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Jeffrey Herf, *Undeclared Wars with Israel. East Germany and the West German Far Left 1967-1989* (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 493 + xv p., \$29.99 (paper).

In this meticulously researched study Jeffrey Herf sets out to answer two questions that have puzzled him since his days of PhD research in West Germany in the late 1970s. Why were West German left-wing radicals of the time agitating against Israel, even to the point of participating in terrorist attacks against Israeli targets, and “[w]hy were East German Communists, who had fought the Nazis and celebrated their anti-fascist traditions, giving aid to Israel’s enemies and embracing Yasser Arafat,” the leader of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) (p. ix)? Drawing on extensive archival documentation, ranging from the materials of the GDR’s infamous security service, the Stasi, to the papers of various West German left-wing groups and to diplomatic documents from the archives of the United Nations, Herf traces the hostility of the West German far left and of the East German regime to Israel from the Six-Days’ War of 1967 to the GDR’s collapse in 1989-1990. In Herf’s view, this hostility amounted to an “undeclared war” on Israel that was waged on multiple levels from both Germanys. The war chest of the West German far left contained mostly rhetoric, which was strongly anti-Zionist and at least partly anti-Semitic, although terrorist splinter groups, particularly the Red Cells (*Rote Zellen*), also engaged in physical violence, most infamously by collaborating with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) in the deadly Entebbe airplane hijacking of 1976. With its state power, the GDR possessed a much more extensive anti-Israeli arsenal, and, as Herf demonstrates, it repeatedly deployed many of the available instruments: rhetorical attacks in multiple fora, from the East German press to UN meetings; diplomatic support in varied guises; logistical and other assistance for particular Middle Eastern and West German terrorists and terror groups; and,

most significantly, extensive provision of military supplies and related services for militant Palestinians and their Arab state allies, especially Syria. Herf surveys a wide variety of anti-Israeli actions from both Germanys and locates them within a wider entity: “the global Left” for which “anti-Israeli passion became one of its defining and enduring features” between the 1960s and the 1990 (p. 5, 450).

Herf also provides answers to the questions about motivations for these anti-Israeli activities that originally piqued his interest. They can be summed up in two words: “ideology and self-interest” (p. 451). Ideologically, both the West German far left and the leaders of the GDR viewed their battle against Israel as a contribution to a wider global struggle against capitalism and imperialism and for communism and national liberation. However, narrower calculations of concrete self-interest also played an important role for both. For the GDR, antagonism to Israel brought diplomatic recognition from the Arab world and subsequently international visibility and appreciation as an integral member of the anti-Israeli front at the UN and other international fora. For the West German far left, or at least its extreme, terrorist fringe, the cause yielded connections to radical Palestinian organizations and, through them, “escape routes, military training, weapons, collaboration in terrorist attacks, and money” (p. 454).

Herf’s monograph has considerable merits. It is the first study in English to explore in detail the often disturbing rhetorical and other contortions that characterized the German far left’s interactions with Israel and Jews during much of the Cold War. As Herf acknowledges, his work draws extensively on previous studies published in German, including the writings of Wolfgang Kraushaar and Martin Kloke on the West German left and of Angelika Timm and Klaus Storkmann on the GDR’s policies toward Israel and the Middle East, thereby making

some of the findings of this important literature accessible to a wider international audience.

But Herf also moves beyond the previous scholarship, particularly in his extensive documentation of East Germany's multi-faceted anti-Israeli activities.

The book has its problems, however. It is not always an easy read. Its arguments get repetitive at times, and the text includes numerous rather tedious lists of empirical detail, such as the precise contents of various GDR arms shipments to the Middle East, which would have been better moved to an appendix. More significantly, in a number of areas the study would benefit from improved contextualization. The GDR's attitudes and policies toward Israel could be embedded more effectively in the Soviet bloc's wider Cold War goals and strategies in the Middle East. Similarly, additional background information about the Middle East conflict and the Palestinian and Arab perspective on it would have enriched the book, particularly its coverage of the Palestinian side, which now remains very one-dimensional. Overall, Herf's study is an important exploration of some of the most troubled aspects of post-1945 German-Jewish and German-Israeli relations, but because of its limited contextualization it is unlikely to remain the final word on the topic.

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