CHAPTER 8. The GDR and the "Arab World":

A Small State's "Fill-In Policy"

Until now, no in-depth analyses of East German activities in the Middle East nor any brief overviews on the four full decades of East German engagement in the region have been published. This is mostly due to the lack of case studies on East German foreign policy in the Middle East from the 1970s onwards, but also to significant gaps in research on the GDR's foreign policy in general. The following chapter cannot be considered this long-awaited overview, as it is merely conceptualized to support the analysis of the GDR's engagement in the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen. Any interpretation of the GDR's activities in the Global South must remain piecemeal, as there is no way to "accurately assess the nature and volume" of East German aid. It was not before the mid-1980s that the GDR was urged by the UN and World Bank to publish systematized numbers,[1] and even these cannot be considered fully reliable: Foreign aid remained a tool of a foreign policy, serving political and ideological ends. Thus, any interpretations with regard to the actual volume of spending have to content themselves with a short- to medium-range explanation. In addition to that, there did not exist a central agency to coordinate the GDR's policy towards the Global South: Though the Politbüro decided on the formation of a "Commission for the Developing Countries" in 1977,[2] this decision was not enforced to any effect before German reunification.

Despite this pessimistic outlook, this chapter intends to offer a foothold and orientation on East German engagement in the Middle East for future research. Based on the Soviet interests in the Middle East during the Cold War, the following chapter firstly sketches the GDR's activities in the region and how it had to navigate within this rather narrow scope of action. Secondly, this brief

1 | Howell, 1994, 307.

2 | German: Kommission für Entwicklungsländer, "to coordinate the economic, cultural, scientific-technical and non-civilian activities in the countries of Asia, Africa and the Arab world," in: Beschluß des Politbüros, Protokoll Nr. 49/77, December 20 1977, in: BArch, SAPMO, DY JI 2/2 1705; also see: Döring, 1999, 44ff; Howell, 1994, 313.

outline introduces the East German engagement in the Middle East before and after international recognition and thirdly concludes with the three dominant strategies that structured East German activities in the Middle East.

1. The Middle East between Washington and Moscow: Pawn or Player?

> "The Soviets were responsible for the whole world and left small bites to their agencies in East Berlin, Sofia, Bucharest, Warsaw, and Prague."[3]

The GDR's activities in the Middle East had mostly been shaped by Moscow's interests in the region. The following subsection places the Middle East within the wider framework of the Cold War to sketch the relationship between the international and the regional. Then, the political development and processes in the region are summarized briefly along major events, most of which were conflicts, in the wider Middle East to identify Soviet interests and strategies in the Cold War.

Halliday diagnoses a "reciprocal relationship"[4] during the Cold War between the international and the regional levels, the system and the sub-system, and the globe and the Middle East. He also considers the Cold War both a "global, formative context" and a system of 'strategic control," reaching out to steer regional actors as well.[5] The relationship between the international level and the regional level had changed significantly after the "high colonial epoch" between 1918 and 1945 and was now characterized by more interaction between "global and regional forces." Halliday's approach clearly ascribes more agency to the regional actors of the Middle East, going well beyond the image of the region as produced by the narrative of the superpower conflict.[6] Halliday diagnoses a considerably more active role of regional actors. Thus, one may imply an overall change of character of foreign policy of the global towards the regional powers in the Middle East with the onset of the Cold War. With regard to the levels of engagement, "imposition" of external actors, i.e., colonial powers, was replaced by the two superpowers oscillating between "intervention" and "involvement" to "influence" due to the growing agency of regional actors who were not only willing, but also able to pursue their own interests.

This change in relationship was demonstrated during the Suez Crisis of 1956 when Egypt unilaterally nationalized the Suez Canal. The former global and

3 | Kowalczuck, 2013, 251.

4 | Halliday, 2005, 98.

5 | Ibid., 127.

6 | With this approach, Halliday opposes Westad, who emphasizes the agency of the two superpowers, Westad, 2005, 272ff.

colonial powers, the United Kingdom and France, supported an Israeli initiative to prevent what they considered Egypt's seizure of the canal and in doing so once more demanded a major power position in the region. In the end, the United States prevented this military move. Still, from then on the Middle East and its regional powers were both pawns and active players in the global conflict: While the region cannot be considered the major venue of the bloc confrontation, it was still "vital to [the superpowers"] security."[7] This was especially true for an extremely sensitive field of foreign policy and economy: For both superpowers and their allies, the Middle East emerged as the primary recipient of their arms trade among the countries of the Global South.

1.1 Heading for New Shores: Moscow's Early Engagement in the Middle East

Compared with the United States, the Soviet Union had a noticeably higher interest in the events and power distribution in the region, even though it "had no direct interest in Middle Eastern oil"[8] at the time. Rather, the relevance of the region to the USSR was of a more immediate nature: the Greater Middle East directly bordered its territory and sphere of influence.[9] Apart from the countries of the Middle East in its immediate vicinity, the Horn of Africa and Bab Al-Mandab were of utmost geostrategic importance for the Kremlin. Not only as a possible naval base between Africa, Europe, and Asia, but also as part of the shipping route between the European West, the Black Sea, and the Asian East on the Sea of Okhotsk that surrounded the vast territory that was the Soviet Union.

Until the so-called "détente period" of the Cold War in the early 1970s, Moscow officially pursued a foreign policy based on ideological assumptions, conclusions and goals that were formulated as ideological principles. The major school of Marxist-Leninist thought in the field of International Relations was the concept of historical materialism. The concept predicts the deterministic expansion of communism and its culmination in world communism. When the hope for Europe as a possible field of Communist expansion was extinguished with the Berlin Crisis of 1948-49,[10] the Soviet Union began to search for new sinecures to actively support the expansion of their worldview in competition with the "imperialist West." To support the "developing world" in its transition to socialism and finally communism, the countries of the Eastern Bloc applied the principle

7 | Halliday, 2005, 124.

8 | Ibid., 98.

9 | In the Middle East, the Soviet Union bordered Afghanistan, Iran and Turkey from east to west. Political and ethnic organization of the USSR before 1990, in: Putzger, 2001, 190.

10 | The United States and their allies had clearly expressed that they would not give up their sphere of influence in Central Europe during the Berlin Crisis as evidenced by the spectacular support of West Berlin with essential supplies by air in 1948/49. Wettig, 1999, 147.

of "international" or "anti-imperialist solidarity" to their foreign policy. Marx and Engel's writings do not offer much guidance on the topic. Lenin, however, did:

> "The Communist International has to formulate and argue for the principle that the backward countries can achieve the Soviet order and [...] communism without going through the capitalist stage - with the support of the proletariat of the most progressed countries."[11]

In retrospect, the comprehensive ideological approach and the Soviet Union's foreign policy were in constant reciprocal exchange and thus mutually dependent. As a consequence, ideology considerably influenced Soviet strategy in the Near and Middle East – though it never determined it exclusively. On the one hand, Moscow carefully selected its closest allies among the most loyal socialist countries of the developing world and focused its attention on the countries of "socialist orientation." The concept "was elaborated as a developmental model based on the Soviet system."[12] On the other hand, however, and with regard to mid-term considerations, Soviet policy towards the Middle East also has to be considered "Realpolitik": whenever it was deemed politically or economical beneficial, the Kremlin did not hesitate to side with conservative and even reactionary regimes.[13]

Halliday distinguishes between four periods of the Cold War in the Middle East that can be used to illustrate the changes in Soviet engagement in the region over time.[14] During the first phase from 1946 to 1955, the Soviet Union focused its efforts on the "non-Arab" north of region, Turkey and Iran, while it "possessed neither the will nor the capacity to challenge the [W]est in the Arab world itself."[15] This changed profoundly during the second phase from 1955 to 1974. While the United Kingdom successively lost ground in the Middle East, the Kremlin expanded its sphere of influence. In the early years of the Cold War, Washington considered the Soviet Union's new interest in the Middle East less motivated by "economic need or lack of oil resources, but part of a drive to communize the world."[16] This assessment was not far off from the truth at the time, as the official policy change from Andrei Zhdanov's "two camps theory" to Nikita Khrushchev's doctrine of "peaceful coexistence" in 1961 indicates.[17] This perceived threat was answered by Washington with the so-called "Eisenhower Doctrine" of 1957, which aimed "to

11 | Lenin, Werke, Vol.31, 1959 (1966), 232.

12 | Shearman, in: Shearman, 1995, 16.

13 | Katz, 1986, 8.

14 | Halliday, 2005, 99.

15 | Halliday, 2005, 99.

16 | Choueri, 2000, 191.

17 | Khrushchev, Nikita S., On Peaceful Coexistence, Moscow, 1961. Kanet, in: Greiner/Müller, Weber (ed.), 2010, FN 5, 47.

deter the aggression of 'international communism' and ensure 'the continued independence' of the free nations of the Middle East"[18] through economic and military assistance. Obviously, Washington included the Middle East into the wider frame work of Cold War rivalry – and for the states of the Middle East, it was clear that from then on they no longer could avoid taking sides in the conflict.

After some maneuvering, Moscow finally sought strategic alliances with the "progressive"[19] regimes in the region who pledged themselves to some sort of Arab nationalism. The losses in French and British prestige and influence in the Middle East following the Suez Crisis and the Six-Day War not only helped Moscow's attempt to establish itself as the dominant external actor in the Middle East but also allowed the Kremlin to profile itself as the alternative to "Western imperialism" and a "major ally of a number of radical Arab nationalist regimes"[20] such as Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Libya, and South Yemen – against the "imperialist imposition" of the West, but also in opposition to the conservative forces of the region. This policy pattern was readily picked up by Moscow's student, the GDR: The Kremlin's policy explicitly aimed to include coordinated action of the Warsaw Pact states under Soviet supervision.[21]

During this period, Soviet engagement intensified from "influence" to "involvement" and "intervention," as evidenced by, for example, Moscow's support of Egypt's involvement in the Yemeni Civil War in 1962-63.[22] A year before this engagement, Nasser had introduced an Egyptian version of socialism.[23] This "Arab socialism" paired George Antonius' notion of "Arab nationalism"[24] with a vague socialist concept based on political instruments. Here Rome Spechler identifies a distinctive phase of Soviet policy toward Egypt and the Middle East over the period between the two Arab-Israeli Wars of 1967 and 1973:[25] During the expansion of their influence from 1955 onward, the USSR further intensified its involvement while emphasizing its claim to political and especially military control over the Arab states. Beginning in the mid-1960s, developmental aid was advanced as a popular tool on both sides of the Cold War rivalry to expand their

18 | Choueri, 2000, 191.

19 | Choueri, 2000, 192.

20 | Halliday, 2005, 99.

21 | Storckmann rightly decries a lack of sound archival findings on the coordination between Moscow and its political orbit of Warsaw Pact states due to lack of access to the relevant archives in Moscow: Storckmann, 2012, 38. Nevertheless, archival documents of the GDR allow some insights to the processes and thus permit generalized conclusions to a certain extent.

22 | Ferris, 2008.

23 | Arabic: al-ishtirākīyah al-'arabīyah; English: Arab Socialism, see: Hanna/Gardner, 1966, 77f.

24 | Antonius, (1938) 2000.

25 | Rome Spechler, in: Marantz/Steinberg, 1985, 134f.

respective sphere of influence. On the Soviet side this approach culminated when Leonid Brezhnev announced the approaching victory of the socialist world system over the dominant capitalist system in the 1970s.[26] Part of this strategy was the explicit inclusion of the most able states of the Eastern Bloc to support the Soviet Union's publicized developmental policy in the Global South, most prominently the Poland, GDR, and the ČSSR.

1.2 Maneuvering as an Established Actor: Moscow's Consolidation and Expansion in the Region

> "The Soviet Union is now firmly established in the Middle East, and is undoubtedly there to stay."[27]
>
> (The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1969)

After the initial years of establishing the Soviet Union in the Middle East, Moscow's strategy toward the region may be summarized as a Janus-faced approach. The support for the revolutionary nationalist movements in the region, foremost those with socialist leanings, remained their first priority. Cooperation with "reactionary" actors nonetheless was always an option out of pragmatic considerations. Nasser's defeat in the Six-Day War against Israel and his death three years later paved the way for a policy change in Cairo toward Moscow under its new leader, Muhammad Anwar al-Sadat. In July 1972, al-Sadat demanded the withdrawal of Soviet advisors due to Moscow's refusal to provide more sophisticated weapons in the Arab war against Israel.[28] In the light of the changes in the superpower relationship toward détente, Moscow clearly intended to restrain any violence against Israel.[29] Al-Sadat declared October 31 of the same year the "target date" to remedy this lack of military support, otherwise the renewal of the Treaty of Friendship and thus the Soviet use of Egyptian port facilities would be at stake.[30] However, in April 1973 al-Sadat announced: "The Russians are providing us with everything that's possible for them to supply. And I am now quite satisfied."[31] When Egypt finally attacked Israel on Yom Kippur in 1973, Washington considered the Soviet involvement an infringement of the détente.[32]

---

26 | Hakhnazarov, Georgij, 1974, in: Kanet, in: Greiner/Müller, Weber (ed.), 2010, FN 5, 46 and 51.

27 | Hunter, 1969, in: The International Institute for Strategic Studies (ed.), 127.

28 | Halliday, 2005, 119.

29 | Rome Spechler, in: Marantz/Steinberg, 1985, 135.

30 | Ibid. 142.

31 | A saber rattles in Cairo, Interview by Arnaud de Borchgrave with Anwar al-Sadat, in: Newsweek April 9 1973.

32 | Quandt, 1973.

A final judgment on Moscow's intentions is neither possible nor necessary here. What has to be pointed out is the delicate political dilemma of the Soviet leadership: While Moscow had agreed to significant steps toward a détente with Washington, it still had to prevent military deployment close to its borders and uphold alliances with the Arab world.[33] As mentioned above, Moscow's attitude of restraint before 1973 may be considered the logical consequence of Moscow's détente policy, and Moscow's policy change a result of political pressure by Cairo. On the other hand, Soviet maneuvering might also be the outcome of a tactical move of Cairo and Moscow. Either this is not the case, or Cairo was able to attain the upper hand in the Soviet-Egyptian relationship in the end. Undeniably, Egypt, the dominant regional power, left the Soviet side and turned toward Washington and the West in the mid-1970s. This policy change in Cairo culminated in the Camp David Agreement of 1979, which was followed by the establishment of diplomatic relations between Israel and Egypt in February 1982.[34] Al-Sadat had recognized Israel as a state and thus – from the perspective of the rest of Arab world – had accepted Israel's existence, its policies, and given up the Palestinian cause. Egypt was isolated among the Arab states.

Moscow was quick to stigmatize its former ally by the Nile as a henchman of imperialism and develop a full-fledged argument in accordance with Marxist-Leninist ideology. This position was integrated into the GDR's official reading of politics in the Middle East. The GDR's Institute of International Relations fully agreed with Moscow on the fact that Egypt "in fact had turned away from the Arab Front [and...] "had broken with the commitments of the Arab League. [...The Camp David agreement] had weakened the anti-imperialist alliance and opposed cooperation with the Soviet Union."[35] Socialist commentators are quick to interpret the participation of the United Sates in the process of approximation between Egypt and Israel, as well as Washington's investment in the Middle East conflict in general, as solely motivated by self-interest. This stance is vividly summarized by the term "separate policy."[36] The quoted East German analysis directly links all violent conflicts in the region with this "separate policy," as it "had destroyed Arab unity,"[37] e.g. the Lebanon War of 1982, and emphasizes the condemnation of this policy by the Communist and Workers' parties of Bulgaria, the ČSSR, Hungary, Poland, the USSR, and the GDR on November 25 in 1978.

This example illustrates how Soviet policies and activities regularly engaged a number of other Eastern Bloc states, most prominently the ČSSR, Hungary, Poland, and the GDR. As involvement in the Middle East increased, competition between

33 | Halliday reminds us of the connection between the Kremlin's fear of a U.S. American missile deployment in Turkey and the deployment of Soviet missiles in Cuba, Halliday, 2005, 125.

34 | Peace Treaty Egypt and Israel 1979, in: Jaeger/Tophoven (Ed.) 2011, 182f; Hourani, 2003, 504.

35 | Hänisch et al, 1982, 35.

36 | Ibid., 38.

37 | Ibid., 38.

the states increased as well, for their prestige in the host country, their position among the other states of the Warsaw Pact, and above all, Soviet benevolence. Interestingly, the GDR pleaded for an improvement of the competitive situation in early 1978.[38] Regardless, it had become clear to Moscow that a coordinated strategy was needed to avoid further "friction losses" within its own ranks. In December 1978, the Committee of the Ministers of Defense of the Warsaw Pact[39] put forward a draft on coordinated engagement with regard to military support according to "proletarian internationalism." About one year later, during the 12th meeting of the Ministers of Defense, the states of the Warsaw Pact finally agreed on the basic principles of coordination for military relations with the Global South.[40] During that time the vice-minister of defense of the USSR listed the focal countries of the Global South: Ethiopia, Vietnam, Angola, Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, Libya, Algeria, and South Yemen. These efforts clearly not only reached the mentioned Arab states, but also had a certain impact on their willingness to cooperate: Only two years earlier, the leading parties of four of the enumerated states together with the Palestine Liberation Organization had announced a political merger as the "National Front" in the Tripoli Declaration of December 1977.[41]

> "Of the eighteen Arab states only one [...] was a full supporter of the Soviet Union, embracing the theory of 'scientific socialism' and modelling itself on the Soviet pattern of political and economic development."[42]
>
> (Fred Halliday, a Marxist scholar of Middle Eastern Studies)

Why and how did one of the least significant countries in the Arab world become Moscow's closest ally in the region? One may say that in the end there simply did not exist any better options for the Kremlin. During the Ethiopian-Somali War, South Yemen served as a military shipping center, but also offered active support in the fighting. In the process, Moscow understandably lost Somalia's political trust and its naval base in Somali Berbera accordingly. The radical regime in Aden successfully replaced Cairo and Berbera as Moscow's new unofficial military

38 | NVA-General Theodor Hoffmann to Minister of Defense of the USSR Dmitri Fjodorowitsch Ustinov, February 21 1978, in: BArch, AZN 30552, Bl. 14f, quoted in: Storckmann, 2012, 170. Hoffmann had been trained in the USSR and advanced to Minster of Defense of the GDR in 1989, Müller-Enbergs/Wielghos/Hoffmann (Ed.), 2000, 369.

39 | Protokoll 11. Sitzung Komitee der Verteidigungsminister TS des Warschauer Vertrages vom 4 bis 7.12 1978, Ost-Berlin, in: BArch DVW 1/71035, 318-357.

40 | Protokoll 12. Sitzung Komitee der Verteidigungsminister TS des Warschauer Vertrages vom 2 bis 6.12 1979, Warschau, in: BArch DVW 1/71036, sine pagina.

41 | The Tripoli Declaration, 2 to 5 December 1977, in: Letter dated 5 December 1977 from the Permanent representative of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya to the United Nations addresses to the Secretary-General, Annex, A/32/411, 6 December 1977, I; Halliday, 1990, 155.

42 | Ibid., 126.

stronghold in the region.[43] This cooperation did surprise some observes of the time, but its roots stretched back some time.

The Kremlin's interest in the Red Sea had surfaced as early as the late 1960s. Unofficial support for the PFLOAG,[44] a revolutionary group of the Arab Peninsula, started in 1968 and became official in 1971.[45] The PFLOAG was closely allied with Aden and aimed to overthrow the conservative rulers of the area, first and foremost those of its country of origin, Oman. The support of PFLOAG is a revelatory example for the long-term nature of Moscow's regional strategy in the Middle East.[46] Soviet engagement was never direct and remained mediated, usually carried out by two levels of middlemen: On one level there were its closer allies, like the GDR. These allies implemented Moscow's policy as messengers to the second level of middlemen, in this case the PDRY.[47] The second level then executed the mediated policy, which meant direct support of PFLOAG through training and equipment. The use of political henchmen was part of a "low-key strategy," used whenever Moscow wanted to be able to deny its active involvement.[48] Soviet restraint in the mid-1970s is especially noticeable after relations with Cairo had started to taper off. Due to the evolving détente, Moscow acted carefully with regard to any support for revolutionary movements in the region, even with regard to the PLO and its liberation case against Israel.

The third phase of the Cold War in the Middle East, from 1974 to 1985, saw the peak of Soviet influence in the region, as well as its subsequent decline of power. Despite the loss of its major ally in Cairo, Moscow went to great lengths to remain among the major regional powers by fostering old alliances and forging new ones. Meanwhile, Soviet interests switched from long-term involvement to "more immediate benefits."[49] In the early 1980s, Moscow could rely on the Ba'athist regimes in Syria and Iraq, both located near Soviet territy. Libya replaced Egypt as a

43 | Halliday, 1990, 204f.

44 | Popular Front for the Liberation of the Arab Gulf (PFLOAG).

45 | Halliday, 1990, 184.

46 | In the mid-1960s the Dhofar Liberation Front located at the Oman-South Yemeni border, changed its name to PFLO, Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman and again in 1968 to PFLOAG, Popular Front for the Liberation of the Arab Gulf. Chubin, Adelphi Paper No.157, 1980, in: The International Institute for Strategic Studies (Ed.), 301.

47 | The GDR Afro-Asiatic Committee of Solidarity was active in developing relations to the PFLOAG throughout the 1970s, in: Bericht über den Besuch des Ministers für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten der VDRJ, Mohammed Saleh Aulaqi in der DDR in der Zeit vom 1. bis 5.Februar 1972, PA AA MfAA C 156276, 61; Brehony, 2013, 77 and 81.

48 | Chubin, Adelphi Paper No.157, 1980, in: The International Institute for Strategic Studies (Ed.), 302.

49 | Yodfat, 1983, 115.

close ally by the Mediterranean Sea and in Ethiopia and South Yemen the Kremlin had positioned itself around the Horn of Africa. Nonetheless, the high times of Soviet prestige and presence in the Middle East were coming to an end. Moscow's allies in the region, though loyal and determinate, for the bigger part were among the poorest, politically weakest, and most isolated in the region. Meanwhile, the Soviet Union began to face the first severe economic difficulties of its own, forcing Moscow to cut its developmental spending and focus on economically more beneficial investments.[50] This withdrawal in engagement was officially explained by a policy change toward the Global South, but also toward the states of the Warsaw Pact. As a kind of "empowering policy," the Kremlin under Mikhail Gorbachev gradually sought to create a perception that it was loosening its grip on its dependent allies. This policy change was meant to firstly ease the economic and political burden created by its ideologically motivated policy and secondly to assure the U.S. and the West of Moscow's willingness for détente.

Half a decade earlier, Moscow had become involved in a conflict on its very own doorstep and paid a high price in trust and prestige among the Arab states. In Afghanistan, the Soviet Union had intervened on behalf of the radical regime. Shortly thereafter, the Iraq-Iran war broke out and complicated matters for the next decade, as Moscow was not able to openly support Iraq. In Afghanistan, the Kremlin was ensnared in a vicious war it could not win – a "bleeding wound"[51] for the Soviet Union in the Middle East – while internationally it faced an unsolvable dilemma, as Westad summarizes:

> "From early 1986 onwards, there was considerable tension between Gorbachev's basically Marxist understanding of Third World events on the one hand, and his wish for détente with the United States on the other. [...] The Americans wanted to see the Soviets begin to give in [with regard to Third World expansionism] before other bilateral issues could be solved."[52]

When in 1988 the Soviet Union finally withdrew from Afghanistan, it was not only considered a defeat of Soviet Third World engagement at the time, but in retrospect can be considered the end of the Cold War in the region.[53]

Despite some preludes after the founding of the state of Israel in 1948, it was not until the Suez Crisis and the Six-Day War that the Cold War fully encompassed the Middle East and with it its major conflict, the Arab-Israeli dispute. Hence, when reconsidering Halliday's four phases, one may conclude that the region was quite important for the Cold War and vice-versa during the second and third phase, between the Suez Crisis and the decrease of Soviet involvement in the mid-

50 | Kanet, in: Greiner/Müller/Weber, 2010, 56 and 59.

51 | Gorbachev, XXVII CPSU Congress 1986, in: Westad, 2005, 371.

52 | Westad, 2005, 371.

53 | Kanet, in: Greiner/Müller/Weber, 2010, 58.

eighties.[54] During that time, the Soviet Union presented itself as a major, and at times as *the* dominant external actor in the region. While its activities were clearly motivated by geopolitical considerations of national security, the Kremlin included the states of the Middle East into its wider ideology as "national democratic" states or countries with a "socialist orientation" under the label of "anti-imperialist solidarity." Throughout its engagement in the region, the Kremlin aimed to distinguish itself as the guarantor of "security and sovereignty of all states of [the Middle East]," [55] while condemning the United States' strategies as power- and interest-driven. And while Lenin's writings were regularly used to explain and justify this ideological approach to the Cold War in general and the Middle East in particular, Soviet statements accordingly were used as claims of truth by East German functionaries and analysts alike.[56]

Moscow's official reading of politics in the Middle East dominated the GDR's foreign policy approach throughout East Germany's existence as a separate state. Not surprisingly, the Kremlin's high times of engagement in the region from the 1970s to the early 1980s coincide with the GDR's most active phase in the Middle East. In the following section, the GDR's foreign policy activities in the Arab world, and sometimes in other countries of the wider Middle East, will be sketched, oscillating between the two major determinants of East Berlin's foreign policy, Moscow and Bonn. Based on the assumption that indeed there existed an East Germany "policy" toward these countries that deserves the label, decisive policy-turns are pointed out, while sketching the emergence of new fields of engagement to support the above statement of a coherence between Soviet and East German levels of engagement in the region.

2. The GDR's "Policy of Recognition" translated to the Middle East

The GDR's room for maneuvering in the Middle East was sharply staked out by characteristics and actions of the Federal German Republic. However, the region turned out to be politically rather welcoming for East Berlin. In combination with the increase of political agency on the side of the Arab states as described by Halliday,[57] this resulted in what Das Gupta considers the East and West German "race for the Third World's favor"[58] in the Arab world. Bonn could not be as close to the Arab world as it might have wished and left certain gaps or at least room

54 | Halliday even states that as early as 1980 the bloc confrontation was supplanted by a regional contention, the Iraq-Iran-War, as the dominant conflict. Halliday, 2005, 100.

55 | XXVI. Party Congress of the CPSU 1981, in: Hänisch et al, 1982, 46.

56 | Lenin, Vol.22. 1959 (1960), 265 quoted in Hänisch et al, 1982, 44.

57 | Halliday, 2005, 98.

58 | Das Gupta, in: Wengst/Wentker, 2008, 132.

for political maneuvering in the "Arab world" - more than in other regions in the world. The restraint on West German policy that created these gaps for East Berlin was the German-Israeli relationship: While Bonn's policy in the Middle East always had to balance between the Arab countries and the Jewish state, East Berlin's relations with Tel Aviv were non-existent until the mid-1980s.[59] West Germany had accepted the responsibility as the "Third Reich's" successor in title which meant that it had also acquiesced to the moral, political, and financial obligations toward the Jewish people. In addition to that, the FRG's relationship with Israel became one of the major indicators of West Germany's metamorphosis in shedding National Socialism and militarism once and for all. As a consequence, any rapprochement to the Arab-Palestinian cause of Bonn conflicted with Israel's interests, endangered West German-Israeli relations, and with it, West Germany's reconciliation with its past.[60]

The GDR benefited directly from this West German dilemma: The SED leadership severed its connections to the past and introduced a foreign policy of "Marxist connotation." The SED leadership explicitly dissociated itself from Germany's recent history, including any responsibility for the atrocities of the National Socialist regime. This policy decision of East Berlin was justified by differentiating between the Jewish people and the State of Israel. Based on this presumption, East Germany denied all responsibilities for Israel as a state. Thus, the GDR simply rejected compensation payments demanded by Israel for suffered injustice until its very last months of existence.[61] Ideologically, the separation between the people and state of Israel also allowed the GDR to brand Israel as part of the "imperialistic-antidemocratic West"[62] and thus an adversary to peace and the self-determination of the Palestinian people. This policy move with regard to Israel was to become one of the few relevant political "advantages" of the GDR in the international sphere over the Federal Republic. Without the inherited responsibility for the political actions of "Nazi Germany," the German twin excluded the Holocaust from its anti-fascist interpretation of history.[63]

---

59 | On East and West German relations with Israel see: Meining, 2002, 269; Timm, 1997a, 25f.

60 | This was not about to change before the first tentative steps of the Arab-Israeli peace process of the early 1990s.

61 | First concrete steps had not been instated before spring 1989. Brief des DDR-Außenministers, Oskar Fischer, an Ministerpräsident Hans Modrow über die Aufnahme diplomatischer Beziehungen zu Israel vom 15.Februar 1990, BArch/DO4, Nr. 1549 and Ministerratsbeschluß über die Aufnahme diplomatischer Beziehungen der DDR zu Israel am 13.Juni 1990, BArch, DC 20, I/3-1991, in: Timm, 1997b, 587; 590 and Trigor, Yehoshua, Untenable position for the DDR, in: Jerusalem Post, May 7th, 1991; First talks had been held as early as 1974, in: Meining, 2002, 381.

62 | Zhdanov, Andrej, September 22 1947.

63 | Hartewig, in: Zuckermann, 2022, 56.

2.1 East Berlin Turns from Tel Aviv and toward the Arab world

When the GDR officially turned away from Tel Aviv[64] in 1956, its new foreign policy approach clearly followed Soviet logic:

> "The struggle of the Arab people against imperialism and Israeli aggression is an integral part of the struggle between the forces of freedom and socialism on the one hand and international imperialism on the other. In this strategically important region, rich in oil, the growing national liberation movement and social progress cause the hatred of imperialists and oil monopolies. They conspire against this movement, unleash wars, and launch aggressive attacks."[65]

As a consequence, all the target countries of the GDR's early policies were led by strong leftist liberation movements. These were considered promising candidates for "socialist development" and either had already acquired or were striving for a leading role in the region. Clearly, East Berlin was hoping for international recognition in the Arab world. Even before the GDR gained formal international sovereignty in 1955, East Berlin had initiated first contact with Egypt, its major partner country in the Arab world until the early 1970s: By 1953 the GDR had already established a trade mission in Cairo.[66] Two years later, the first visits by an East German minister to countries outside the Eastern Bloc were to India and Egypt.[67] In 1958 Egypt was the first country to receive financial aid from the SED regime and in 1961 the GDR was the seventh-largest donor state to Cairo, though Western Germany ranked third.[68] During these years, trade and cultural agreements were conducted with Egypt and Syria, followed by trade agreements with Lebanon and Sudan. After the downfall of the monarchy in Baghdad in 1958, Iraq became another focal country. Accordingly, it comes as no surprise that the "German-Arab Society" became the first East German Society of Friendship in 1958.[69] These early contacts in the Arab world and East Berlin's reputation of advocating for "liberation movements" were combined to put forth an international image of the GDR as a "peace state." This image probably motivated several of these movements to turn to East Berlin for support, i.e., military equipment. After an early phase of aloofness to these requests, East-Berlin decided to get involved. The actual reasons for this policy change have not

64 | In December 1955 East Berlin rejected Tel Aviv's aide-mémoire that asked for redress, Meining, 2002, 257f; Also see: Timm, 1997, 25; 34f.

65 | Int. Beratung der Kommunistischen und Arbeiterparteien, Moskau, 1969, in: Kleines Politisches Wörterbuch, 1973, 561-565.

66 | Dok zur AP der DDR I, 1954, 505f.

67 | Dok zur AP der DDR Republik V, 1958, 279.

68 | Wippel, 1996, 17.

69 | Wentker, 2007, 55.

yet been brought to light. Nonetheless, Moscow ordered the SED to act.[70] In 1965, the Ministerratsvorsitzende Willy Stoph assigned Foreign Minister Otto Winzer to draft a "fundamental resolution" on the support of the African and Arab peoples in their struggle of liberation with "non-civilian materials":

> "Any achievement of these peoples' struggle of liberation will have a positive effect on the anti-imperialist attitude of other African an Arab states. By supporting these liberation movements, the GDR will improve its position with the progressive forces in Africa and the Arab world and thus promote the roll-back of Western imperialist influence."[71]

The Politbüro quickly followed suit.[72] With this, the NVA, the Volkspolizei,[73] and the MfS were ordered to sift through their stocks to find equipment to be sent to the GDR's "partner countries." Coordination, transport, and delivery were put in the hands of the MfAA and the MfS. Even though this directive appears to be quite specific, Storckmann rightly considers it an "indicatory decision,"[74] which profoundly shaped the character of the GDR's engagement in the Global South. Furthermore he verifies the interdependence between military exports and the GDR's "policy of recognition" in the 1960s.[75] Accordingly, other decisions on military engagement followed, like military training and visits by military delegations.[76]

2.2 The Role of Anti-Semitism in the GDR's Middle East Policy

The Soviet position toward Israel had been muddled from the very beginning:

> "Moscow had hoped to extend its influence on the young state of Israel, but was disappointed when Israel emerged as a democratic country modelled on the West: [In the early 1950s] Soviet foreign policy was turning away from Israel and more and more toward supporting and exploiting Arab nationalist movements."[77]

---

70 | Storckmann, 2012, 109.

71 | Otto Winzer and Willy Stoph, May 28 1965, in: BArch, DC 20/13001, Bl.28-33. Also see: Storckmann, 2012, 108.

72 | Politbürositzung January 10 1967, Annex 5, in: BArch SAPMO, DY 30/J IV 2/2/1093.

73 | English: The People's Police.

74 | Storckmann, 2012, 109.

75 | Based on his analysis of documents and minutes of the Ministry of Defense and Gerhard Weiß, Storckmann, 2012, 123ff.

76 | Storckmann names the exchange of military delegations in the early to mid-70s, such as the exchange of delegations with Syria, Iraq and Egypt in 1971, Storckmann, 2012, 113.

77 | Thomson, Gerald E., 1967, in: Ostow, 1990, 54.

Arab anti-Zionism was a dependable link between the Arab world and the states of the Warsaw Pact. "Chauvinist Zionism,"[78] Judaism, and the Jewish state were identified as and used to form a homogeneous opponent of the "just cause" of the PLO and the "Arab struggle."[79] The SED was able to use this pivotal conflict in the region for its own ends. Regularly, East Berlin's struggle for existence against "imperialist Germany" was equated to the Palestinian fight for self-determination. This "policy of fraternization" against the "Washington-Bonn-Tel Aviv axis"[80] included straightforward anti-Semitism[81] and turned out to be an extremely fruitful and sustainable strategy for the GDR in the Arab world.

Over several years, the obvious focus on Israel by West Germany escalated to the severance of diplomatic relations by the majority of Arab states: When the actual extent of a West German-Israeli arms trade came to light in 1964, the new chancellor Erhard's prestige in the Arab world was substantially damaged. Naturally, East German representatives did everything possible to claim this diplomatic vacuum for themselves. In the same year, Egypt's invitation for Walter Ulbricht to visit Cairo as a Head of State was a spectacular example for an apparent ascendancy of the GDR in the international realm.[82] For the GDR's population, the ostentatious reception of Walter Ulbricht "of course was a highlight. It was an official state visit with all the bells and whistles,"[83] remembers Fritz Balke, Vice-Consul in Yemen's north from in 1969.

However, one has to consider Cairo's explicit fraternization with East Berlin a warning for Bonn rather than an actual commitment to the GDR: As a reaction to Ulbricht's visit, West Germany established diplomatic relations with Israel in May 1965 while ten Arab states terminated their diplomatic relations with Bonn in return.[84] From East Berlin's point of view this should have been the straw to break the camel's back and ought to have led to the GDR's international recognition. But Nasser remained hesitant toward the establishment of diplomatic relations. Nonetheless, East Berlin's hopes for a final breakthrough and the "en

78 | Timm, 1997a, 24.

79 | Timm, 1997b, 395ff.

80 | The Egyptian newspaper al-ǧumhurīya on Bonn's credit for Israel in September 1969, in: Neues Deutschland vom 2.Oktober 1969, S.7.

81 | Eckard, Gabriele, The GDR and Anti-Semitism?: A Comparison of Jan Koplowitz' Novel Bohemia, mein Schicksal (1979) and Horst Seemann's Film Hotel Polan und seine Gäste (1981), in: Shofar: 2008, 86.

82 | Blasius, 1998.

83 | Interview with Fritz Balke on May 23 2011.

84 | Compare Ludwig Erhard's speech on Germany's Near East Policy at the German Parliament on February 17 1965. Excerpt in: Auswärtiges Amt (ed.), 1989, 165; Also see: Gerlach, 2006, 48.

bloc recognition by the Arab countries"[85] remained high, but it took another five years of diplomatic "courtship"[86] by the GDR's diplomats in Egypt and Syria before the Arab states finally gave in. Until then, East Berlin could do nothing more than to live with the status of relations with these two leading states as it was. As a consequence, the GDR had begun to direct its efforts to the less powerful but possibly more receptive actors of the region – such as the two Yemens – and continued its incremental "policy of recognition" with new enthusiasm.

3. The GDR and the Middle East during the "High Times of Diplomacy"

Against East German hopes, the "wave of recognition" did not simply sweep over the Arab world: "Most of the Arab states [North Yemen among them] did not establish diplomatic relations before the 'Grundlagenvertrag' was signed in 1971."[87] However, in May 1969 the "breakthrough in international diplomatic arena"[88] finally was within reach. The radio channel "Free Europe," financed by the U.S. Congress, speculated about the visit of Iraq's foreign minister to the Soviet Union and East Germany in March: "[S]teps for the deepening of cooperation in political, economic and cultural fields"[89] might have been taken there. Kuztnetzov's discussion with PDRY President al-Sha'abi in June 1969 completes the picture:[90] Even though Bonn had offered significant financial aid to Baghdad to prevent Iraq from recognizing East Germany, Moscow apparently was willing to offer at least as much.

Without doubt, the Kremlin's political and financial insistence played the major role in the last mile toward East Germany's recognition. In May 1969

> "Foreign Minister Gromyko supposedly expressed that any further arms delivery by the Soviet Union [to Egypt] depended on the establishment of diplomatic relations with the GDR."[91]

85 | Ibid., 330.

86 | Reinhardt, 1969, 331.

87 | Interview with Fritz Balke on May 23 2011.

88 | Miller, 1969.

89 | Gould, 1950.

90 | Vermerk über ein Gespräch des Genossen Kiesewetter mit dem sowjetischen Gesandten, Genosse K.P. Kusnezow, June 11 1969, in: PA AA MfAA C 1223/71, 67-71.

91 | Helwig, 1969, 894 and Instructions for the Soviet ambassador in Cairo, May 16th 1969, in: BArch SAPMO, DY 30/3524, 108-111, quoted in: Wentker, 2007, 285.

In June, the SED was informed that "[T]he Soviet representation to the UN is working toward the diplomatic recognition of the GDR in collaboration with missions of other countries."[92] This included the PDRY, which continued to advocate for the GDR's membership to the UN. Thus, the Arab world indeed played its role to increase pressure on West Germany's "Hallstein Doctrine." A prime example is the case of South Yemen, as Chapter 10 of this book describes in greater detail.

After the "wave of diplomatic recognition," which had been building up since 1969 and reached full force after the signing of the "Grundlagenvertrag," the GDR's foreign policy did change in a profound way, transforming from its "policy of recognition" to a "policy of self-assertion." Accordingly, East Germany's policy toward the Middle East also was rather "continued by other means" than a radical breach. East Berlin explicitly built on its first decade of foreign policy making by keeping and even expanding its ideological focus. In 1974 the SED included the "support for anti-imperialistic struggle" around the world as introduced by its new constitution.[93] The principle of "anti-imperialist solidarity" as a policy directive became centrally coordinated by a new commission of the Politbüro three years later.[94] On the occasion of the XIth and also final Party Congress of the SED, Honecker explicitly included the continuation of the GDR's active support policy of "International Solidarity" toward the "liberated states" of Africa, Asia, and Latin America in their "struggle for peace and social progress" but also toward those people who were still in the middle of this "struggle."[95] This move toward central coordination of "anti-imperialist solidarity," and thus a comprehensive developmental strategy in the late 1980s, not surprisingly coincides with Soviet-led coordination for military relations of the Eastern Bloc with the Global South.[96]

From then on, East Berlin's foreign policy expanded and transformed significantly. The GDR's political coming of age followed its internal consolidation after the closure of the border in 1961 and coincided with a period of economic growth. This

92 | Vermerk über ein Gespräch des Genossen Kiesewetter mit dem sowjetischen Gesandten, Genosse K.P. Kusnezow, June 11 1969, in: PA AA MfAA C 1223/71, 67-71.

93 | Constitution of the GDR of 1968, Version October 7 1974, Art.23.

94 | Scholtyseck, 2003, 36.

95 | Bericht des ZK der SED an den XI. Parteitag der SED, April 17 1986, 41ff, in: Protokoll der Verhandlungen des XI: Parteitags im Palast der Republik in Berlin 17. bis 21. April 1986, Berlin (Ost), 1986; Protokoll Nr.23/87 der Sitzung des Politbüros, June 9 1987, BArch, SAPMO, DY 30/J IV 2/2/2224; Ordnung für die Koordinierung und Abrechnung der Hilfeleistungen der DDR gegenüber Entwicklungsländern, in ökonomischer Hinsicht weniger entwickelten sozialistischen Ländern, Beschlüsse des Sekretariats, Oktober 1988, in: BArch, SAPMO, DY 34/13551.

96 | Protokoll 12. Sitzung Komitee der Verteidigungsminister des Warschauer Vertrages vom 2 bis 6.12 1979, Warschau, in: BArch DVW 1/71036, sine pagina.

translated into a new self-confidence, both within the Eastern Bloc and toward the international community of states. East Berlin became more active as part of Moscow's international strategies and policy making but also aimed to fill its new room for political maneuvering with own initiatives. Having its own case in mind, East Germany tried to emphasize the "right to self-determination" internationally and support movements and states following this principle. For example the GDR had been one of the first states of the Eastern Bloc to contact and establish diplomatic relations with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1969.[97] Not only among the states of the Warsaw Pact did East Berlin position itself as Moscow's "junior partner."[98] The states of the Global South, first and foremost in Africa and the Middle East, also began to perceive the GDR as a confidant of the powerful Soviet Union.[99]

After international recognition, several of the countries of "socialist orientation" received a strategic "upgrade" by the GDR. These countries were supposed to follow a "socialist path of development"[100] and in the Arab world they accounted for about ninety per cent of East German trade with the region.[101] However, most of the countries of "socialist orientation" were located in sub-Saharan Africa and thus the GDR's foreign policy focus moved away from its former major partners in the Middle East to provide more substantial support to Ethiopia, Ghana and Sudan.[102] After the sixth conference of non-aligned countries in Havana in 1979, the GDR began to strive for "Treaties of Friendship" with states following a "socialist path of development"[103] – a form of bilateral bond which had been reserved for the socialist states of the Eastern Bloc.

However, East German international recognition coincided with new challenges for the small country emerging from its relationship with the Soviet Union. Significant changes to the GDR's external economic determinants were caused by Moscow's inability to uphold the GDR's oil supply coupled with mounting difficulties of the GDR's economy.[104] Both trends significantly affected East Germany's activities in the Middle East with regard to oil imports and arms exports to acquire foreign currency. And while the former can be considered a success, the latter cannot. To secure its energy supply, East Berlin had to develop new strategies, among them canvassing for alternative oil suppliers. Hence, it was a stringent foreign policy incentive to improve relations with oil exporting countries – most importantly the

97 | Maeke, 2012; Wippel, 1996, 29.

98 | Bock, in: Bock/Muth/Schwiesau, 2004, 235; Muth, 2000, 27.

99 | Bücking, 101.

100 | Wippel, 1996, 28.

101 | Wippel, 1996, 32.

102 | See for example: Schleicher/Schleicher, 1993.

103 | The East German Treaties of Friendship followed the Soviet model, for example East-Berlin's Treaty with Aden in 1979, in: Jemen (Demokratischer), Völkerrechtliche Vereinbarungen der DDR, 1987, 140-1.

104 | Wippel, 1996, 30.

OPEC states.[105] In the early 1980s East Berlin tried to increase its foreign currency reserve without being detected by Moscow through the international trade company IMES. It worked in the greatest secrecy and in doing so was able to ignore East German foreign policy principles. Former Vice-Foreign Minister Winter comments: "I've always considered it problematic that questions of arms deals mostly were kept secret and lacked sufficient control."[106] Regardless of this secrecy, a high number of IMES' business transactions simply turned out to be inefficient with a higher cost than revenue.[107] All in all, the extremely pressing need for foreign currency and oil during the 1980s created a "double standard" in East German international behavior. More often than not, pragmatic considerations overruled ideological principles, a characteristic which similar to Soviet "realpolitik" in the region. Also, this "double standard" challenged one of the major foreign policy strategies of the GDR in the Near and Middle East, the "strategy of the honest broker."

4. Means to an end: The GDR's Foreign Policy Strategies in the Arab World

> "The imperialist countries aim to subvert and push back both the progressive development of some Arabic states and the anti-imperialist attitude and non-alignment-policy of most members of the Arab League. They exploit the discord among the Arab states and do not refrain from political, economic, and military coercion."[108]
>
> (The GDR's Little Political Dictionary on the Arab League)

For the most part, even analysts who acknowledge the existence of legitimate East German foreign policy refuse to speak of coherent East German policies or even strategies. Wippel argues that "[f]oreign relations never exceeded single strategies, as they were not merged into a long-term, coherent Near East and trade policy."[109] Siebs, on the other hand, considers East German developmental policy a "provisional arrangement."[110] According to him, the GDR's decision-makers tended toward spontaneous actions, especially after gaining international recognition, while they often ignored the official foreign policy decisions and concepts. In addition to that, there never existed a dedicated administrative unit, or budget for development policy, let alone a separate ministry. Nevertheless, Siebs' judgment concedes the existence of such a policy, albeit a provisional one. And indeed, the GDR did opt for

105 | Wippel, 1996, 30 and 32.
106 | Interview with Heinz-Dieter Winter July 3 2013.
107 | Buthmann, 2004, 22.
108 | Kleines politisches Wörterbuch, 1973, 499.
109 | Wippel, 1996, 6f.
110 | Siebs, 1999, 100.

a comprehensive developmental strategy in its final decade. Part of this development was due to international pressure by the World Bank and the United Nations to present reliable data on developmental aid and technical assistance, but it also had become a pressing issue due to East Germany's economic problems.

In 1977 the Politbüro decided on the formation of a "Commission for the Developing Countries."[111] A decade later, this commission provided the Politbüro with a draft on the "results and efficiency of the scientific-technical cooperation of the GDR with the developing countries" and in October 1988 Gerhard Schürer, Head of the Planning Commission, presented a paper which aimed to incorporate developmental engagement into the GDR's foreign policy and trade policy.[112] During the "last year of the GDR," its development policy also was a topic at the grassroots roundtable on democratization held in February 1990. This also included the emergence of the first truly non-governmental organizations in the field, the "Society for Solidarity in Development Co-operation" and the "Society for Development Policy." However, neither the concepts of the late SED nor the ideas of the newly emerging civil society actors were put into practice – time was running out for the SED regime, but also for the GDR itself. In October 1990, Bonn's Ministry for Economic Cooperation (BMZ) incorporated the GDR's aid program. "[F]rom then on, only those projects were to be continued which conformed to the development principles of the former West Germany."[113] East German foreign policy had missed its "window of opportunity" to develop and enforce a full-fledged policy toward the Global South by a hair's breadth.

However, and even though East Berlin did not implement a coherent foreign policy concept for the "developing countries" or the Middle East,[114] dominant policy strategies toward the Middle East can be identified in retrospect. A big part

111 | German: Kommission für Entwicklungsländer, "to coordinate the economic, cultural, scientific-technical and non-civilian activities in the countries of Asia, Africa and the Arab world," in: Beschluß des Politbüros, Protokoll Nr. 49/77, December 20 1977, in: BArch, SAPMO, DY JI 2/2 1705; also see: Döring, 1999, 44ff.

112 | Bericht des ZK der SED an den XI. Parteitag der SED, April 17 1986, 41ff, in: Protokoll der Verhandlungen des XI. Parteitags im Palast der Republik in Berlin 17. Bis 21. April 1986, Berlin (Ost), 1986; Protokoll Nr.23/87 der Sitzung des Politbüros, June 9 1987, BArch, SAPMO, DY 30/J IV 2/2/2224; Ordnung für die Koordinierung und Abrechnung der Hilfeleistungen der DDR gegenüber Entwicklungsländern, in ökonomischer Hinsicht weniger entwickelten sozialistischen Ländern, Beschlüsse des Sekretariats, Oktober 1988, in: BArch, SAPMO, DY 34/13551.

113 | Howell, 1994, 320.

114 | The proposal to formulate a comprehensive concept among the members of the "Mittag Commission" had been declined in 1978, due to the lack of concepts for the individual countries. Möller, 2004, 40.

of these were born of necessity to live and work with the strong competitor West Germany: Bonn's successful moves to keep the GDR in international isolation forced East German foreign policy personnel and SED functionaries alike to become creative with regard to their foreign policy strategies. Muth, for example, considers the GDR's activities in Africa "active, at times [even] innovative."[115] The following subsection identifies three pivotal East German strategies toward the developing world and the Middle East.

4.1 Toward Recognition: A "Strategy of Focus and Low-Profile"

From 1959 –63[116] the GDR established a strategy to attain international recognition, labelled here as a "strategy of focus and low-profile."[117] The Hallstein Doctrine was meant to be overcome through modest but persistent steps, especially by the "third sphere" of the foreign policy apparatus, i.e., society and its mass organizations, while the GDR's resources had to be concentrated on a small number of selected countries. By working below official diplomatic channels, especially in countries of little interest for Bonn, East Germany aimed to initiate relations through personal connections and social groups. The most important vehicle for this strategy were the "progressive" and communist parties.

This strategy was especially relevant for the GDR's focal countries in the Arab world.[118] Major actors, apart from parties and trade unions, were the Societies of Friendship, the Committees of Solidarity and, especially in North Africa, the Free German Youth (FDJ).[119] On the ground these actors were supposed to be coordinated by the MfAA and the embassies.[120] The GDR's foreign policy strategy in the Middle East and all over the "developing world" was complemented by propaganda dispensed by SED officials and its media whenever East Germany was present at international sports competitions, academic conferences, or economic exhibitions.[121] Thus, any international activity in the international realm was considered political, as it could be used in the "struggle for recognition." On various occasions, such as sports events or business conferences and exhibitions,[122] first

115 | Muth refers to Ulf Engel's and Hans-Georg Schleicher's monograph on the GDR's foreign policy in Africa of 1997, in: Muth, 2001, 27.

116 | Engel/Schleicher, 1997, 183f; See also Ch 8. The GDR and the "Arab World": A Small State's "Fill-In Policy."

117 | Von Bredow had described the GDR's performance during the negotiations of the CSCE-process as a "low-profile" strategy, Von Bredow, in: Equete-Kommission, Band VIII, 1999, 954.

118 | Wippel, 1996, 4.

119 | Interview with Heinz-Dieter Winter July 3 2012.

120 | Muth, 2001, 67.

121 | Bericht des ZK der SED an den V. Parteitag der SED, July 1958, in: Judt, 1998, 503.

122 | Judt, 1998, 503f.

contact was supposed to be established through low-level relations between civil society organizations such as the "Societies of Friendship."

Previously, the "Societies of Friendship" had been centralized and connected to the one-party system as a "transmission" between party and society. From there it was only a small step to establish party relations between the SED and Marxist, socialist, or at least left-wing associations in the host country. Ideally, the "partner state" was already led by such a party or the respective party at least was aspiring to take over leadership. "Historic determinism" envisaged that these parties in the long run were to transform their society and political system toward first socialism and then communism. This policy of "one-party expansion" naturally was in accordance with the approach of Sovietization led by a vanguard party.

One of the two major determinants of East Berlin's foreign policy, Bonn's "claim of exclusive representation," forced East Berlin to establish and develop its international contacts below the governmental level and thus was an important trigger for the emergence of the GDR's "low-profile strategy." Combined with East-Berlin's limited economic resources, the strategy was complemented by a focus on certain selected countries to finally overcome the international limits of the GDR's foreign policy created by West Germany. As soon as diplomatic relations were established, the GDR was able to simply build on its "low-profile strategy" by connecting the "second" and "third sphere" relations between the parties and society actors with the "first sphere," the state and its government, through official bilateral agreements, such as agreements on scientific-technical cooperation or the "Kulturarbeitspläne."[123]

4.2 Improving the Well-tried Concept of Focus: Ideological Reasoning and the Countries of "Socialist Orientation"

East Berlin was somehow able to make a virtue out of necessity. Its "strategy of focus and low-profile" was further developed throughout the 1960s, especially with regard to concentrating foreign policy on a few select countries. The concept of "anti-imperialist solidarity" had been used as a moral coating for the GDR's policy toward former colonies and "developing countries" early on and included the support for the liberation movements in the Global South.[124] Based on this logic of mutual solidarity between socialist countries, the SED expanded the strategy based on the Soviet concept of the countries of "socialist orientation."[125] These countries became prioritized due to their "ideological orientation," or rather the likelihood of their becoming a socialist state.

123 | Examples of this are South Yemen and Algeria. Interview with Heinz-Dieter Winter July 3 2012.

124 | Kowlaczuck, 2011, 262.

125 | Shearman, in: Shearman, 1995, 16.

In the beginning, the SED did not offer its diplomatic personnel a specific definition for this category: "There was a huge discussion over the years about this term 'states with a socialist orientation.' Hermann Axen all of a sudden declared: 'These are the ones, these aren't.'"[126] The categorization of "developing countries" and thus also countries of "socialist orientation" had evolved over the years and after some time was defined officially. For example in the "Foreign Policy Dictionary" of 1980[127] the countries of the world were categorized as follows: First, countries that had opted for a "capitalist path of development." These were of lower priority, as the GDR usually had not much to offer where Western states were involved. Second, countries where the struggle between left-wing or Marxist groups and "reactionary powers," that is "bourgeois," "capitalist," or powers of Western democratic orientation, had not yet been decided. And third, countries of "international importance," those following a path of "socialist orientation." For sure, this categorization of non-socialist "developing countries" partly was motivated by pragmatic considerations: The distribution of the very limited resources to promote the GDR's international recognition needed some kind of justification beyond economic interest.

Without doubt the countries of "socialist orientation" enjoyed the highest foreign policy priority among the "developing countries."[128] In 1969 these were Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Libya, the PDRY, Somalia, Sudan, and Syria. All of them also ranked high in foreign trade volume – except for the extremely poor states of Somalia and the PDRY. These two are not even mentioned in the East German Yearbook of Statistics.[129] In the most comprehensive overview of East German foreign trade with the Middle East available, neither of the two is to be found among the first thirteen trading partners either.[130] Nonetheless, Somalia and the PDRY verifiably received the same preferential treatment as the other focal countries of the Middle East and Africa inclined toward "socialist orientation." They were contrasted with those "developing countries" governed by a "national bourgeoisie" that were considered to be following some kind of capitalist path. Everyone else was grouped into the in-between states where "weak class structures" had not yet been able to induce socialist development.[131] Two cases hovered somewhere between this last category and the countries of "socialist orientation" without being labelled as

126 | Interview with Wolfgang Bator, May 27 2011.

127 | Wörterbuch der Außenpolitik und des Völkerrechts, 1980, 153f.

128 | Kanet, in: Greiner/Müller/Weber (ed.), 2010, 50.

129 | German: Statistisches Jahrbuch der DDR 1973 and 1979, Staatliche Zentralverwaltung für Statistik (ed.), Staatsverlag der DDR, Berlin (East), 1973 and 1979.

130 | The thirteen top-ranking destinations of East German trade with the "Middle East" between 1949-1989 are: Egypt, Algeria, Iraq, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, Iran, Turkey, and Afghanistan, in: Wippel, 1996, 44-46.

131 | Categorization of non-socialist "developing countries" in: Wippel, 1996, 19f.

such. The PLO and Ethiopia both enjoyed a special status. The former on the one hand was not a state but gradually became more of an official partner, especially after it was granted status by the United Nations in 1974. The latter, on the other hand, clearly replaced Somalia as the closest partner not only of Moscow, but also of East Berlin, in the Horn of Africa after the Soviet pullout from Berbera in the late 1970s.

Most interestingly, among all these countries, South Yemen not only was grouped with the high-priority category of countries of "socialist orientation," it also topped the list of "solidarity spending." This kind of developmental aid at times was up to a half, of overall East German "developmental aid."[132] This clearly shows Yemen's significance in East German development policy. Between 1966 and 1984, the GDR spent about 248 million GDR marks on "international solidarity,"[133] of which South Yemen received the biggest share with 94 million, followed by Vietnam with 48 million, Tanzania with 22 million and the PLO with 8 million.[134] This categorization of the "developing countries" clearly had an impact on the shape of the GDR's foreign relations that should not be underestimated. Based on fundamental ideological principles of Marxism-Leninism, it turned into an inflexible dogma that could not be questioned[135] – even after it had proven to be of little to no use with regard to possible success or failure of the GDR's foreign policy activities. In many cases the categorization led to East German investments beyond any political benefit for the GDR, with South Yemen being one of the most prominent examples.

4.3 The Strategy of the Honest Broker

> "As opposed to the anti-Arab policy of the West German Republic's government which is supporting British colonial terror in Aden morally and materially, the GDR sides firmly with the people of Aden fighting for their right of self-determination."[136]
>
> (MfAA official on April 8th 1967)

From the very beginning, the two Germanys had been proxy states of their allied superpowers and thus competitors. Bonn's integration into the capitalist Western hemisphere and affiliation with "imperialism" made it possible for the GDR to successfully promote its propaganda of the "German alternative" among

132 | For example Howell, 1994, 313.

133 | Each GDR citizen had to give 25 marks for solidarity purposes a month, in: Interview with Wolfgang Bator May 27 2011.

134 | Möller, 2004, 43. As Möller rightly remarks, Ethiopia paradoxically is missing in this list. Möller is referring to Monika Tanzscher's findings. Tantzscher, in: Timmermann (Ed.), 1996, 614.

135 | See for example Muth, 2001, 40.

136 | Public decl. by MfAA official on April 8 1967, DOK zur AP der DDR XV/2, 1970, 1026f.

the post-colonial states. East Berlin skillfully marketed the GDR as a "better state" through its cultural and educational foreign policy and aimed to create a positive image among the public of its "partner countries."[137] The other aim of this "public relations campaign" was to discredit the "other Germany." East Berlin emphasized Bonn's negative reputation to exploit disagreements between the Arab states for its own ends. This attitude can be found regularly in its party organ "Neues Deutschland." In 1969, the Algerian news agency APS commented on the changes of the Hallstein Doctrine: "Bonn's institutions appear to disregard the sovereignty of the countries of the Third World."[138] Hence, at least some Arab countries considered the Hallstein Doctrine to have marginalized their very own sovereignty by dictating their preferred diplomatic behavior to the Arab world. This attitude of course came in handy for East Germany's campaign against West Germany.

Using the slogans of "anti-imperialist solidarity" once again, East-Berlin aimed to present itself as the more humane version of Germany to the states of the Global South and used this notion to justify its existence. When the GDR gradually accepted German separation, it began to focus on the principle of "peaceful coexistence" that locates the "struggle" of the two opposite political and social systems not with the military but rather in the field of economic and social development. The socialist scholar Werner Hänisch paints Europe as the "main battlefield for peace and international security [where] the confrontation of the two political systems"[139] could be felt the most. He conventionalizes the "BRD" (FGR) as a symbol for the "aggressive policies of world imperialism" led by the United States of America. The GDR, on the other hand, in his view is indispensable for any solution of Europe's problems of security and cooperation, a "better Germany" that promotes "progress and peace."[140] Hänisch's position does nothing more than summarize the regime's position on the matter.

Foreign trade also tied in with this "strategy of the honest broker." The GDR did not separate its foreign trade and development policy mostly because development policy was often used either for economic or political ends or both.[141] This was the case in the Arab world, where the GDR's trade policy followed the "pattern of traditional North-South Trade": Finished products were exported, especially technical equipment and machinery, while raw materials were imported.[142] Though East German products were mostly not able to compete in terms of

137 | Das Gupta, in: Wengst/Wentker 2008, 119.

138 | "Interesse für DDR wächst ständig," in: Neues Deutschland, Oktober 2 1969, 7.

139 | Hänisch, in: Hahn/Hänisch/Busse/Lingner, 1974, 209f.

140 | Hahn/Hänisch/Busse/Lingner, 1974, 44f.

141 | Wippel, 1996, 5.

142 | Wippel, 1996, 15.

quality with products from other industrialized countries, and in particular West Germany, they were often priced competitively.

Foreign trade with "developing countries" was embedded in the wider framework of development. Developmental policies of the time usually meant a strategy based on investments, credits and technical assistance that were tied to conditions that benefited the donor nation. Despite the often fair conditions for the host states,[143] the GDR used the concept of "tied credit" and "tied aid" just like any Western nation. Usually, this meant that the receiving country had to spend aid and credits on GDR machinery and expertise. Wippel suggests that credits were supposed to be repaid with profits obtained from these economic improvements financed by GDR capital.[144] Nonetheless, the exchange of investment and finished products for raw materials largely characterized the GDR trade policy in the Global South in general and the Middle East in particular.

All in all, the GDR was able to offer a foreign trade policy which at times appeared to be more beneficial and thus attractive for the economies of post-colonial states: East Berlin was one of the few emerging industrialized nations advocating for the establishment of the "most-favored-nation clause,"[145] while it also offered to barter in international trade arrangements significantly longer than other industrialized states.[146] Where possible, "traditional North-South trade" evolved toward cooperation, for example in industrial production. East German foreign trade policy was complemented by "economic and scientific-technical cooperation," such as by providing tools meant firstly to enable the host countries to use and repair GDR machines and thus be able to sell them, and secondly to strengthen bilateral relations and generate trust. However, East Germany did not abstain from measures that exploited the recipient, either. Its policy toward the "Global South" by and large was not far off from Western liberal trade policies that the GDR condemned as "imperialist" and "neo-colonialist."[147]

143 | Winter mentions governmental loans to Syria with only about 2.5% to 3% interest and a maturity of up to twelve years, Interview with Heinz-Dieter Winter July 3 2013.

144 | Wippel, 1996, 32f.

145 | The "Most-favored Nation Clause" guarantees that any trade advantage granted by one state to another has to be granted to any other state as well. The clause, for example, is valid among the GATT-states today. Socialist International Economic Policy aimed at the implementation of this clause for all of the WTO. Woll, 1990, 609ff.

146 | This traditional foreign trade approach is based on the direct exchange of goods and served the import-demanding economy of the GDR extremely well. Interview with Wolfgang Bator May 27 2011.

147 | Scholtysek, 2003, 36.

5. Conclusion: The GDR in the Middle East: A Showcase of East German Foreign Policy Strategies

Interestingly, the East German policy change at the turning point of "recognition" is not only visible in the GDR's Middle East policy. The region itself is an excellent case study in which one can reconstruct a policy change that coincided with the replacement of Ulbricht by Honecker. The "strategy of focus and low-profile" had defined the intermediate goal to establish consular and general consular relations as the last step before full recognition. Even though in the early 1960s there were only two countries from the wider Middle East fulfilling this requirement – Algeria and Egypt – only a few years later it was obvious to the SED regime that the key to overcoming international isolation lay in the Arab countries.

> "There were general consulates in several countries already which merely needed an upgrade [to become an embassy], for example in Syria, in Egypt. In addition to that we had commercial agencies in most Arab countries."[148]

The Middle East turned out to be one of the few fields where East Berlin was able to actively implement a foreign policy – not in spite of but due to the restrictive impacts of the Soviet Union and the Federal Republic. From the early 1960s to the late 1970s, the two German states switched the main venue of their conflict to the developing world, that is, first and foremost the Arab states.[149] While East Berlin passively stepped in wherever Moscow ordered it to, the GDR reacted proactively to West German restraints and gaps in international activities. Thus, the GDR's policy in the Middle East can be characterized as a "fill-in policy" between Bonn and Moscow based on the three major strategies of "focus and low-profile," "socialist orientation," and the "strategy of the honest broker."

Moscow's control of the GDR's internal and external affairs remained constant over this first phase of East Berlin's foreign policy. However, the GDR was granted a semi-sovereign status after 1955 and under Ulbricht's leadership seemed to have some voice in decisions concerning its "SED state"[150] and even Berlin. Ulbricht's policy toward Moscow can be characterized as active, though this did not lead to a self-directed foreign policy. Rather he tried to "incorporate the GDR's interests into the Soviet Union's policy."[151] On behalf

148 | Interview with Fritz Balke May 23rd 2011.

149 | See Chapter 3. Analytical Approach: An Interdisciplinary Analysis of Foreign Policy on the "levels of engagement" and Muth, 2001, 31.

150 | Schroeder, 1999.

151 | Bonwetsch/Filitow, 2000, in: Scholtyseck, 2003, 96.

of the Kremlin,[152] the GDR had presented itself as the "peaceful" alternative to West Germany in the developing world. Its lack of diplomatic ties and international prestige made it appear to be an "honest broker" for the young nation-states in Africa, Asia and the Arab world. In addition to that, the GDR was able to distance itself from German history and heritage, while claiming the traditionally positive relations between Germany and the Arab world for itself. As opposed to Bonn, East Berlin saw no necessity to take into consideration interests or sensitivities of Israel, while it could rely on traditionally good relations between Germany and the Arab states.[153] Thus, despite regular direct competition with the well-heeled FRG, the GDR was able to establish intensive relations with a number of "developing countries."[154] And even though it did not have comparable financial means at its disposal, Eastern Germany as a rising industrial nation during certain periods was able to offer attractive developmental aid through trade, technical support, educated personnel, and even certain monetary concessions.

Until the early 1980s, the Arab countries remained the major destination of foreign diplomacy and trade for East Berlin. Despite the extension of its foreign trade, the GDR's global economic involvement had intensified only modestly. Developmentally motivated trade and aid remained rather insignificant in comparison to other donor nations.[155] Nonetheless, former short- and mid-term foreign trade arrangements grew into long-term foreign trade relations based on trade and aid agreements and East Berlin acquired more diverse trading partners.[156] Even though many countries in the Middle East sympathized with the GDR, the decline of its status in the region was predestined. In the 1970s, East German foreign policy in the "developing countries" began to show its first cracks. After the specious prosperity during the last 1960s, major economic problems surfaced. East Berlin was often unable to fulfill its foreign policy promises. Technical projects in particular suffered from parts shortages in the GDR. Bator, for example, mentions "permanent difficulties" with deliveries "from home" to the flour mills in Libya.[157] Similar problems were reported from South

152 | Compare relations to Egypt: "Abschluss eines Abkommens über den Handels- und Zahlungsverkehr mit Ägypten," March 7 1953, in: Dokumente zur Außenpolitik der Regierung der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, 505.

153 | Compare Signing of German-Yemeni Communiqué, in: Dok zur AP der DDR III, 1956, 696.

154 | By 1979, not even a decade after the wave of recognition, East Berlin had signed over 50 governmental agreements with "developing countries," in: Möller, 2004, 43.

155 | Wippel, 1996, 5.

156 | Wippel, 1996, 30.

157 | Interview with Wolfgang Bator May 27 2011.

Yemen.[158] Furthermore, Scharfenberg reports on the planned sale of a cold-storage warehouse for potatoes in the mid-1970s. In the end a Danish company won the bid. It simply offered better conditions.[159] As a result, East Germany simply was not able to compete with other economic actors for reasons that had nothing to do with its political standing and prestige. The scope of trade and aid it could offer clearly had its limits and the GDR remained a rather insignificant partner in foreign trade for the Arab states. Thus East-Berlin only remained attractive for those countries which lacked alternatives, such as South Yemen, which had been marginalized by its fellow Arab states.

158 | A motor from the oil mill had to be used to substitute the broken engine of the flour mill. Scharfenberg, 2012, 45.

159 | Scharfenberg, 2012, 45.