**Book Review**

Israeli-German relations can be divided into two phases: 1945-1965 – from the end of World War II to the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Federal Republic and Israel – and onwards of 1965. In terms of historical content, there are vast differences between these two periods. The first saw dramatic, even tectonic developments in Israeli/Jewish-German relations. It began (1945-51) with a firm, steadfast Israeli-Jewish decision to impose an uncompromising boycott on all things German for generations to come. Yet in March 1951 the issue of reparations arose (Israel laid claim for $1.5 billion from both German states as compensation for taking in half a million Holocaust survivors), challenging the boycott approach. After several months of negotiations between West Germany and Israel, the two signed a reparations agreement in September 1952, whereby Bonn committed to pay Jerusalem $720 million in goods and services for 12 years, starting in 1953. This agreement was the catalyst for an accelerated and comprehensive process of normalizing relations between the two nations, which culminated in the establishment of formal diplomatic ties in May 1965. In practice, by the time Bonn and Jerusalem exchanged ambassadors, a rapport between the two had already been established in most policy areas. It would not, therefore, be far-fetched to presume that the second phase of Israeli-German relations was not marked by any notable developments – the political-emotional drama had occurred during the first decade or so of ties. Media reports about the two countries’ relations from 1965 onwards largely support this assumption. There are no signs of meaningful or groundbreaking developments. On the contrary, publicly available sources indicate normal, routine interactions between Bonn and Jerusalem, with the occasional ups and downs – as is typical of a friendly bilateral relationship.

Nevertheless, there is room for an in-depth examination of the relations between Israel and the Federal Republic following the official establishment of diplomatic ties. Such a study is necessary, not least because a scholarly inquiry would be able to uncover information and reach new insights that could paint a more complex picture than the one indicated by publicly available sources. Indeed, to date there is no study dedicated to post-1965 Israeli-German relations that draws on a diverse selection of sources. The unique nature of the Jewish-German case, likely unparalleled in world history, begs a thorough analysis.

Carole Fink has taken up this challenge and painstakingly investigated the question of West German-Israeli relations in 1965-1974, relying on an impressive variety of sources. And yet, reading through the 350 pages only confirms what we already assumed, based on publicly available information, to be the case: the relationship between Israel and the Federal Republic saw no earth-shattering developments after 1965. This could very well have to do with the fact that, to quote Fink, the “West German-Israeli relationship was not a paramount one for either side” (295). It would seem, then, seeing as there were no pivotal changes in the relationship following the establishment of diplomatic relations, that there is no justification for a book-length project on the subject. A succinct study in article form would have sufficed.

Fink, a renowned scholar in the field of international history, examines the relationship between the two countries through two parallel prisms: the global one (which revolves primarily around the Cold War), and the intra-state one (whether Israeli or German). Yet in the absence of any substantial findings, Fink assigns disproportionate, sometimes altogether unneeded, significance to issues relating to the Cold War, international developments, or local perspectives. Thus, for example, in order to support her assertion that the world at large was in turmoil in 1967, Fink reports natural and environmental disasters around the world, a military coup in Greece, murderous purges in China, a devastating war in Nigeria (47) and riots of African Americans in several US urban centers (48). The relevance of these to the question of Israeli-German relations is doubtful. Moreover, Fink does not discuss, or altogether avoids, a number of issues that do have the potential to shed light on the book’s subject matter. For example, an important event within the examined period – West German Chancellor Willy Brandt’s historic visit to Israel in June 1973 – is not handled satisfactorily (238-244). The analysis of this visit overlooks some important aspects, including how public opinion in both countries reacted; how both governments prepared for it; and how Germany implemented Israel’s request that it moderate between them and the Egyptians.

In those parts where Fink does tackle Israeli-German relations, a well thought-out, coherent thesis can be extracted. Her conclusions, detailed below, may have already appeared in other academic studies, but they are supported here with a rich corpus of archival materials. Fink posits that Israel aimed to constitute its relations with West Germany on the memory of the Holocaust (a “special relationship”) and, on these grounds alone, to receive special treatment from the Germans (in security, economic, and foreign policy areas). The Germans, on the other hand, wished to unburden themselves of this weighty history and aspired to a “normal relationship.” This objective was not only psychologically motivated but had to do with a material interest in maintaining ties with the Arab/Muslim Middle East, hostile to Israel.

This rift deepened after the June 1967 War, in which Israel defeated its Arab neighbors and occupied a significant amount of territories. Shortly thereafter, in 1969, Brandt launched his *Ostpolitik*, which aimed to thaw West Germany’s relations with the Soviet bloc, and, by proxy, improve Bonn’s relations with the Arab world (which suffered a considerable blow following the establishment of diplomatic relations with Jerusalem in 1965). We thus have here a recipe for interstate collision: Israel after 1967 adopted an increasingly nationalistic line that supported a tougher stance toward its Arab neighbors and rejected a complete withdrawal from the occupied territories, while Germany sought to strengthen its ties to the Arab world, an ambition that, at the very least, stipulated neutrality with regard to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Within this context, diplomatic clashes between Bonn and Jerusalem were on the rise, setting a discordant tone to the relationship as a whole. And yet, these opposing political approaches did not prevent the establishment of bilateral relations on a score of issues, not least security and the economy (111, 165-6, 168-70, 173, 175). Fink concludes her book by describing the examined period in West German-Israeli relations as one of “tenuous stability” (295). Indeed, an apt description that could have been demonstrated in a study more modest in scope.