

Notes on Palestinian - German Seminar



**Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs
Jerusalem**

INTRODUCTION

PASSIA, The Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs in Jerusalem held a seminar on Palestinian-German relations, on the 4th and 5th of October, 1987, at the National Palace Hotel in Jerusalem. Panelists included academics from local universities and from the Middle Eastern Studies Center of Berlin University, the Federal Republic of Germany. Eighty other Germans and Palestinians participated in the seminar.

Both the Palestinian and German participants met in the land of Palestine, without previous acquaintance or experience. Their sole motive for arranging this specialized seminar to discuss mutual relations, was their love of learning and quest for knowledge.

Behind both groups lies a huge and rich tradition, and ahead of them a political atmosphere in which local, regional and international events rush pell-mell. The two national groups, Palestinian and German, exist in a political atmosphere charged with ideological and religious diversity. Neither group is merely an observer; each participates in the concerns of the present and future.

The seminar intended to shed light on Germany and its relations with Palestine. On the one hand, it sought to broaden other countries' knowledge of the Palestinian community with regard to the Palestine Question: land, people, rights and leadership. And on the other to enable Palestinians to develop a well-informed and meaningful dialogue among themselves and with others, building bridges of mutual respect, trust and cooperation. The seminar's lectures and discussions have been documented in a booklet entitled "File on German - Palestinian Relations" with statistical information on German history, population, political parties, press, culture, educational institutions, and a bibliography of publications dealing with Arab-German relations. The booklet is intended as a primary reference for Palestinian researchers and academics who wish to continue to study aspects of these relations. It will also be an informative and objective document opening wider scientific and ideological horizons for cooperation and understanding between Germans and Palestinians.

TIMING:

The timing of the seminar coincided with a number of events which enhanced its importance. Locally, the society wished to announce its establishment, programs and aims to Palestinian society, as an academic effort within the general framework of Palestinian legitimacy. The seminar marked the first open activity to which academics and those concerned with ideas, culture, and media were invited. Berlin and Jerusalem are the primary centers for reviewing the Palestinian and German files and serve as examples of the similarities and differences between the two peoples. The convening of the seminar came on the 750th anniversary of the foundation of the city of Berlin, and the declaration of the Democratic Republic of Germany with East Berlin as its capital, on the 1st of October, 1949. Despite the marked absence of participants from the Democratic Republic of Germany, for purely organizational reasons, our commitment to this timing indicates the seminar's recognition that our fellow academics in the DRG are an integral part of our joint scientific work with the Federal Republic of Germany. Their absence is only temporary and accidental. Hence, in its own way, the seminar participates in the celebrations of the DRG.

The seminar coincided with the visit of Erich Honecker, President of the DRG, on September 7, 1987, to Bonn, at the invitation of Chancellor Helmut Kohl. This was the first German-German summit meeting since the division of the land and people of Germany following the second World War. The seminar, set at this time, registers its support for this meeting and dialogue, in spite of differences of opinion. It also declares its anticipation of the unifying of the land and people of Germany. In the same way, it registers its firm commitment to the unity of the Palestinian people and for their struggle for independence and sovereignty over their national soil, and the establishment of an independent state under the leadership of their sole legitimate representative.

THE DIFFICULT FORMULA:

No two can disagree concerning the difficulty and complexity of the issue of Palestinian-German relations, especially since it is one aspect of German-Arab relations within the general framework of European-Arab relations.

The inherent difficulty of the issue is not limited to the comparison between the German and the Palestinian Arab historically and geographically or in their struggle for national unity. The issue comprises the difficulty of the researcher who must detach himself from personal values and traditions when reading, explaining, or analyzing common concerns: occupation, refugees, a divided homeland, and a dispersed people.

The seminar was not limited to comparisons between each people's achievements concerning basic and inalienable human rights or legitimate rights of self-determination for example. It attempted to develop a sensitivity in proposing concepts, meanings, and limits to justice, freedom, and equality; between what is relative and what is absolute, and which of these issues holds priority.

COMPLICATION:

This issue centered around three basic questions:

A — Can the German free himself from the "guilt complex" which was imposed on him and with which he has lived for 40 years, reflecting positively and negatively on his political and social behavior? Can the German overcome this complex and transcend it in order to create an atmosphere of freedom, democracy, and justice, for himself and those around him, to meet objectively with whomever he wants, in particular, with Palestinians, without any sort of alignment to either party?

B — Can the Palestinian be free of his "particularity" complex resulting from the injustice and deprivation with which he has lived for more than 40 years and which remains an inherent feature of his thought and behavior? Does the Palestinian have the ability to transcend this particularity, in order to think without fear, to move without violence, and think progressively, and act civilized, to create an equal basis for dialogue with others. Perhaps he could start Germany.

C — Can both the Palestinian and German parties in the economic, social, and political world of today write down together a new formula for future Arab-German relations and a Palestinian role in them? How far can they move in their ideological and practical march, from the concerns of Jewish society, and not acquire its complexes or problems?

CONSTANT AWARENESS:

Despite the enthusiasm and activity of society members for the success of this first public scientific initiative, and the first Palestinian-German academic meeting on the land of Palestine; despite the positive response of German academics and their participation in panels and the payment for their expenses, the general atmosphere at the conference was one of wariness. This caution had three affects:

1 — The subject: is it a documentation of Palestinian-German relations or an assessment of them? Are the participants professors of history and political science or political counsellors? Or can they be both, and hence, declare a position?

2 — The past: is the return to the political history of Germany and Palestine, as a historical background for the discussion of mutual relations done for the purpose of accusing, condemning, and repudiating politicians' views of events, as enemies of both people tend to do, or is it simply a reading of political history to create a contemporary understanding of events, set down by the people themselves?

3 — Results: Does this seminar hope to publish joint resolutions and declarations or individual ones? What are its present and future effects? Will Israeli society in Palestine and Jewish society outside Palestine merely observe this meeting and dialogue, even though it is central to more than one issue and more than one subject concerning the Palestinian and German parties? How will the two parties discuss the Jewish issue, past, present, and future?

PANELS:

The German side submitted three papers for discussion. No Palestinian papers were presented. Participants exchanged views and ideas on the nature and development of relations. Discussions digressed to the Jewish issue, its effect on the past and present of both sides and relations between them.

The seminar did not begin by looking into historical roots or traditional friendship between the two nations, German and Arab, or documenting the history of German and Arab leaders who fought for German and Arab unity. There was also no mention of the nature and development of German-Ottoman Turkish relations and their effect on relations with Arabs and Palestinians, or the first World War, or the Weimer Republic 1919-1933, or the issue of relations between the Third Reich and the Arabs and Palestinians 1933-1945. Panels in the seminar concentrated on the positions of the Federal Republic in the past forty years.

Prof. Helga Baumgarten from the Free University of Berlin submitted a paper entitled "The Middle East Policy of the Federal Republic of Germany and the Palestinians." The paper said that West German relations with the Middle East are governed, to a great extent, by the 12 years of the Third Reich, the massacres of the Jews, and the relationship of the Palestinian Mufti, Haj Amin Husseini, with the Third Reich. In the researcher's opinion, we cannot understand West German foreign policy without consideration of this background. Prof. Baumgarten divided her paper into three sections:

- 1 — A synopsis of the German foreign policy at the time of Chancellor Conrad Adenauer and the German-Israeli compensations agreement in 1952 (the Luxembourg agreement.) Then came the meeting of Adenauer and Ben Gurion in New York, in 1960, and Germany's declaration that it was prepared to offer loans to Israel up to 200 million marks annually. Following this was Adenauer's agreement, under American pressure, to a secret arms deal with Israel. In early 1964, Israel received weapons worth 320 million German marks.

2 – A resume of the Willy Brandt government policy, 1969-1974, and Helmut Shmidt, 1974-1981, both members of the Democratic Socialist Party, concentrating on the role of the foreign minister Hans Gunsher (Free Democratic Party) who retains his position today with the government of the Liberal-Christian coalition, headed by Chancellor Helmut Kohl.

3 – The blending of Federal German policy with EEC foreign policy which was governed by the oil crisis in the seventies and the beginning of Arab-European dialogue, headed by the Palestinian party on the Arab side. This blend was represented by the primary EEC response to the new situation in the Middle East following the October war, in the Brussels declaration issued by the foreign ministers on November 6, 1973. This declaration concluded that any peace procedures in the Middle East must take place within the framework of the United Nations according to four basic principles:

- A – The illegitimacy of land confiscation by force.
- B – The necessity of Israel's ending of its occupation of the lands it took over after the 1967 war.
- C – Respect for sovereignty and security of lands and independence of every country in the area, and the respect of its rights to live in peace within secure and recognized borders.
- D – Recognition of Palestinian legitimate rights. In July 1979 the COMINTERN recognition of the PLO was declared and it took shape in the meeting of Brandt and Kreisky with Yasser Arafat. On the 2nd of September 1979, German foreign minister Gunsher, during his visit to Cairo, gave new dimensions to the German-European position by announcing six principles for peace arrangements in the Middle East:

- 1 – The Palestinian right to self-determination.
- 2 – Their right to a homeland.
- 3 – Their right to choose their representatives.

- 4 — Their right to determine their future.
- 5 — The necessity to achieve a just and comprehensive peace.
- 6 — Refusal of any one-sided peace treaty.

Finally, and even after the Venice declaration of the EEC on June 13, 1980, on the Palestinian right to self-determination, a right which was recognized by Germany before, the attempts to build joint relations between the PLO and the German government are still stumbling because of German demands that the PLO recognize Israel's right to exist and give up "terrorist" activities.

Researcher Thomas Shefler submitted a paper entitled "The policy of the Social Democratic Party in West Germany" in which he explained that this party considers Israel the epitome of Democratic Socialism, rather than a country founded on the ruins of another.

The party, he added, had always worked at gathering support from Israel and, in particular, through influencing the US to enable the party to finally take over the government in Germany. This opened the path for cooperation between the SDP and Israel, starting in the early 50s. He added in his panel discussion that while the party supported the Algerian liberation movement, it never offered anything to Palestinians. The reasons for this on the one hand, were good contacts between West Germany and Algiers as a result of the Algerian revolution and battle against French colonialist occupation, and geographic proximity on the other hand. Added to that is the great interest in and influence of the Algerian revolution in Europe. Mr. Shefler explained that there is little German interest in the Palestinians in West Germany or in relations between the labor and trade unions of both countries.

In the 70s, foreign affairs spokesman Bruno Friedrich of the SDP demanded that the two superpowers offer guarantees for the security of Israeli borders as a starting point for initiatives to find a comprehensive and peaceful solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Following this came the declaration of the West German delegate in the UN, in November 1974, of Germany's support of the Palestinian right to self-determination, followed later by Chancellor Schmidt's statement in

1981 in which he said that Germans who live as a divided nation and demand the right of self-determination for the German people, have a moral commitment towards the Palestinians, and to recognize their legitimate demands for self-determination.

The third panelist was Prof. Friedman Buttner, who submitted a paper on West Germany and the Middle East in which he stated that West German subordination to the West, under US leadership after the Second World War, prevented it from assuming a neutral position and this affected its policy concerning the Middle East. The Arabs and Palestinians have considered the various types of support offered to Israel by West German sources as German alignment with the Israeli side via West German institutions which support Israel. Prof. Buttner added that Arab-Palestinians in Europe in general, and in Germany in particular, do not invest their human, ideological, and social presence to introduce to and activate European and German public opinion concerning the Palestinian issue. There are numerous groups of Arabs and Palestinians, students, merchants, and diplomats, each of which only looks to individual and personal interests and does not perform any concrete role in the European milieu or, at least, does not perform the minimum expected of them. Sympathy with the Palestinians had decreased to a great extent after the Munich operation and the spread of the picture of "violence" and "terrorism" in European media concerning the PLO. This picture, however, began to take another form after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and the Sabra and Shatila massacres. This confirms the fact that the West, in general, and Germany, in particular, is following all incidents with interest rather than merely listening to complaints or one side blaming the other!

As to the future of negotiations for establishing a formula for peace in the Arab arena, Prof. Buttner said that West Germany will not recognize the PLO as speaker and representative of the Palestinian people, as long as Israel and the US refuse to do so. Attempts to establish joint relations between the PLO and the German government will stumble over the rock of German demands that the PLO to give up terrorist actions and recognize Israel's right to exist. Therefore, the

present political choices for a German position on the Middle East are limited for various reasons. It cannot give up its attempts to participate in a peaceful resolution of the conflict. West Germany, as a large exporting country, one of the leading powers in the EEC, and a major US ally in the Atlantic Alliance, bears the responsibility to become more involved in Middle East developments, perhaps even more than its own previous attachment....

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Discussions were held among panelists and participants on how to best invest the ideas and information which were presented during the two day seminar, to move the German government and the Palestinians people's legitimate representative, to take positions that will bring the two sides closer together. The seminar discussed various practical procedures to facilitate contacts on both sides, especially Arab and German churches, to increase consciousness and move public opinion towards support for the Palestinian cause. It urged the German government to deal publicly with the PLO and to call on Israel to accept direct negotiations with the PLO. Finally, it encouraged the continuation of academic meetings between Palestinians and Germans on the levels of private and official institutions and coordination between them.

These recommendations, however, remained verbal and were not set down on paper in a joint statement.





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Riyad Agha



Dr. Mahdi Abdul Hadi



Mr. Thomas Shefler



Dr. Helga Baumgarten



