatlantic alliance at global level, but it also has a direct participation in the so called 'war on terror,' intensive diplomatic efforts to solve regional and international conflicts such as the Arab-Israeli conflict and Iranian nuclear issue, and active involvement in promoting liberal values such as freedom, democracy and human rights.<sup>3</sup> Germany is therefore trying to pursue a more active and positive foreign policy. Nevertheless, and in spite of all these important changes, German foreign policy toward the Middle East in general and the Arab-Israel conflict in particular does not commensurate with its capabilities as a major European state, a global economic power and a main financial and economic contributor to some regional countries. So why is Germany still unable to pursue a more influential role in the Arab-Israel conflict? What are the main determinants of German foreign policy toward the region? Is pragmatism or the special relationship with Israel the driving force in the making of this policy? The purpose of this paper is to examine the main determinants of German foreign policy toward the Arab-Israeli conflict, and their 'function' or role within both national and European frameworks of this policy.

## REVIEW OF GERMAN INTERESTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

German national interests in the Middle East generally consist of security, political and economic interests. Security interests include avoiding possible risks emerged from regional conflicts, particularly the Arab-Israeli conflict, terrorism and the proliferation of the weapons of mass destructions. German as well as European territories have direct and very long borders with the Middle East countries from the east and south. Therefore, there is a growing fear in Germany, and other European countries, that geographic closeness can expose them to negative outcomes of illegal border crossing and the effects of the

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<sup>1</sup> Andra Garber, *Der Nahe/Mittlere Osten und Nordafrika: Die blockierte Region am Scheideweg*, (Bonn/Berlin: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2007), p. 19.

<sup>2</sup> Ahmad J. Azzam, 'Growing German Role in the Middle East,' *Arabic Media Internet Network*, February 14, 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Muna Yaqubian, 'Promotion of Democracy in the Middle East: European Initiatives,' *Special Report*, (Washington: United States Institute of Peace), No. 127, October 2004, p. 7.

ongoing conflicts in the region. Political interests are generally related to the peace process between the Arabs and Israelis<sup>4</sup> and the enhancement of stability in other problematic areas in the region such as Lebanon. Germany has a clear interest of its own in achieving peace and enhancing stability in the Middle East.<sup>5</sup> Economic interests, which is may be more important, include a safe access to energy sources and increasing German exports to the regional markets. Germany is now one of the main trade partners of many regional countries. Its exports to the Arab markets increases every year. For example, those exports increased from 14.2 billions in 2001 to 20 billions in 2006.<sup>6</sup>

These interests are being strengthened by the increasing and widespread activities of German governmental and non-governmental organizations such as the foundations affiliated to the political parties, DAAD<sup>7</sup>, the Goethe-Institute and the Federation of German Chambers of Industry and Commerce. Furthermore, the funds invested by the Ministry for Economic Cooperation in various development projects that are carried out in the region<sup>8</sup> are important for enhancing German national interests there.

All these dimensions indicate that the Middle Eastern region is very important for German national interests. However, there are two important points which should be emphasized in this context. First, the economic dimension of German interests is still, in contrast to what is usually expected, not the driving force behind the German foreign policy toward the Middle East. Although it is growing rapidly, particularly in recent years, German trade with the Arab countries accounts for 5 percent (about 29 billion in 2005) of its total foreign trade.<sup>9</sup> There are, in addition to economic interests, other important factors which increase German interest in the region. Security fears have lately caused public interests in the region. This is due to the geographic proximity of the Middle East to Germany and the European Union. Another factor that increases German interests in the region is the changing geopolitics of Europe associated with its integration.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Volkmar Wenzel, 'North Africa and the Middle East in German Security Policy'. In Volker Perthes. (ed.), *Germany and the Middle East: Interests and Options* (Berlin: Heinrich Boll Foundation, 2002), p. 141.

<sup>5</sup> Hermann Grohe, Hermann Grohe, Christoph Moosbauer, Volker Perthes and Christian Sterzing, 'Evenhanded, not Neutral: Points of reference for a German Middle East Policy,' in Volker Perthes (ed.) *Germany and the Middle East*, (Berlin: German Institute for International and Security Affairs, 2002), pp. 11-28, p. 13; Frank-Walter Steinmeier, 'European Action Plan for the Middle East,' *Handelsblatt*, October 15, 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Arabisch-Deutsch Vereinigung für Handel und Industrie e.V. [www.ghorfa.net](http://www.ghorfa.net) accessed on 14 October 2007.

<sup>7</sup> Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst

<sup>8</sup> Shimon Stein 'Germany's Middle East Policy from the Israeli Perspective,' *German Foreign Policy in Dialogue*, Vol. 3, No. 7, May 2002. pp. 30-33.

<sup>9</sup> Ibrahim Mohammad, 'Merkel's Visit to the Arab region,' *Deutsche Welle*, September 08, 2006. Available at [www.deutsche-welle.de/dw/0,,613,00.html](http://www.deutsche-welle.de/dw/0,,613,00.html), (accessed on December 13, 2007.)

<sup>10</sup> Volker Perthes, 'Germany and the Middle East,' (Berlin: German Institute for International and Security Affairs, 2005), p. 1.

Besides, German national interests are nurtured by more than humanitarian concerns and German economic interests in providing security for sales markets and ensuring access to the region's energy resources.<sup>11</sup> They also reflect the special relationship between Germany and Israel. A peaceful settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict would indeed, in addition to be vital for Israel, end German fears of a conflict between its special relations with Israel and its growing national interest in enhancing good relations with the Arab countries.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, a lasting peace between Israelis and Arabs will contribute to a more balanced German foreign policy in the region and consequently serve German national interests in their various dimensions. That is why the search for a peaceful resolution to the Arab-Israel conflict is now -perhaps more than any other time- a priority in German foreign policy.

### **DETERMINANTS OF GERMANY FOREIGN POLICY TOWARD THE REGION**

The growing national interests of Germany in the Middle East, particularly in the past decade, suggest a comprehensive German foreign policy in the region. Yet, there is no recognizable and clear cut policy toward the Arab-Israeli conflict.<sup>13</sup> Some have even claimed that such a policy is non-existent or unfeasible. At best, it is maintained, there can be German policies toward certain countries in the region such as Israel or Iran, and even probably a cultural policy towards the Arab world, Israel and Iran.<sup>14</sup>

However, such claims or assumptions are not entirely precise. It is true that Germany in the past was, generally, reluctant to get diplomatically or politically involved in the Arab-Israeli conflict,<sup>15</sup> thus has had no declared policy toward the Middle East and North Africa region (MENA); also it is true that the space available for Germany -and of course other EU countries both individually and collectively- to pursue an active and influential role in the region has been relatively limited, due to various reasons can be listed as: (1) the American dominance in the region,<sup>16</sup> (2) the growing integration of German foreign policy into the EU framework or/and (3) the special relationship with Israel; but this does not mean that we cannot identify special elements or specific features to a Germany's Middle East policy. In fact, Germany has some historical implications and recently has developed national interests of its own that stimulate policy makers in Berlin to draw a "special German policy track" which does not necessarily conflict with the overall European interests, despite differing from them, at least in terms of priorities. These implications and interests have been, and of course continue to be, main determinants of Germany's foreign policy in the

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<sup>11</sup> Christian Sterzing and Jorn Bohme, 'German and European Contributions to the Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process,' in Volker Perthes, (ed.) pp. 31-52.

<sup>12</sup> Grohe et al., 2002, op.cit., p. 13

<sup>13</sup> Abdallah Frangi, 'Germany and the Middle East Peace Process: The Palestinian Perspective,' *German Foreign Policy in Dialogue*, Vol. 3, No. 7, May 2002, pp. 34-36 (p. 34).

<sup>14</sup> Grohe et al, 2002, op.cit., p. 11.

<sup>15</sup> Stein, 2002, op.cit., p. 31; Perthes, 2002, op.cit., p. 8

<sup>16</sup> Jawad al-Hamad, 'Eureapen Foreign Policy and the American Determinant,' *Middle East Studies Journal*, No. 31, Spring 2005. p. 1.

Middle East. These determinants are centered around (1) the Germany's special relationship with Israel, known as the historical and moral factor; and (2) the national economic and trade interests with the Arab countries, known as pragmatic factor. So how is German foreign policy toward the Arab-Israeli conflict been determined in light of these two factors?

### **The Special Relationship with Israel**

States are; at least theoretically, determine their foreign policies according to their national interests, on one hand, and their capabilities, on the other. It is also possible to have some other determinants or restrictions regarding ideological or historical dimensions, though these are usually linked to or sometimes associated with national interests, as seen in the policy making of many countries in this world. But determining foreign policy of a major power toward a main region in the world by a 'moral factor' related historically to the oppression of one of its government to a segment of its people is indeed a unique case which deserves real attention and needs much more studies. Germany, which adopted the 1930s and during the Second World War a supportive position to the legitimate rights of Arabs in independence and self-determination<sup>17</sup> formed its foreign policy in the region after the war based on its historical responsibility toward the Jews, while it recognized the rights of Palestinian people in self-determination only in 1980. The Germany even recognized the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), which was previously labeled as a terrorist organization, in the beginning of 1990s, after the mutual recognition between PLO and Israel. So the historical responsibility which is recognized by consecutive German governments represents the moral factor upon which the German foreign policy toward the region is mainly based.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, because of the Holocaust and the related historical moral attitudes concerning Israel, Germany has always adopted a pro-Israeli position. Germany has not only supported Israel financially or politically but also militarily with arms.<sup>19</sup>

Of course, there are different views in Germany as to whether the German-Israeli relationship is an asset or a liability for Germany's policies in the Middle East.<sup>20</sup> There is even a dispute over the character of this relationship. But beyond these differences and this dispute, German-Israel relations have always

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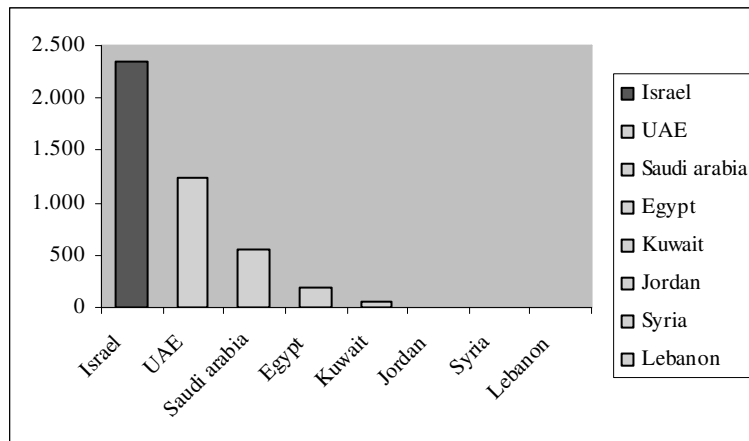
<sup>17</sup> Two days after a coup in Iraq, on April 3, 1941, Hitler declared Germany's support for Arab independence; after one year, the then German foreign minister sent a letter to Hajj Amin al-Husayni, the Mufti of Jerusalem, stating that "Germany is willing to provide all possible means to help Arabs in their struggle for independence and creating their own state." See *Aljazeera*, 'Our History and their Achieves', available at <http://www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/17CF3169-12A7-485A-83A9-FA797C09DE96>, accessed on 15 January 2008; more details are also available in 'The Arab World in German Secret Documents 1937-1941,' *the Middle East*, No. 10151, September 13, 2006, available at <http://asharqalawsat.com/details.asp?section=19&issue=10151&article=382458>; Bernard Lewis, *The Jews of Islam*, (Princeton : Princeton University Press, 1984).

<sup>18</sup> Oliver Lembecke and Markus Kaim, 'The German Role in the Middle East: High Time for a Check Up,' *German Foreign Policy in Dialogue*, Vol. 3, No. 7, 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter 2002, pp. 16-23, p. 16.

<sup>19</sup> Frangi, op.cit., p. 34.

<sup>20</sup> Volker, 2005, op.cit., p. 2.

been very intense.<sup>21</sup> This applies equally to the various aspects of bilateral relations: be it cultural, military, political, economic and societal. At cultural level, German-Israeli cooperation is distinguished and includes academic and social exchange at governmental and societal levels.<sup>22</sup> In security and defense area, Germany is a source to military equipments. Official statistic show that the total German arms exports to Israel from 1993 to 2000 are more than those exported to the six Arab countries surrounding Israel (Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait) (Fig.1).<sup>23</sup> In addition, Germany always declares its commitment to ensure the security and existence of Israel. In economic and political spheres, the situation is even better. Besides spending every possible effort to support Israel politically in the various international arenas, Germany economic relations with Israel is also very strong. Germany is the second trade partner to Israel after the US. At societal level, this relationship has been also marked by a great intensity for decades. The high participation in youth exchanges, the contacts among many groups in society and an active tourist trade are evidences for this.<sup>24</sup> All these not only demonstrate unique and distinguished relations between Germany and Israel, but also made this relationship the primary determinant of German foreign policy toward the region. In fact, this factor has been the guideline in making Germany foreign policy toward the Arab-Israeli conflict for decades. This explains Germany's strong commitment to a stable regional system that ensures Israel its right of



**Fig. 1.** German arms exports to the Middle East countries from 1993-2000 (in Million DM)<sup>25</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Roger Cohen, 'Israel Accepts Germany as its Friend and Ally,' *International Herald Tribune*, March 5, 2001.

<sup>22</sup> Gardner Feldman, 'Germany's Policy Toward Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: Continuity and Change,' *German Foreign Policy in Dialogue*, Vol. 3, No. 7, 1st Quarter 2002, p. 25.

<sup>23</sup> German Federal Economics Ministry, 2000.

<sup>24</sup> Sterzing and Bohme, 2002, op.cit., p. 36.

<sup>25</sup> Source: *German Federal Economic Ministry. 2000 Arms Exports Report.*

existence and enjoying normal relations with the Arab countries.<sup>26</sup>

As a result, the historical German commitments toward Israel become continuities in German foreign policy toward the region.<sup>27</sup> This policy has been centered on (a) bearing a permanent responsibility for Israel; (b) supporting Israel in all possible means; and (c) working with international community to ensure its security and its right of existence within recognized and lasting borders.<sup>28</sup> That is why Germany has been committed to a solution of the Arab-Israeli conflict and has lately placed special emphasis on the resolution of the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. In view of its historical commitment to Israel, Germany is striving to reach a peace that would guarantee the safety and well-being of Israel.<sup>29</sup>

However, these commitments associated with the special relationship with Israel do not mean that Germany does not criticize some policies of Israel particularly those related to settlement, and regular incursion into areas and cities under the Palestinian Authority. Germany also was not satisfied with Israel's siege on the late Palestinian President, Yaser Arafat, either The German State was not 'happy' with the way Israel handled the issue of President Arafat's attendance at the 2002 Arab summit in Beirut.<sup>30</sup> However, there is a limit to such criticism compared to some other European countries such as France during Jack Chirac. German officials or politicians who sometimes crossed this boundary and criticize Israel for its brutal suppression of the Palestinians, such as the former minister Norbert Blum and other political parties such as Jurgen Molle-mann of the Free Democratic Party, quickly faced public denunciations or directly condemned their "ill-chosen words" by their colleagues in parties.<sup>31</sup> Some criticism and "offensive words" could be at times easily classified as "anti-sentiments." In contrast, German officials, politicians, and the media condemned continuously and vocally Palestinian efforts to resist the occupation and defend themselves.

At the end, the special relationship with Israel continues to serve as a main driving force in German foreign policy toward the Arab-Israeli conflict. This of course creates a certain kind of dilemma for Germany, because such a special relationship renders German policy in the region 'biased' against Arabs or in favor of Israel. That is why it not easy for Germany to perform the role of a neutral mediator in the conflict between Arabs and Israelis.

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<sup>26</sup> Steinmeier, Frank-Walter, 'European Action Plan for the Middle East,' *Handelsblatt*, October 15, 2007. It is also published in Arabic by Deutschland-Zentrum (German Information Centre – GIC), at the Homepage of German Foreign Ministry.

<sup>27</sup> Steinmeier, 2007, op.cit.

<sup>28</sup> Sterzing and Bohme, 2002, p. 38; Steinmeier, 2007, Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Stein, 2002, op.cit., p. 32.

<sup>30</sup> Feldman, 2002, op.cit., p. 26.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 26

### Pragmatism and Relations with the Arab World

German foreign policy toward the Arab-Israeli conflict is also driven by pragmatism. The moral and historical obligation that account for the strong German support for Israel at all levels is, from the German point of view, balanced by pragmatic interests with the Arab world. While the special relationship with Israel serves, as above explained, as the primary or the most influential determinant of German foreign policy toward the Arab-Israeli conflict, pragmatism embodied in national interests cannot be ignored.<sup>32</sup> This has more to do with classical realist argumentation and is mainly based on economic and security interests.<sup>33</sup> However, pragmatism and in spite of its growing importance in German foreign policy trends has not been the driving force of this policy. German economy depends basically on exports and the size of Germany's trade with the Middle East and North African countries has been relatively low. As a percentage of the total German foreign trade, the level of trade with these countries is about 5 per cent.<sup>34</sup> During the 1990s Germany's foreign trade with the MENA region dropped from 3.1 per cent (1991) to 2.3 per cent (2000). In hard numbers, German exports to the MENA countries in the 1990s ranged from USD 14 billion (1993) to USD 17 billion (2000).<sup>35</sup>

Nevertheless, the importance of this factor is recently growing and expected to continue so in the future. Four points should be clarified here. First, the region has enormous growth potential due to expected demographic developments and structural changes within the context of Euro-Mediterranean partnership or integration, and a slow, but clear-cut trend towards economic liberalization in many Middle East countries.<sup>36</sup> Secondly, the growing and intensive economic and trade competition among major exporters in the global economy motivates Germany to find markets for its products. The region is important for certain German economic segments such as construction, machinery and telecommunication sectors. For example, more than 12 % of the total German electric and electronic products are exported to MENA countries.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, German products are in need for such high level consuming regional markets. Thirdly, Germany depends on the MENA as a main energy source.<sup>38</sup> Given that more than 80% of the German imports from the region are crude oil and natural gas, trade relations with MENA are indeed of strategic/growing importance for the German economy. Moreover, there are considerable German investments in

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<sup>32</sup> Hermann Grohe, Christoph Moosbauer, Volker Perthes and Christian Sterzing, (September 2001) 'Evenhanded, Not Neutral: Points of Reference for a German Middle East Policy,' *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (English edition).

<sup>33</sup> Lembcke and Kaim, 2002, op.cit., p.17.

<sup>34</sup> Perthes, 2005, op.cit., p. 1.

<sup>35</sup> Volker, 2002, op.cit., p. 187; see also 'The German Ministry for Economics and Technology (BMWi), <http://www.bmwi.de>.

<sup>36</sup> Volker, 2002, Ibid., p. 188.

<sup>37</sup> Ibrahim, 2006, op.cit.; see also the Central Association for Electro-Technology and Electric Industries.

<sup>38</sup> Bashshar Humais, 'Features of New Foreign Policy in Merkle's Middle East Tour,' *Deutsche Welle*, January 06, 2007, available at <http://www.dw-world.de/dw>, accessed on 15 January 2008.

some regional countries such as Libya, Tunisia, Egypt, Algeria and Saudi Arabia<sup>39</sup> and those investments are expected to increase in the future.

German development program is another area of economic relations. About 20% of German net aid payments and commitments went to the MENA countries between 1995 to 2000,. The main aid recipients in the region are the Palestinian Territories.<sup>40</sup> Germany, with its bilateral contributions and those made in conjunction with the EU, the United Nations and the World Bank, is the largest donor country to support building up the infrastructure of the Palestine territories. Of course, there are economic and political factors which determine the scope and intensity of German cooperation with the Arab countries including the Palestinian Authority. There is often a direct relationship between the degree of economic ties and the intensity of political ties on the one hand and the level of German development aid on the other. Development aid largely reflects political considerations. Particular need is only an additional criterion. Germany's relatively high level of aid to the Palestinian Territories is quite clearly politically motivated and reflects Germany's considerable interest in providing economic support for the peace process between the Palestinians and the Israelis.<sup>41</sup>

Similarly, enhancing trade and economic relations with the Arab world together with providing development aid to some regional parties is also motivated by a political factor. Indeed, it is used or utilized by the German government as a mean or way to strike a balance between German strong commitments to Israel's security and its acceptance of the Palestinian right of self-determination.<sup>42</sup> As mentioned, the special relationship with Israel makes Germany policy toward the Arab-Israeli conflict in favor of Israel, because of the historical obligation. Therefore, Germany foreign policy makers try to achieve a certain kind of balance or equilibrium in this context through enhancing economic relations with Arab states, on one hand, and providing financial and economic aid to regional parties such as the Palestinian Authority, on the other.<sup>43</sup>

With respect to security interests, Germany is concerned with preventing any increase in the number of refugees from the region and avoiding the international overflow of the Arab-Israeli conflict.<sup>44</sup> This position, which corresponds completely with the general European policy, not only intends to achieve regional stability, but also to maintain the German and European interests in the region. Germany always expresses its fears of losing control over the situation in the Middle East -which seems to be so in the last few years- will have direct impacts on the European security and economic interests. Accordingly, Ger-

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<sup>39</sup> Volker, 2002, op.cit., p. 198.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 200.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 192.

<sup>42</sup> Marco Overhaus (2002). 'A New German Foreign Policy in the Middle East?', *German Foreign Policy in Dialogue*, Vol. 3, No. 7, May 2002, pp. 5-7, p. 6.

<sup>43</sup> See European Commission Technical Assistance Office to the West Bank & Gaza Strip, <http://www.delwbg.cec.eu.int/en/index.htm>

<sup>44</sup> Kaim and Lembcke, op.cit, 2002 P.17

many always declares its commitment to ensure stability and achieve peace in the region within the framework of two states solution.<sup>45</sup>

These are the main determinants of Germany foreign policy toward the Arab-Israeli conflict. The previous overview shows that the interplay of the two factors leaves Germany with a dilemma. In fact, German foreign policy makers sometimes find themselves in front of two determinants that do not always push in the same direction.<sup>46</sup> Germany interests are, in spite of the special relationship with Israel, based upon strong economic relations with Arab states, and these relations are growing in recent years. Therefore, German national interests require a more balanced policy that can maintain economic as well as political ties with the Arab world, as well as sustaining the special relationship with Israel.

### **FRAMEWORK OF GERMAN FOREIGN POLICY**

States normally pursue their foreign policy through bilateral or/and multilateral frameworks. The growing national interests of Germany in the Middle East and its special relationship with Israel along with the growing integration of German policy within the European structure suggest two frameworks to the German foreign policy toward the Arab-Israeli conflict: One is the national and the other is European. Although both are generally interrelated and often interchanged, they may sometimes vary or function in different directions, at least in terms of setting of priorities.

#### **The National Framework**

There is no doubt that the integration of German Middle East policy in the European framework since the 1980 and the gradual emergence of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) after Maastricht directly impact German and European interests in the region.<sup>47</sup> However, the shift of some German foreign policy prerogatives to the European Union does not mean that Germany can simply outsource its Middle East policy completely to Brussels, thus lacks its own national framework. As a key member of the EU, it cannot leave these policies to Brussels alone or to other European involved countries such as France and Britain.<sup>48</sup>

The national understanding of German foreign policy is clearly seen in (a) the political sphere through diplomacy and endeavors for peaceful resolutions of regional conflicts, and (b) economic field through enhancing trade relations with regional states, and more importantly providing economic assistances to some regional parties especially Palestinians, Jordan and Egypt. In this context since its beginning in Madrid 1991, the current peace process has offered German foreign policy makers an opportunity to gradually liberate themselves from the

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<sup>45</sup> *Berlin Declaration* 1999; and also Steinmeier, 2007, op.cit.

<sup>46</sup> Kaim and Lembcke, 2002, op.cit., p. 16.

<sup>47</sup> Volker, 2005, op.cit., p. 2.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p.2

dominance of the historical determinant which enhances German role in the region. Germany changed this situation through direct and indirect economic assistance, as well as through promoting a sustainable Palestinian authority, as successive governments try to increase German diplomatic engagement in the region. What is noticed here is that Germany, same as the European Union, does not seek a leading role or the role of patron in the peace process or the resolution of the conflict between Arabs and Israelis, possibly because of admitting the American leading role in the region. However, it seeks a broader role at national level that corresponds with the European position, but also takes a more independent course from the US framework<sup>49</sup>-the one which was a constrained element during the Cold War. That is why German role at national level is appeared in this process through oriented economic aids, participation in infrastructure of the Palestinian authority in addition to the opening of regional markets to German goods.

In spite of all these efforts, the German role in the region at this level remained relatively moderate until the year 2000. The failure of Camp David II, the coming of the republicans to the White House, and the escalation of tension particularly after the Aqsa Intifadha brought great pressure on Germany and also other European powers, to play a more active role in the region. This was reflected in the intensive engagement of Fischer, the ex-foreign minister, in the direct talks and negotiations between concerned parties through his initiative known as "ideal paper" to advance the peace process.<sup>50</sup> This engagement represented an attempt to adopt a more independent or neutral position toward the parties. In fact, the initiative represented a clear instance in which Germany assumed a leadership role on the global stage, and this time, in the highly sensitive arena of Middle East politics.<sup>51</sup> The September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks on the US nourished the new direction, principally because Germany and other European countries started to fear from the possible expansion of the conflict and its impacts on regional stability and German and European interests. This is the reason why Germany therefore regards solving the regional conflicts in general and the Arab-Israeli conflict in particular as the key of the war on terror. That is why it doubles its efforts at national level to bring the parties again to the negotiation table. Of course, Germany realizes that playing an efficient or fruitful role requires the acceptance of involved parties,<sup>52</sup> which was very clear on the Palestinian part. Indeed, an effective German and European role has been always sought by the Arab parties, at least in terms of balancing what they believe to be an American biased policy toward Israel.

### **German Middle East Policy within the European Framework**

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<sup>49</sup> Azzam, 2007. op.cit.

<sup>50</sup> Jackson Janes (American Institute for Contemporary German Studies) 'Fischer's "Idea Paper" for the Middle East', *American Institute For Contemporary German Studies*, Washington, available at <http://www.aicgs.org/at-issue/ai-fischeridea.html>.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Lily Gardner Feldman, 'Reconciliation and German Foreign Policy,' *International Affairs*, April 1999.

Throughout the Cold War, and before the reunification, there was no independent German foreign policy in the Middle East.<sup>53</sup> During this period, Germany has attached its public position on the region in general and the Arab-Israeli conflict in particular to the European framework.<sup>54</sup> The Venice Declaration in 1980 was a turning point in this context because it represented not only the most prominent and extensive European statement recognizing Palestinian national rights, including the right of self-determination,<sup>55</sup> but also the beginning of an independent European Middle East policy and became a corner stone of German Middle East policy within the European Union. Since then German policy towards the region has moved within the parameters of European policy and as a result, it is now clearly seen as an integral part of the European common foreign policy related to the Middle East.<sup>56</sup> This policy, which was reaffirmed in Berlin Declaration in 1999 and expanded in Barcelona Declaration in 2002 to include various aspects of relations between EU and MENA, is centered on calling for a cessation of violence, an end to the Israel's settlement policy, Israeli withdraw for the territories occupied in 1967, and reciprocal recognition of Israeli and Palestinian states. In the last few years, Germany has, within the EU framework, diplomatically participated, particularly during its EU presidency in efforts aimed at de-escalation and strongly supported peaceful-solution initiatives including the Saudi Initiative and Road Map.

Yet, and in spite of its growing integration in the European framework and in the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), Germany continues to lessen any tough position or criticism by the EU against Israel. Just as its intervention prevented any indication to Palestinian Liberty Organization (PLO) in the Venice Declaration in 1980 to please Israel, Germany recently set limits on EU goals. During Schroder's government Fischer resisted the Vedrine's proposal for immediate recognition of a Palestinian state and for parallel elections in the occupied territories claiming that the process must be gradual.<sup>57</sup> Similarly, while there has been much talk in the European and some German circles regarding economic sanctions against Israel during the Intifadhah, so far they there was no outcome. Indeed, both Schroder and Fisher were opposed to such sanctions. Same thing happened during the war on Lebanon in 2006. Germany's complete understanding of and strong political support for "Israeli right" to defend itself have influenced in a way or another the general position of the European Union which was unable to criticize Israel or even call to an immediate end to the war.<sup>58</sup>

The impact of Germany's special relationship with Israel on the EU position was also evident in the 2006 Palestinian parliamentary election. Re-

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<sup>53</sup> Grohe et al., 2002, op.cit., 11; Frangi, 2002, op.cit., 34; Volker, 2005, op.cit., p. 1.

<sup>54</sup> Feldman, 2002, op.cit., p. 27; Perthes, 2005, op.cit., p. 132.

<sup>55</sup> Frangi, 2002, op.cit., p. 36.

<sup>56</sup> Volker, 2002, op.cit., p. 2.

<sup>57</sup> Feldman, 2002, op.cit., p. 27.

<sup>58</sup> Gärber, 2007, op.cit., p. 19.

sponding to western and international demands to hold general election in the Palestinian territories, the election was freely and fairly conducted. Hamas, the main Palestinian resistant movement, won the majority in this election and accordingly formed the government. However, and in spite of the fact that the election was primarily a foreign demand, Germany together with the EU joined the American campaign to boycott the new government and more seriously cutting humanitarian aids to Palestinians, basically because the new elected government did not recognize Israel or accept the conditions of the Quartet. Although the declared purpose was to enforce Hamas to change its historical principal position toward Israel and the current peace process, which, according to some observers, might have been possible by adopting a helpful, not boycotting strategy, this policy was simply not successful. On the contrary, the situation in the region has to become more complicated as it is not possible to achieve "peace" without admitting evidently and supporting practically the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, and sincerely engaging the main Palestinian powers and parties. Hamas's participation in the democratic process was indeed a 'good justification' and a real opportunity for Germany and the EU to deal with Hamas, instead of going behind the campaign to boycott and siege it.

All these events show that German position within the European framework affects, in a way or another, the general EU policy toward the Middle East and the Arab-Israeli conflict. Such a position is no doubt influenced by the Germany's special prelateship with Israel which continues to sway Germany foreign policy toward the region.

### **CREDIBILITY OF GERMAN FOREIGN POLICY**

Germany's special relationship with Israel and its strong support of pro-Israel European policies leave negative impacts on the ability of Germany to be a neutral mediator in the conflict. However, the German credibility in the international community as well as in the Middle East was not seriously affected. There are different factors contributed to this: (a) the Europeanization of Germany foreign policy, in particular after the reunification;<sup>59</sup> the continuing and strong German support and commitment to the United Nation; (b) its non-involvement in any armed conflicts outside the framework of international legitimacy, and possibly (c) the absence of German hidden agenda or hegemonic ambitions.

These factors create a certain kind of regional satisfaction for German political engagement before the various concerned parties in the region. For Israel, Germany is somehow different from other European countries and so it is perceived as a "reliable" partner, owing mainly to its special relationship with her<sup>60</sup> and strong support at various levels and fields. However, such reliability on the part of Israel has not reflected in an Israeli call for Germany to play a role of

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<sup>59</sup> Lembcke and Kaim, 2002, op.cit., p. 19.

<sup>60</sup> Cohen, op.cit.

mediation in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Indeed, Germany as well as European engagement often meets Israeli skepticism. Since the first declaration concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in 1980, the EU including Germany has been perceived as "pro-Arab" by consecutive Israeli governments. And this perception finds steady nourishment, e.g. during the Belgian presidency of the EU council (second term of 2001), when a case against ex-Prime Minister Sharon concerning human rights violations and war criminals during the Lebanon War of 1982 was opened at court in Brussels.<sup>61</sup>

For Arabs, Germany, and Europe as well, is very much welcomed as a mediator<sup>62</sup> because (a) it was not a colonial power in the region,<sup>63</sup> (b) it is a significant economic partner to many Arab countries, and (c) it is a key financial contributor to the Palestinian Territories.<sup>64</sup> Consequently, Germany has the potential to play a more effective role in the region. It seems that its past reluctance to get politically involved in the region, (mainly due to its special relations with Israel) has contributed significantly to the development of a positive image before regional parties, particularly the Arabs, that Germany can be a reliable partner in the "peace process" and a more neutral mediator in the Arab-Israel conflict.

## CONCLUSION

Germany has economic, political and security interests in the Middle East. These interests are generally not conflicting with the overall EU interests. However, they may differ in some respects with the interests of the EU member states, at least in terms of priorities. Therefore, German foreign policy in the Middle East is pursued within national and European frameworks. In both, Germany position and policies concerning the issue of the region, in particular the Arab-Israeli conflict, is influenced and determined by two major factors that do not always push in the same direction: (1) The special relationship with Israel (the independent variable), which makes German policy relatively 'biased' or at least generally supportive of Israel, and (2) pragmatism embedded mainly in economic and trade relations with the Arab countries (the dependent variable), through which Germany attempts to strike a balance between its strong commitments to Israel's security, on the one hand, and its acceptance of the right of self-determination for the Palestinians on the other. The analysis of both determinants (separately and within the German policy frameworks) shows that

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<sup>61</sup> Lembcke and Kaim, 2002, op.cit., p. 20.

<sup>62</sup> There are many Arab officials who call upon Germany and the EU to play a more active role in the Arab-Israeli conflict; see, for example, a statement by Saud al-Faisal, the Foreign Minister of Saudi Arabia, *Daily Riyadh Newspaper*, No. 14083, January 14, 2007, available at [http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/arabic/news/newsid\\_1808000/1808006.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/arabic/news/newsid_1808000/1808006.stm); Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Mualim, also call upon Germany to play a more active role in solving the problems and conflicts in the region; see Kuwait Ministry of Information, *Special News Bulletin*, No. 7347, October 11, 2006. p. 13; Mahmoud Abbas, the then Secretary of PLO after Arafat emphasized in a meeting with ex-German foreign minister Fischer, the importance of Germany role in the peace process, Palestinian National Authority, December 6, 2004. Available at [www.mofa.gov.ps/arabic/subject\\_details\\_print.php?id=2938](http://www.mofa.gov.ps/arabic/subject_details_print.php?id=2938)

<sup>63</sup> Hichem Djaït, *L'Europe et l'Islam*, (Seuil ,Paris, 1978)

<sup>64</sup> Christian and Bohme, 2002, op.cit., p. 37.

pragmatism is not the driving force behind German policies towards the Arab-Israeli conflict. Germany's special relationship with Israel resulted from the Holocaust and the related historical moral mindset vis-à-vis Israel, has been the most important factor in making Germany's policy toward this conflict. This explains why Germany has often adopted a clear pro-Israeli position. Nonetheless, the special relationship with Israel does not, and this is a paradox, affect the positive perception of the regional parties regarding the ability of Germany to be a liable partner or mediator in the conflict between Arabs and Israelis. Indeed, the German support for the self-determination of Palestinian people and their right in a viable state, the Europeanization of German foreign policy, the growing mutual interests between Germany and the Arab countries and continuing strong commitment to the United Nations have contributed to the German credibility both in the region and in the international community as well. Based on this, Germany is now seeking a more active role in the region. Yet, and in spite of the growing diplomatic efforts and political engagements both bilaterally and multilaterally -specially in the last 10 years- the political role of Germany in the region or its ability to influence the conflicting parties, particularly Israel, is still limited, and does not commensurate with its international status as the world's third economy, its economic and political weight as a major European power, and its role as a key donor to regional states. Such a relatively low influence is usually attributed to its special relationship with Israel on one hand, and its apparent desire to maintain a cohesive European policy toward the region, on the other. As such, it is not easy for Germany to play a more effective and influencing role in the Arab-Israeli conflict without (a) achieving a balance through adopting a more neutral policy and always standing at the same distance to all parties, and (b) integrating completely in the EU Middle East policy, which seems to be so in recent years.