The Anti-Zionist Bridge

The East German Communist Contribution to Antisemitism’s Revival After the Holocaust

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Communist anti-Zionism was an ideological offensive against the State of Israel whose advocates insisted that the accusation that they were motivated by antisemitism was an imperialist or Zionist trick to defuse legitimate criticism of Israel’s policies toward the Arabs and the Palestinians. The associated rhetoric of anti-fascism, anti-imperialism and anti-racism made it possible for anti-Zionism to burst beyond the bounds of European neo-Nazi circles as well as its Arab and Palestinian or Islamist boundaries and became an enduring element of global Communist, radical leftist and third worldist politics. This anti-Zionism was the primary vehicle through which pejorative views, previously applied to Jews in the Western tradition, were now applied to the State of Israel around the world.

The creation of a journal entitled Antisemitism Studies in 2016 raises the question of why this hatred persists as a factor in world politics following its delegitimation in Europe and the United States after the Holocaust. Part of the answer to that question lies in the history of Communist anti-Zionism, an ideological offensive against the State of Israel whose advocates insisted that the accusation they were motivated by antisemitism was an imperialist...
or Zionist trick to defuse legitimate criticism of Israel’s policies toward the Arabs and the Palestinians.¹ The Communists and, from the 1960s, the global radical Left presented themselves as opponents of all forms of racism and as simply acting on the basis of a Marxist-Leninist interpretation of global economic imperialism. They despised Israel and supported its Arab enemies because the Jewish state had become an outpost of this global system of exploitation and colonialism. In November 1975, a majority of the members of the United Nations General Assembly officially labeled Zionism to be a form of racism. That resolution dramatically accelerated a process that had begun in the 1950s and that had made it possible for anti-Zionism to burst well beyond the bounds of European neo-Nazi circles as well as its Arab and Palestinian or Islamist boundaries and become an enduring element of global Communist, radical Leftist, and Third World politics. This anti-Zionism was the primary vehicle through which pejorative views, previously applied to Jews in the Western tradition, were now applied around the world to the State of Israel.² Soviet anti-Zionism had such a huge impact on world politics because it came from the same country whose armed forces had been decisive in the military defeat of Nazi Germany. Communist and leftist anti-Zionism had markedly different political coordinates than the antisemitism of the Nazis but lurking within it were forms of argument and stereotypes that gave renewed life to antisemitism. The bitter irony to the persistence of antisemitic arguments in world politics lay in the fact that the moral and political prestige that the Soviet Union gained due to wartime anti-fascism and the victory over Hitler lent global credibility to its assault on the Jewish state. How, the Communists argued, could the victors over Hitler be antisemites?

The distinctive historical contribution of the Soviet Union and the Communist regimes in Eastern Europe to the persistence of antisemitism after the Holocaust was five-fold. First, Communist anti-Zionism reintroduced the themes of past antisemitism, especially its conspiracy theories, into an assault on Zionism and Israel. The anti-Zionist attack attributed negative features to the State
of Israel which previous antisemites had associated with Jews or “international Jewry,” most importantly an inclination to war, aggression, and violence. The Soviet Bloc’s denunciation of Israel as comparable to Nazi Germany encapsulated this theme. Second, the reintroduction was all the more powerful for being done in the name of anti-racism and anti-imperialism. In so doing, it lent such arguments a moral and political respectability which they had lost so long as they were associated with Nazism, the far Right in Europe, or Islamists in the Middle East. Third, as noted above, the fact that the Soviet Union had played a decisive role in the military defeat of Nazism ironically brought the prestige of wartime anti-fascism to the anti-Zionist cause and provided support for efforts to destroy the Jewish state. The anti-fascist cause, once directed against Nazi Germany, now became part of the rhetorical arsenal used against Israel. After the purges of the early 1950s, anti-Zionism became a component of both Communist anti-fascism and anti-imperialism. Fourth, Moscow and its satellites made these themes part of international Arab politics. Through a combination of military power, diplomatic offensives at the United Nations, and global propaganda, the Soviet Union and its allies brought anti-Zionism into the mainstream of world politics well beyond the Middle East region. Anti-Zionism became an important component of the Soviet Bloc’s propaganda offensive against the West and a key theme of Communist propaganda during the Cold War. Fifth, the global Communist attack on Israel became so one-sided, and its continuing silence about open expressions of rhetorical Jew-hatred in the Arab states and terrorism aimed at Israeli civilians so tendentious, that it amounted to antisemitism regarding its consequences if not always through its intentions. Moreover, deeds followed hostile words. The Soviet Bloc also became the primary military arsenal of the Arab countries and Palestinian organizations that were in a state of war with Israel.

With the defeat of Nazi Germany in 1945 and the Allied trials for war crimes and crimes against humanity in Nuremberg, radical antisemitism lost credibility in the mainstream of postwar European politics, including for a time in Communist politics.
phenomenon, it was limited to radical Arab nationalists and Islamists who opposed the establishment of the State of Israel and then went to war in 1948 to try to destroy it. Communists, leftists, and liberals in the postwar years had fresh memories of the convergence of anti-Zionism and antisemitism in the Nazi regime. The Nazis viewed the effort to establish a Jewish state in Palestine as evidence of the workings of an international Jewish conspiracy which was threatening Germany and which they were certain was a powerful force in world politics. The Communists shared those vivid memories of the Nazi attack on the Jews, on what the Nazis called “Jewish Bolshevism,” and of those Arab collaborators who denounced the Soviet Union along with its Western Allies. So it was not surprising that there was an era of Soviet Zionism in the four years after World War II when the Soviet Union and Communist states in Eastern Europe supported the establishment of a Jewish state both rhetorically and diplomatically in the United Nations and militarily in the form of weapons, especially from the Czech arms industry. In word and deed, the anti-fascism of the 1940s meant support for the new State of Israel.

Yet in 1948, as Stalin imposed his will on Eastern Europe and the anti-Hitler coalition gave way to the Cold War, the Soviet leader reversed his policy toward Israel and the Jews. With the Doctor’s Plot in Moscow in 1948, the Slansky Trial in Prague (in 1952), and the Merker case in East Berlin (that same year), Stalin unleashed a series of “anti-cosmopolitan purges.” Their targets were mostly Jewish Communists whose primary sin was support for the State of Israel. They were arrested and convicted in a series of public show trials and secret trials, accused of engaging in a global conspiracy to overthrow the Communist regimes. They had fallen under suspicion because, as Jews, Stalin suspected them of being “cosmopolitan,” that is, lacking loyalty to the Soviet Bloc, because they focused attention on the specifics of the Holocaust, and because they had publicly or privately expressed support for the establishment of the State of Israel. The anti-cosmopolitan purges reintroduced classic antisemitic arguments into Communist political discourse. Soviet Bloc anti-Zionism gave way to the
indictments of the Doctor’s Plot, the Slansky Trial, and the Merker case, indictments that imagined a conspiracy of pseudo-Communists, who were either Jewish or sympathetic to Israel, who had joined with American capitalists and imperialists in order to overthrow the Communist regimes.

The anti-cosmopolitan purges brought about a shift in Communist loyalties from Europe’s Jews and the survivors of the Holocaust in Israel to the Arab states and Palestinian organizations. The Communists transformed their view of the Arabs. Those they had once denounced as religious obscurantists, political reactionaries, participants in the imperialism of oil, and supporters of the Nazis, they now extolled as members of the exploited Third World fighting for national liberation against the now common Cold War enemies in the West. They began to describe Israel as a tool of imperialism. In the aftermath of the Six Day War in 1967, a similar reversal of course from empathy to hostility spread to the global radical Left which placed Israel on the wrong side of the global war between imperialism and “national liberation struggles” in the Third World. Both turns, that of 1948–1956 in the Soviet Bloc and the Communist parties, and the second in 1967 in the global radical Left, internationalized antagonism and hatred that previously had been limited to the Arab region or to Islamist politics. The memories of World War II were still too fresh to permit the Muslim Brotherhood, Sayyid Qutb, or the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin al-Husseini, to become respectable figures on the world stage. Their past enthusiasm for Hitler was too recent, their hatred of the Jews and Judaism was too raw, too open, and unapologetic, and their origins in religious fundamentalism too obvious to find respectability beyond their local confines. As a result, in the early postwar decades, this mix of antisemitism and anti-Zionism remained a strictly regional hatred, linked to the political conflict between Israel and the Arab states and to Islamic organizations elsewhere that opposed the foundation of Israel.

It was the historical accomplishment of the Communists in the 1950s and the radical and Third World Left in the 1960s and 1970s to burst beyond the bounds of those geographical and cultural
limitations. Before and during World War II, Communism’s ideological advantage over fascism and Nazism lay in its universalistic appeals to the exploited of the whole world compared to the narrowness of Italian nationalism and the even narrower attraction of Nazi visions of an Aryan master race, both of which excluded the vast majority of humanity.9 During the Cold War, the Communists’ contribution to the diffusion of anti-Zionist arguments duplicated that earlier contrast of universalism vs. particularism by making arguments that would appeal beyond the narrow national confines of the Arab states and the larger numerical limits of Muslims in many countries, arguments especially likely to strike a nerve among nations in what was then called the Third World in the era of decolonization. Due to the primacy of anti-imperialism in the Communist lexicon and the connections between Islamic and anti-imperialist politics during the Cold War, the boundaries between secular and Islamist politics became more permeable than they were when Islamism was primarily associated with Nazism.

There were limits to the moral and political respectability that anti-Zionist arguments could confer on world politics, especially after the devastating blow that Nikita Khrushchev delivered in his “Secret Speech” of 1956. The global New Left and Third World Left, especially during and after the Six Day War of 1967, promoted a second stage of internationalization of anti-Zionism and antagonism to Israel, one that spread it well beyond the Communist states and parties to a young generation radicalized in protests against the US war in Vietnam. In the 1960s, a new Left emerged around the world, particularly in Western Europe, Japan, and the United States. It had begun with anti-Stalinist and anti-Leninist themes, but as it increasingly turned to Third World Communist movements and regimes for inspiration, its ideology became more Marxist-Leninist and thus ironically closer to the actual positions of the Soviet Union and its allies. Antagonism toward the Jewish state in the global New Left crystallized in the spring and summer of 1967, during and after the Six Day War. New Left organizations in Western Europe and the United States also placed Israel in the camp of imperialism and global counter-revolution. Having found a new collective agent
of revolution in Third World leftist insurgency, the Western New Left celebrated the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and its affiliates as part of this new movement. The Israeli as imperialist, colonialist, and racist became a theme in New Left publications. The two decades from 1965 to 1985, roughly from the Soviet Bloc’s intensified military support for the Arab states to the coming to power of Gorbachev and the beginnings of “new thinking” in Soviet foreign policy, constituted the high-point of Communist and secular leftist antagonism to Israel. It was then that this antagonism combined hostile propaganda and diplomatic offensives at the United Nations with open support for war and terror against Israel in the Six Day War of 1967 and the Yom Kippur War of 1973, as well as assistance for the PLO’s terrorist campaigns and its accumulation of a powerful arsenal in southern Lebanon, culminating in the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982.

ANTI-ZIONISM IN EAST GERMANY AND THE WEST GERMAN LEFT

Though all of the major Soviet Bloc states supported the Arab states and the PLO during the Cold War, none took a more prominent public role than did the Communist dictatorship in East Germany, officially known as the German Democratic Republic (GDR). While the global radical Left turned against Israel, it was only in West Germany that leftist radicals confronted Nazism as their own national past. So, anti-Zionism in Germany after the Holocaust would necessarily raise suspicions of antisemitism, at worst, or charges of insensitivity and amnesia, at best. For historians of Germany, however, why any Germans in this period were making common cause with those attacking the Jewish state would be an important question. In the West German tradition of Vergangenheitsbewältigung, that is, efforts to “come to terms with the Nazi past,” there existed an implicit eleventh commandment of German history. It could be expressed in the following dictum: Do not kill or harm any more Jews and do not help anyone else to kill or harm any more Jews, including the Jewish citizens of the
State of Israel. The plea was a moral minimum implicitly adopted by leaders of West Germany, such as Konrad Adenauer, Kurt Schumacher, and Theodor Heuss, and a few dissident and quickly purged Communists in the early 1950s, such as Paul Merker. In West Germany, this ethical injunction became compatible with judicial delay, premature amnesty of ex-Nazi officials, and public silence about the crimes of the past. Yet the East German regime as well as the West German Leftist terrorist organizations did violate this dictum and did bring harm to Jews and Israelis. They did so by becoming allies and supporters of Israel’s armed adversaries in the Middle East. For the Israelis who were killed, wounded, or traumatized by these armed assaults, the question of whether their enemies were motivated by antisemitism or “merely” by anti-Zionism was of secondary importance.

One of the most important consequences of the revolution of 1989–1990, which was followed by the collapse of the East German Communist state and its incorporation into a unified Germany, was the ready availability of all of the key archives of the regime’s most sensitive political institutions. That availability has made it possible to document the translation of anti-Zionist ideology into the anti-Israeli policy of what I have called undeclared wars with Israel. Like their Communist comrades in other states and in Communist parties around the world, the East German leaders indignantly rejected the accusation that their hostile propaganda, diplomatic offensives, and military support for the Arab states and the Palestinian terrorist organizations had anything at all to do with antisemitism. Yet from the founding of the state to its end, East German leaders left no doubt that theirs was a policy of unambiguous and passionate anti-Zionism. East Germany offers us a paradigmatic case of the shift of the political coordinates of anti-Zionism from the extreme Right before 1945 to the Communist states and the radical Left during the Cold War. The West German radical Left after 1967 illustrated how anti-fascism in its context evolved first into verbal and then into armed attacks on Israelis in collaboration with the most extreme members of the PLO, in particular the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.
From the mid-1960s, when it began to participate in Soviet Bloc arms shipments to the Arab states to its demise in 1989, the government of East Germany participated in the Soviet Bloc’s undeclared war with the State of Israel. In using the word “war,” I refer to policies which, if successful, would have led to the destruction of the State of Israel by force of arms. Nouns such as “criticism” or “hostility” do not capture the combination of propaganda, verbal justifications for armed attacks on Israel, deliveries of thousands of assault rifles, hand grenades, millions of bullets, and other implements of war, cooperation of intelligence services and military training, and financial support to both the PLO and its affiliates and the Arab states at war with Israel. The East German government declared itself a Friedenstaat (peace state) and never formally declared war on Israel. Nevertheless, its passionate public engagement with the Arab states and the PLO at a time when the PLO Charter was publicly committed to the destruction of Israel went well beyond the minimum required of members of the Warsaw Pact.

In contrast to the West German leftist terrorist organizations, such as the Red Army Faction and the Revolutionary Cells, the GDR was a state, with the sinews of power and of war that a state possesses: armed forces, a modest arms industry, a controlled press, embassies and consulates around the world, formidable secret police and intelligence agencies, institutes for military training, hospital care for wounded soldiers, an international airport, ports and ships to deliver military assistance, and government-controlled universities that offered ideological messages to young students coming from Third World countries. Though the West German terrorists captured most of the media’s attention, East Germany and its Soviet Bloc allies had a far more important impact on the conflict between Israel, the Arab states, and the PLO. With access to a variety of government and political archives in West Germany and to the archives of all of the decision making and implementation institutions of the East German regime—including the decision-making Politburo, the implementation offices of the Council of Ministers, and the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defense as well as the
An anti-Zionist passion burned with particular intensity in East Germany. It did so from 1949 under the leadership of Walter Ulbricht, First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED) and thus leader of the East German dictatorship until 1971, and continued under his successor, Erich Honecker, until 1989. It did so due to a confluence of Marxist-Leninist ideology with the pursuit of national interest conventionally understood. In its effort to undermine the East German regime, West Germany stipulated that it would refuse diplomatic recognition to any state that would recognize the East German regime. In response, the East German leaders looked for ways to gain such recognition from countries outside the Soviet Bloc. East Germany’s hostility to Israel and its partisanship for the Arab states proved to be the most important factors that shattered West German efforts to isolate it and that opened a path to diplomatic recognition and popularity first among the Arab states, then among other leftist regimes and organizations in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. For the East German Communist leaders, West Germany’s support for Israel was a vulnerability which they exploited as they played the anti-Zionist card. Doing so was both a matter of ideological conviction as well as one that aided the search for diplomatic recognition beyond the Soviet Bloc. It was this mutually reinforcing quality of Communist anti-fascist and anti-imperialist ideology combined with national self-interest, conventionally understood, which contributed to the passion with which East Germany adopted anti-Zionist ideology and policy. The more diplomatic recognition East Germany gained, the more it spread the anti-Zionist arguments which had contributed to its diplomatic successes. As became particularly evident in the 1970s at the United Nations, East Germany’s hostility to Israel won it approval from many countries around the world.

East German antagonism to Israel became most visibly evident to a global audience when East Germany, along with the Soviet Bloc, supported the Arab states during the Six Day War of 1967. According to CIA reports, East Germany delivered about 3%
of Soviet Bloc military assistance to the Arab states. Yet this small country of 17 million people managed to send 50 MiG jets in the spring and summer to Egypt and Syria.\(^{15}\) In June 1967 alone, East German deliveries to Egypt included: 35 Soviet T-34/85 tanks; 5,000 Kalashnikov 7.62 millimeter machine guns with 600,000 bullets; 6,000 MPi 41 Kalashnikov machine guns; and 3,500 Kalashnikov machine guns number 43/44 as well as an additional 11 million 7.62 millimeter bullets and five million 7.9 millimeter cartridges.\(^ {16}\)

In Karl Marx’s phrase, the East Germans combined the arm of criticism with the criticism of arms.\(^ {17}\) On June 15, 1967, in a speech in Leipzig, East German leader Walter Ulbricht denounced Israel and supported the Arab states.\(^ {18}\) At the United Nations in New York, Soviet Ambassador Yakov Malik compared Israel’s surprise attack that began the Six Day War with the Nazis’ war on the Eastern Front in World War II. Ulbricht offered his own comparison of Israel to Nazi Germany. With allusions to the Nazi Protectorate in Czechoslovakia and to the Nazis’ General Government of occupied Poland during World War II, Ulbricht said that the “world could not accept that a quarter of a century after the Second World War, the aggressor Israel and its men behind the scenes (Hintermänner) form a Sinai Protectorate or a General Government of Jordan for the purpose of renewed colonial oppression of the Arab peoples.”\(^ {19}\) In subsequent decades, the association of Israel with Nazi Germany remained an enduring element of Communist, Arab, Palestinian, and West German and West European leftist anti-Israeli propaganda, and the association survives down to our own times.

Following the Six Day War, the Arab states waged what they called a war of attrition that included artillery exchanges with Israel’s armed forces as well as terrorist raids against Israel. The files of the East German Defense Ministry indicate that while these attacks were taking place, the East Germans expanded their cost-free weapons assistance to the Arab states, primarily to Egypt and Syria.\(^ {20}\) The deliveries included 30 MiG-17 F and 20 MiG-17 fighter jets and 48 jet engines as well as rocket propelled grenade launchers,
recoilless rifles, 60 anti-tank rocket propelled grenade launchers, 17,500 Kalashnikov machine guns ( MPI-41, MPI-43/44), 430 light machine guns with munitions, 150,000 land mines, and 3,500 hand grenades together with helmets, uniforms, and back packs. Additional deliveries to the Saika guerrilla organization in Syria included six T-34 tanks, 3,000 machine pistols, 560 machine guns, 2,000 carbines, 10,000 hand grenades, and 260 binoculars. On May 13, 1969, the Politburo agreed to give—without cost—5,000 Kalashnikov machine guns (43/44) and 12 million 7.9 millimeter cartridges to Iraq’s “people’s militia.” Faced with increasing requests from many states and movements in the Third World for military support, the East German regime formalized its weapons delivery programs. On September 30, 1969, Willi Stoph, Politburo member and President of the East German Council of Ministers, assigned Gerhard Weiss, the Deputy Minister, to be the coordinator of deliveries of weapons to states around the world, including the Arab states. Weiss’s committee remained the center of that program for the next 15 years.

The mutually reinforcing nature of ideological passion and national interest in East Germany became dramatically apparent in June and July of 1969 when it received diplomatic recognition from the Arab states. On April 30, 1969, Iraq became the first non-Communist government (after Norodom Sihanouk’s Cambodia) to establish diplomatic relations with the GDR. The breakthrough was due, in part, to the persistent efforts of Otto Winzer (1902–1975), East Germany’s Foreign Minister from 1965 to 1975. The joint declaration issued by Winzer and Iraqi Foreign Minister Abdul Karim al-Sheikhly on May 10, 1969 at the conclusion of a week of negotiations in Bagdad made a clear connection between Iraq’s decision to establish diplomatic relations and East Germany’s position regarding Israel. The two foreign ministers stressed their “shared struggle . . . against imperialism, neo-Nazism, colonialism and Zionism” and described Israel as “racist, imperialist, reactionary, and aggressive.” The description of Israel as a racist state, an imperialist spearhead, and even as a state similar to Nazi Germany was thus embedded.
in the beginnings of diplomatic relations between Iraq and East Germany and also in the political language of the Soviet Bloc. Similar language accompanied the establishment of East Germany’s diplomatic relations with Sudan (June 3, 1969), Syria (June 5, 1969), and with Egypt as well as South Yemen (July 10, 1969). An increase in weapons deliveries of MiG fighter jets to Syria and Egypt soon followed.27

During these same years, the Soviet Bloc as a whole deepened a state-to-state military alliance with the Arab states. Heinz Hoffmann (1910–1985), East Germany’s Minister of Defense from 1960 to 1985, and Honecker, Ulbricht’s successor as General Secretary of the SED, were the central figures in the emergence and growth of the East German component of that alliance.28

In October 1971, Hoffmann led an East German military delegation on a trip to Iraq, Egypt, and most importantly, to Syria. There he met with Hafez al-Assad as well as with the Chief of the Syrian General Staff, Mustafa Tlass. In the course of extolling solidarity in the common struggle against Zionism, Hoffmann observed that Tlass “clearly” expressed a “tendency that existed among other leading officers of the Arab armed forces,” namely, an “unconditional admiration for the fascist Blitzkrieg strategy and the expert accomplishments of the bourgeois German military.”29

Unfazed by Tlass’s admiration for the Wehrmacht’s accomplishments, Hoffmann expressed confidence that the Syrians “will be victorious in their battle against the enemy. We are fighting the same enemy,” that is, the United States and Israel.30

The relationship between East Germany and Syria and between Hoffman and Tlass deepened in the following decade. Assad’s Syria, in fact, became the lynchpin of Soviet state-to-state policy in the Middle East—just as it is the lynchpin of Russian policy in the Middle East today. In 1983, Tlass published _The Matzo of Zion_, a work that offered a Syrian version of the blood libel about Jews killing children to use their blood to bake matzos. East German diplomats and military leaders then knew with whom they were allied and said nothing publicly to chastise the openly Jew-hating Syrian Minister of Defense.31

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In September 1973, East Germany became the first of the Soviet Bloc states to open a PLO consulate in its capital. The East German-PLO agreement extolled their common “struggle against imperialism and Zionism.” The agreement of August 2, 1973 included the GDR’s promise to deliver “solidarity goods in the civilian and non-civilian area,” that is, weapons. Similar agreements for civilian and military deliveries were signed on an annual basis over the next 15 years. The opening of the PLO office caused consternation in the Jewish community of West Berlin. On September 21, 1973, Heinz Galinski, the titular head of that community, sent an open letter to East German leader Honecker to express the “growing concern and anxiety in the Jewish community” about the establishment of the PLO office in East Berlin. The following makes clear Galinski’s apprehension:

With astonishment, we see that the stance of the GDR towards Israel is more hostile than other socialist countries…. Now and then we hear from your side the assurance that you have nothing against Jews. Rather it is only Zionism that you condemn and fight. We have had negative practical experiences with such theories. There is no doubt that the biased, uninformed and hate-filled reporting about Israel in the press, radio and television in the GDR in recent years again awakens anti-Semitic resentment. In so doing, it accords with the intentions of neo-Nazi elements. People, such as yourself, who belonged to the circle of those persecuted by the Nazi regime, must be especially conscious of such effects. It especially pains us that people who suffered with us under National Socialism and fought against it, foster such destructive emotions and sentiments.

Honecker did not reply to Galinski’s letter.

During the 1970s, the East German-PLO relationship grew into a full-scale alliance that included military training, delivery of
weapons, and cooperation between East Germany’s Ministry of State Security, and the PLO’s intelligence service. One result was the formulation of a distinctive East German Eurocentric definition of counter-terrorism which simultaneously sought to prevent terrorist attacks in West Germany and Western Europe that could be traced back to East Germany, while supporting and facilitating the PLO’s terrorist attacks on Israel.36 In June 1979, East Germany’s Ministry of State Security signed a formal agreement of cooperation with the PLO intelligence services based on their shared interest in preventing the use of East Germany as a base for terrorist operations against Western Europe but in fostering it as a base for terrorist operations against Israel.37 East Germany’s active support for terrorist organizations engaged in attacks on Israeli civilians was a clear example of how Communist anti-Zionism facilitated military attacks on Jews living in Israel.

The connections between the Soviet Bloc and Arab states entailed deliveries of larger and more numerous weapons than was the case to guerrilla organizations such as the PLO and its affiliates.38 During the Yom Kippur War of 1973, while West Germany proclaimed its neutrality and joined other members of NATO in refusing to allow American planes resupplying Israel to refuel in West Germany, East Germany loudly proclaimed its support for the Arab states and sent MiG jets and two freighters loaded with 2,000 tons of heavy weapons to Syria. While the West German government was urging Israeli ships to get out of Bremerhaven harbor (they were there to receive American military supplies), the East German government enthusiastically joined in the shipment of weapons to the Arab states, including Syria, in its own ships. The shipments of MiG jet planes, tanks, and heavy artillery were kept secret. Two East German freighters delivered approximately 2,200 tons of weapons, including 62 Soviet T-54 tanks with the necessary experts and ammunition; 300 anti-tank rifles (RPG-7) with 24,000 shells; 75,000 grenades that were designed to function with the Syrian army’s artillery systems; and 30,000 land mines capable of destroying tanks.39 Here again was clear evidence that through support of the Arab states at war with Israel and the Palestinian
armed organizations seeking to destroy it by force of arms, East Germany, along with its Soviet Bloc allies, was in an undeclared war with Israel.

The United Nations General Assembly became the central political institution through which anti-Zionism expanded beyond the limits of regional Arab politics and became a key element in the political culture of world politics. The Soviet Union and its allies played a key role in this process of internationalization. After it became a member of the United Nations in 1973, East Germany placed itself in the midst of the huge anti-Israel majority in the UN General Assembly.\(^\text{40}\) In 1975, it was one of the 20 co-sponsors of the UN resolution that created the PLO’s anchor at the UN, the Committee for the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (CEIRPP). It joined the majority of 72 nations in the General Assembly that voted in favor of Resolution 3379 that determined “Zionism is a form of racism” on November 10, 1975. Chaim Herzog, Israel’s Ambassador to the UN, told the General Assembly at the time that as a result of the resolution the UN had become “the world centre of anti-Semitism. Hitler would have felt at home on a number of occasions during the past year, listening to the proceedings in this forum, and above all, to the proceedings during the debate on Zionism.”\(^\text{41}\)

In his response on November 10 to the passage of the Zionism as racism resolution, the American Ambassador to the UN, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, declared that “the resolution was a lie,” that “a great evil has been loosed upon the world. The abomination of anti-Semitism … has been given the appearance of international sanction.”\(^\text{42}\) Moynihan added that if, as the Soviet delegate declared, “racism is a form of Nazism, and if, as this resolution declared, Zionism is a form of racism, then we have step by step taken ourselves to the point of proclaiming that Zionism is a form of Nazism.”\(^\text{43}\) According to Moynihan, this was a lie “scarcely exceeded” in the twentieth century’s “annals of untruth and outrage. The lie is that Zionism is a form of racism. The overwhelmingly clear truth is that it is not.”\(^\text{44}\) Yet it was this lie, that Zionism was, in fact, not only a form of racism but also “a form
of Nazism,” which was so devastatingly effective for the globalization of antisemitism in the halls of the United Nations. By placing the traditions of Communist anti-fascism and anti-imperialism in the service of this attack on Zionism and the State of Israel, East Germany, enthusiastically following the lead of the Soviet Union, voted in favor of this and many other anti-Israeli resolutions at the UN. In so doing, it made a significant contribution to the globalization of antisemitism embedded in the rhetoric of anti-Zionism. To insist that the Zionism is racism resolution had nothing to do with antisemitism was to claim that spreading a lie about Zionism had nothing to do with hatred of the Jews. Moynihan’s reasoning that supporters of the resolution had to conclude that Zionism was a form of Nazism grasped the illogical nature of that presumption and the hatred inspiring it.

Although, as a UN member, East Germany’s delegation was informed in detail by Israel’s UN delegation of Palestinian terrorist attacks on Israeli citizens, the East German press and media, along with their counterparts in the Soviet Bloc, reported little or nothing about these attacks while making general assertions of support for the Palestinians’ legitimate rights of resistance, that is, to use weapons of war against the citizens of Israel. When speaking frankly to their counterparts in the PLO, East German intelligence officials in the Ministry of State Security supported the PLO’s resort to terrorism. On October 14, 1974, Yosef Tekoah, Israel’s Ambassador to the United Nations, in opposing a resolution to give the PLO observer status in the organization, referred to the PLO’s program to destroy the State of Israel and its use of “the most despicable methods witnessed by mankind in recent decades—the deliberate murder of guiltless civilians.” Peter Florin, East Germany’s UN Ambassador replied that “we fully support” the “just struggle to ensure the people of Palestine their legitimate rights.” Referring to Tekoah’s comments, he added that “the slander of the Israeli representatives against the PLO is simply a desperate effort to distract attention from Israel’s continuing aggression against neighboring Arab States and shows that Israel is still not inclined to acknowledge the rights of the Arab peoples
of Palestine.” It was in these same years that the PLO and its various affiliates (the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine), supported by East Germany, carried out attacks on Israeli citizens in northern Israel.

The Soviet Bloc and East German response to Israel’s invasion of Lebanon in 1982 offered an example of how anti-Zionism crossed the line into antisemitism. The war took place following almost a decade of terrorist attacks on the towns of northern Israel from PLO bases in southern Lebanon, hence its name, “Peace for Galilee.” Yet both within Israel and abroad, the war was and remains controversial. Opposition to the war, or the way it was conducted, was significant in Israel as well as around the world. According to Soviet Bloc and East German propaganda during the war, the Israeli attack on Lebanon was an *Ausrottungskrieg* (a war of extermination), as East Germany’s official newspaper, *Neues Deutschland*, declared on June 28, 1974. On June 29, East German Foreign Minister Oskar Fischer wrote to UN General Secretary Pere de Cuellar asking him to repeat the charge of a “war of extermination.” On July 6, 1974, *Neues Deutschland* reprinted an article from *Pravda* which claimed that “the Zionists solve the ‘Palestinian Question exactly as the Nazis solved the ‘Jewish Question’ … through total extermination and genocide. The ‘Great Israel’ was built with the same methods as was the ‘Great Germany,” that is, “by territorial conquest” at “the cost of the blood and bones of other peoples.”

In July, *Neues Deutschland* described Israel’s war in Lebanon with nouns made infamous by their association with Nazi Germany—*Sonderkommando* (special commandos), *Mordfeldzug* (campaign of murder), *Ausrottungskrieg* (war of extermination), and *Völkermord* (genocide). That summer, *Neues Deutschland* published wildly inflated numbers of civilian deaths, figures which it refused to correct after accurate (and far lower) numbers were reported by Lebanese as well as Israeli sources. While the Soviet press repeated the “Israeli as Nazi” theme that emerged in the UN debates in 1967, the East Germans were a bit more reserved, merely describing the Zionists as mass murderers and practitioners of genocide.
For the Soviet Bloc propaganda organs, Israel’s war in Lebanon confirmed what Moynihan had called the lie that Zionism was a form of Nazism.52

CONCLUSION

Following the Iranian Revolution of 1979, the publication of the Hamas Charter in 1988, the revolutions of 1989 in Eastern Europe, and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Islamists re-emerged as a leading force in the war against the Jewish state. In contrast to the Communists and the radical Left, the Islamists proudly declared their hatred for Jews and Judaism, offered religious, not secular, justifications for this hatred, dispensed with rhetoric about diplomatic and peaceful solutions, and proudly declared that they intended to destroy the State of Israel by armed force. Islamism revived the classic convergence of antisemitism and anti-Zionism that was present in Nazi Germany. Yet the habits of thought of the secular Communist and leftist era survived the collapse of the Soviet Union and the East European Communist states because the Communists had been successful in associating falsehoods about Israel with the causes of anti-fascism, anti-imperialism, and anti-racism.

In the four decades following the Holocaust, Communism and the radical Left did for antisemitism what Islamism could not do. Even in the 1960s and 1970s, the memories of Haj Amin al-Husseini’s radio broadcasts from Nazi Berlin or Sayyid Qutb’s justifications of the Holocaust in his *Our Struggle with the Jews* were too close to the letter and spirit of Nazism to appeal beyond the radical nationalist Arab or Islamist milieu of North Africa and the Middle East. An anti-Zionism which insisted that it had nothing to do with antisemitism, which spoke in the name of anti-fascism and anti-imperialism, and which came from a power, the Soviet Union, that had played a decisive role in defeating Nazi Germany proved to be a powerful carrier of a set of ideas and claims about the State of Israel that denied its legitimacy and justified armed
attacks on its citizens. It was this Communist and radical leftist anti-Zionism that contributed to repeated defeats of Israel in the United Nations General Assembly and turned it into what Herzog called “the world’s centre of anti-Semitism.” These ideas fostered indifference to terrorist attacks launched against Israelis, justified those attacks as part of a legitimate struggle for national liberation, and offered excuses for expressions of open Jew-hatred when it came from Arabs and Palestinians. The anti-Zionism of the Communist era during the Cold War also made hatred of the Jewish state respectable among those who spoke the language of human rights and anti-colonialism. Through global competition with the United States and its allies, the Soviet Union and its allies globalized falsehoods about Israel and promoted hatred toward the Jewish state and its citizens beyond the limits of the Middle East. Ironically, the most important arena of that globalization was the United Nations where East German diplomats worked intensively in the anti-Zionist effort.

Communist anti-Zionism described Israel in the same terms European antisemites used to describe Jews: violent, aggressive, murderous, and a great danger to the whole world. The assault on Zionism presented Israel as the stubborn particular which refused to be absorbed into the universal. It was both a manifestation of an evil modernity, now called imperialism, as well as an anachronism whose national liberation struggle was somehow not acceptable while the nationalisms of Palestinians and the Arab states were to be extolled. The repeated falsehood that the Israelis were like the Nazis lay at the core of Communist anti-Zionism. By associating the Jewish state with the modern embodiment of radical evil, Communist anti-Zionism made a major contribution to the persistence of antisemitism. For if the Jewish state was a practitioner of genocide, gross violations of human rights, and wars of extermination, did this not have at least something to do with the character of the Jewish people?

On March 11, 1978, Yasser Arafat laid a wreath at the memorial to “victims of fascism and militarism” in East Berlin. The photo of the event shows Arafat walking between Gerhard Grüneberg,
the member of the East German Politburo who negotiated and signed the agreements with the PLO, and an East German military officer who bears resemblance to Minister of Defense Heinz Hoffmann. Units of East Germany’s National People’s Army stand at attention in the background. By associating the memory of the victims of fascism with the leader of the PLO, the image captures the essence of Soviet Bloc and East German propaganda aimed at the State of Israel, namely that the war against Israel was another chapter in the history of anti-fascism. There are multiple causes for the persistence of antisemitism after the Holocaust, but no history of that persistence would be complete without paying close attention to the contribution made by the Communist assault on Zionism. We recall Heinz Galinski’s words to Erich Honecker in September 1973: “Now and then we hear from your side the assurance that you have nothing against Jews. Rather it is only Zionism that you condemn and fight. We have had negative practical experiences with such theories.” Galinski’s powerful understatement alluded to the important chapter of the globalization of antisemitism that was then in full swing and today continues to affect the world.

Notes


2. On anti-Judaism in the Western tradition, see David Nirenberg, Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition (New York: W. W. Norton, 2013)


4. On Arab language denunciations of the Soviet Union and Communism on Nazi Germany’s short wave radio broadcast to North Africa and
the Middle East, see Herf, *Nazi Propaganda*, chs. 5–6.


11. On West Germany’s policies toward the Nazi past, see Herf, \textit{Divided Memory}.

12. See Herf, \textit{Undeclared Wars with Israel}.


19. Ibid., 118.


28. “Hoffmann, Heinz,” Bernd-Rainer Barth, et al., *Wer war Wer in
der DDR: Ein biographisches Handbuch (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1996).


30. Ibid.

31. On the meetings between Heinz Hoffmann and Mustafa Tlass see Herf, Undeclared Wars with Israel, 142–144; 371–372. On Tlass’ Matzo of Zion, see Herf, Undeclared Wars with Israel, 377–380.

32. See Herf, “Formalizing the East German Alliance with the PLO and the Arab States: 1973,” in Herf, Undeclared Wars with Israel, 198–238.


35. Ibid.


38. On military deliveries to the Arab states during the Yom Kippur War, see Herf, “East German Arms Deliveries to Syria” in Herf, Undeclared Wars with Israel, 234–238.


Undeclared Wars with Israel, 288–316.


42. Cited in Herf, Undeclared Wars, 298–299. See also Daniel Patrick Moynihan, UNGA, 30th Session, 2400 Plenary Meeting (November 10, 1975), UN ODS A/PV.2400, 796.

43. Ibid.

44. Ibid.

45. On this issue, see Herf, “Candid discussions about terrorism in East Berlin between Abu Ayad and Stasi Officials,” in Herf, Undeclared Wars with Israel, 355–356.


49. On these assertions, see Herf, “The Israel-PLO War in Lebanon of 1982,” in Herf, Undeclared Wars with Israel, 425–426; esp. 417.

50. Ibid.

51. See Herf, Undeclared Wars with Israel, ch. 12.

52. These extremely negative views of Israel also became important aspects of the West German and West European Radical Left. See chapters 3, 10, and 13 in Herf, Undeclared Wars with Israel. See also Andrei Markovits, “‘The Twin Brothers’: European Anti-Semitism and Anti-Americanism,” in his Uncouth Nation: Why Europe Dislikes America (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 150–200.

53. Figure 11.1, in Herf, Undeclared Wars with Israel, 343.

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