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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The ontological security of special relationships: the case of Germany's relations with Israel

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Abstract
This article suggests studying special relationships in international politics from an ontological security perspective. It argues that conceptualising the partners to special relationships as ontological security seekers provides a promising theoretical angle to address gaps in our understanding of three important dimensions of such relations: their emergence and stability; the processes and practices of maintaining them; and the power relations within special relations. The article illustrates its theoretical argument in a case study on the German-Israeli relationship. The close partnership between the two countries that has developed since the Holocaust ranks as one of the most remarkable examples of special relationships in the international arena. We argue that foregrounding the ontological security that the special relationship provides, in particular for Germany, sheds important new light on how German-Israeli relations have developed. Specifically, we hold that Germany's ontological security needs were already an important driver in establishing the relationship and have been a key stabiliser of it ever since; that the ontological security perspective can make sense of three interrelated practices of maintaining the 'specialness' of the relationship; and that the asymmetries between the ontological security needs of the two partners help account for Israel's political leverage in the relationship.

Keywords: Special Relationships; Ontological Security; Israel; Germany

Introduction

The objective of this article is to contribute to two fields of scholarship and debate. Conceptually, it advances the literature on 'special relationships' in International Relations.[1] Empirically, it furthers our understanding of the German-Israeli relationship, which stands out as one of the most remarkable cases of special relationships in international politics.[2] To that twofold purpose, the article suggests studying special relationships in general and the relations between Germany and Israel in particular from an ontological security perspective.[3]

The article begins with the assumption that states are motivated by ontological security seeking and it regards special relationships as a means of states to fulfil their ontological security

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[1] Sebastian Harnisch, 'Special relationships in foreign policy', in Cameron Thies (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Foreign Policy Analysis, Volume II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 710–22.

[2] Lily Gardner Feldman, *Germany's Foreign Policy of Reconciliation: From Enmity to Amity* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012).

[3] Jennifer Mitzen, 'Ontological security in world politics: State identity and the security dilemma', *European Journal of International Relations*, 12:3 (2006), pp. 341–70; Brent J. Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations: Self-Identity and the IR State* (London: Routledge, 2008); Ayşe Zarakol, 'States and ontological security: a historical rethinking', *Cooperation and Conflict*, 52:1 (2017), pp. 48–68.

needs. Such a theoretical angle promises to address three important gaps in our understanding of special relationships. These relate to the emergence and stability of special relationships, the processes and practices by which states keep their relations up over time, and the power relations within them. The article makes the case that the concept of ontological security illuminates blind spots in existing works that conceptualise special relationships in terms of material power relations, convergent interests, institutionalised interactions, or similar normative outlooks between the partners.[4]

In the empirical analysis, the article foregrounds in particular Germany's attachment to the special relationship. It argues that zoning in on Germany's reliance for its ontological security on what leading German decision-makers describe as the 'miracle'[5] of German-Israeli relations sheds new light on three important dimensions of the relationship. Specifically, the analytical perspective of the article provides distinct insights into how the relationship was established after the Holocaust and how it has endured in the face of major international and domestic transformations; the politics of maintaining the special relationship; and Israel's ability to exert influence within the relationship.

The article begins with a short discussion to clarify our understanding of the concept of special relationships in international politics. The next section identifies German-Israeli relations as a prime example of such special relationships. We then move on to relate the concept of ontological security to the study of special relationships. Finally, we apply our theoretical argument to the German-Israeli case.

Special relationships in International Relations

Ever since Winston Churchill described the relations between Britain and the United States as a *special relationship* in his famous 'iron curtain' speech on 5 March 1946, the term has become widely used in political and academic discourse. While most attention has focused on the 'specialness' of the Anglo-American relationship,[6] the term has, apart from the German-Israeli relationship under study here, also been applied to, for example, the relations of the United States to Canada[7] and Australia[8] as well as to Germany's relations to France and Poland.[9] However, the popularity of the concept exceeds its analytical clarity or precision. Since definitions of the concept are often ad hoc and unsystematic, it remains surprisingly vague and ambiguous. Still, existing scholarship points us to the following building blocks for a more concise working definition.[10] While the main purpose of this article is to show how ontological security can benefit the study of special relationships rather than to offer a new definition of the concept of special relationships, this working definition clarifies and consolidates the key characteristics of the concept and should thus be helpful for future research in the area.

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[4]Sebastian Harnisch, 'Special relationships: Sonderbeziehungen als analytische Brücke zwischen Außenpolitik und internationalen Beziehungen', in Sebastian Harnisch, Klaus Brummer, and Kai Oppermann (eds), *Sonderbeziehungen als Nexus zwischen Außenpolitik und internationalen Beziehungen* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2015), pp. 25–52.

[5]Auswärtiges Amt, 'Rede von Außenminister Frank-Walter Steinmeier vor dem Deutschen Bundestag', Berlin (7 May 2015), available at: {http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/DE/Infoservice/Presse/Reden/2015/150507-BM_BT_D_ISR.html} accessed 15 November 2017; 'Was sich in 50 Jahren ereignet hat, ist ein Wunder', *Die Welt* (12 May 2015), available at: {http://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article140864287/Was-sich-in-50-Jahren-ereignet-hat-ist-ein-Wunder.html} accessed 15 November 2017.

[6]See, for example, John Dumbrell, *A Special Relationship: Anglo-American Relations from the Cold War to Iraq* (2nd edn, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2006).

[7]John Sloan Dickey, *Canada and the American Presence: The United States Interest in an Independent Canada* (New York: New York University Press, 1975).

[8]Klaus Brummer, 'Die Sonderbeziehung zwischen Australien und den USA: "All the Way"?', in Harnisch, Brummer, and Oppermann (eds), *Sonderbeziehungen als Nexus zwischen Außenpolitik und internationalen Beziehungen*, pp. 81–105.

[9]Gardner Feldman, *Germany's Foreign Policy of Reconciliation*.

[10]See also Harnisch, 'Special relationships'.

First, the concept of special relationships begins with a state-centric perspective on international politics. While the term has occasionally been applied to relationships that include non-state actors,[11] it is predominantly taken to refer exclusively to relations between states. What is more, the concept tends to be used with reference to relations between exactly two states and thus denotes a particular subset of bilateral interstate relations.[12]

Second, special relationships are particularistic and rest on a logic of inclusion and exclusion. They express a qualitative difference between the relations of states inside and outside of them. Although special relationships involve the demarcation from other states, they do not necessarily rely on processes of 'negative othering'.[13] In other words, special relationships exclude other states, but they do not in the first instance define themselves against other states.[14] What is important, however, is that the members of a special relationship recognise the specialness of the relationship and that they ascribe particular significance to it relative to their relations with other states. Similarly, the special character of a relationship tends to be acknowledged also by outsiders to the relationship. Since special relations are therefore implicitly defined in comparison with a state's other relationships, states can always only have a limited number of relations that qualify as special.

Third, special relationships distinguish themselves *positively* from other relationships. They are typically regarded as being particularly close, cooperative, trustful, and intimate.[15] This is not to deny that relationships between states may also negatively distinguish themselves from other relationships in the sense of being particularly confrontational or hostile. Relationships of enmity[16] and 'enduring rivalries'[17] are cases in point.[18] However, such 'negative' relationships are not normally discussed as special relationships.

Finally, an important characteristic of special relationships is their durability and endurance. Members of special relationships as well as outsiders do not regard them as partnerships of a temporary nature, but rather as relatively stable social institutions in international politics. What should therefore be seen as a critical litmus test of special relationships is their capacity to withstand crises and to outlive shifts in the interests and capabilities of its members.[19]

In view of these four building blocks of special relations, our working definition understands special relationships as *exclusive and relatively durable bilateral relations between states in the international system that are recognised by its members and by outsiders as being qualitatively distinct and as distinguishing themselves positively from other interstate relations in international politics.*

The concept of special relationships thus promises to capture a particular type of relations between states in international politics. The study of such relationships is located on the inter-action level of analysis in-between the unit and the structural level. This level of analysis focuses

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[11]See, for example, Siegfried Schieder, 'Solidarität als konstitutives Element von Sonderbeziehungen: Frankreich und Schweden in den Cotonou-Verhandlungen', in Harnisch, Brummer, and Oppermann (eds), *Sonderbeziehungen als Nexus zwischen Außenpolitik und internationalen Beziehungen*, pp. 261–86.

[12]Lily Gardner Feldman, *The Special Relationship between West Germany and Israel* (Boston: George Allen & Unwin, 1984). p. 7.

[13]Jutta Weldes, *Cultures of Insecurity: States, Communities, and the Production of Danger* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

[14]Felix Berenskoetter, 'Friends, there are no friends? An intimate reframing of the international', *Millennium*, 35:3 (2007), p. 659.

[15]In many special relationships that entails a moral and historical dimension. While this dimension is particularly strong in the German-Israeli case, it is also present, for example, in the special relationships between Germany and Poland or the UK and India. Other special relationships – such as the Anglo-American case – are less defined by historical guilt but still derive a sense of solidarity from a shared history.

[16]Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 260–3.

[17]Steve Chan, *Enduring Rivalries in the Asia-Pacific* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

[18]See Harnisch, 'Special relationships'.

[19]Gardner Feldman, *The Special Relationship between West Germany and Israel*, p. 252; Janice Bially Mattern, 'The power politics of identity', *European Journal of International Relations*, 7:3 (2001), pp. 349–97.

attention on patterns of interaction between states that can neither be fully accounted for by the attributes of the interacting units nor deduced from the macro-structure of the international system. For one thing, special relationships are social institutions that are being created, reproduced, and potentially transformed by the foreign policy practices of their members. At the same time, they are practices of interaction that constitute the micro-structure of the international system. They shape the identities and interests of their members and contribute to the production and reproduction of the macro-structures of the international system.[20]

Moreover, it is important to note that the concept of special relationships is closely related to but analytically distinct from friendship in international politics.[21] Unlike friendships, special relationships do not presuppose an understanding of partners as equals but can include asymmetric relations between states that recognise each other as junior and senior partners. Also, special relationships do not necessarily have to operate on a primarily non-utilitarian logic of reciprocity that is essential to true friendship,[22] but can involve more strategic expectations. In this sense, the concept of special relationships is less demanding and broader than the concept of friendship.[23] At the same time, the partners to special relationships may well use the language of friendship[24] to symbolise and reassure themselves of the special quality of their relationship.[25]

The German-Israeli special relationship

Given our working definition of the concept, German-Israeli relations are a widely acknowledged example of a special relationship in international politics. Among other things, the 'specialness' of the partnership is reflected in the institutionalisation and frequency of official political interactions, including annual cabinet-level meetings. Diplomatically, key indicators for the special quality of the relationship include Germany's role as the second most important supplier of weapons to Israel and its support for Israel in multilateral forums such as the United Nations or the European Union. Economically, Israel is Germany's most important trading partner in the Middle East, and Germany is Israel's third most important trading partner overall. On the societal level, pointers to the specialness of the relationship are the broad range of well-developed partnerships in civil society, including the German-Israeli society, the German-Israeli Future Forum, extensive youth exchanges, and the close collaboration between the two countries in education and research.[26]

Moreover, the German-Israeli special relationship has stood the test of time. It has outlived major transformations in its international environment, including the end of the Cold War and German unification and it has weathered various crises in German-Israeli relations, such as the fallout between Chancellor Schmidt and Prime Minister Begin in the late 1970s, the aborted sale of German tanks to Saudi Arabia in the early 1980s, or most recently the German criticism against Israel's policy of settlement constructions in the West Bank. What all these crises have in

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[20]Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, pp. 145–50.

[21]Evgeny Roshchin, 'The concept of friendship: From princes to states', *European Journal of International Relations*, 12:4 (2006), pp. 599–624; Graham M. Smith, 'Friendship and the world of states', *International Politics*, 48:1 (2011), pp. 10–27.

[22]Berenskoetter, 'Friends, there are no friends?', pp. 666–7.

[23]See also Harnisch, 'Special relationships in foreign policy', p. 711.

[24]Felix Berenskoetter and Yuri van Hoef, 'Friendship and foreign policy', in Cameron Thies (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Foreign Policy Analysis, Volume I* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 750.

[25]Felix Berenskoetter and Mor Mitrani, 'Is it Friendship? An Analysis of German-Israeli Relations', paper presented at the 11th Pan-European Conference on International Relations, European International Studies Association (EISA), Barcelona, 13–16 September 2017.

[26]Muriel Asseburg and Jan Busse, 'Deutschlands Politik gegenüber Israel', in Thomas Jäger, Alexander Höse, and Kai Oppermann (eds), *Deutsche Außenpolitik: Sicherheit, Wohlfahrt, Institutionen und Normen* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2011), pp. 693–716; Martin Kloke, '40 Jahre deutsch-israelische Beziehungen' (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2005), available at: {http://www.bpb.de/izpb/25044/40-jahre-deutsch-israelische-beziehungen?p=all} accessed 4 February 2015.

common is that they were not only resolved, but quickly followed by mutual reassurances of the specialness of German-Israeli relations.

Most significantly, the special relationship between Germany and Israel is routinely identified as such by both partners.[27] A case in point is the 2008 visit to Israel by the German Chancellor Angela Merkel, when both the Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and the German Chancellor praised the special quality of the relationship.[28] In the words of Chancellor Merkel in the Knesset:

> Germany and Israel are and will always remain linked in a special way by the memory of the Shoah. … Yes, our relations are special, indeed unique – marked by enduring responsibility for the past, shared values, mutual trust, abiding solidarity for one another and shared confidence.[29]

What is more, these sentiments are widely shared by outside observers and commentators[30] who tend to rank the relationship as one of only very few special relations the two countries have. For Germany, relations with Israel are seen in a line with two or at most three other special relations with France, the US, and Poland.[31] In the case of Israel, relations with Germany often count as its second most important special relationship after relations to the US.[32] Few would disagree, therefore, with the *Economist*'s characterisation of German-Israeli relations as a 'very special relationship'.[33]

Special relationships and ontological security

As opposed to physical security, ontological security is security as being, not as survival.[34] It refers to an actor's 'stable sense of self-identity', which comes from a 'sense of continuity and order in events'.[35] The agency of actors depends on such ontological security because it stabilises their cognitive environment and reduces uncertainty, which is a necessary precondition for purposeful behaviour. Like physical security, ontological security is a primary need of any social actor because it is constitutive of their capacity to act.[36] For Alexander Wendt, it is one of five basic material needs of human beings.[37]

Social actors achieve a sense of ontological security by constructing coherent and continuous biographical narratives through which they and others reflexively understand their self-identity.[38] They develop a 'protective cocoon',[39] their basic trust system, which allows them to bracket knowledge of potential threats to their self-identity and serves as a kind of 'emotional

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[27]George Lavy, *Germany and Israel: Moral Debt and National Interest* (London: Frank Cass, 1996), p. 207.

[28]Ulrike Putz, 'Merkel in the Knesset: "We would never abandon Israel"', *Spiegel online*, available at: {http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/merkel-in-the-knesset-we-would-never-abandon-israel-a-542311.html} accessed 4 February 2015.

[29]Deutsche Bundesregierung, 'Rede von Bundeskanzlerin Angela Merkel vor der Knesset in Jerusalem', Jerusalem (18 March 2008), available at: {http://www.bundesregierung.de/Content/DE/Publikation_alt/Anlagen-be/_Anlagen/2008-03-18-merkel-rede-knesset.pdf;jsessionid=28FAB9E5437BAFE87123FA640D63FBD9.s2t1?__blob=publicationFile&v=2} accessed 22 January 2016.

[30]Felix Berenskoetter, 'Germany and Israel: Is It Friendship?', LSE Ideas (1 October 2012), available at: {http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/ideas/2012/10/germany-and-israel-is-it-friendship} accessed 4 February 2015.

[31]Lily Gardner Feldman, 'The principle and practice of "reconciliation" in German foreign policy: Relations with France, Israel, Poland and the Czech Republic', *International Affairs*, 75:2 (1999), pp. 333–56; Günther Nonnenmacher, 'Besondere Beziehungen', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (31 January 2010).

[32]'Germany and Israel: Friends in high places', *The Economist* (22 March 2008).

[33]'Germany and Israel: a very special relationship', *The Economist* (31 January 2015).

[34]Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations*, p. 51.

[35]Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), pp. 54, 243.

[36]Jennifer Mitzen, 'Anchoring Europe's civilizing identity: Habits, capabilities and ontological security', *Journal of European Public Policy*, 13:2 (2006), pp. 272–3.

[37]Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, p. 131.

[38]Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations*, pp. 10–12.

[39]Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, p. 40.

inoculation'[40] against existential anxieties. Ontologically secure actors take the basic parameters of their actions for granted and trust in the overall cognitive stability of their environment.

While ontological security needs have traditionally been problematised on the level of individuals, a growing literature in International Relations ascribes such needs also to states. Since modern states are the main providers of ontological security for its citizens, it has been argued that it is plausible to conceptualise such states as ontological security seekers themselves.[41] Along slightly different lines, agents who act on behalf of the state in international politics are expected to share a commitment to the self-identities of the states they represent and will thus seek to satisfy the ontological security needs of these states.[42] States were understood as biographical narratives that constitute collective national communities and embed individuals in these communities and thus serve the ontological security needs of both states and their citizens.[43] Whichever rationale one adopts, the assumption that states are social actors who act in the international system 'as if' they were ontological security seekers[44] has proven useful in exploring different patterns of interstate relations in international politics. For example, this perspective has shed new light on conflictual dynamics such as the security dilemma[45] as well as on the foundations of interstate friendship[46] and the politics of state apologies.[47] While conceptualising states as ontological security seekers is not uncontroversial,[48] the article links in with this line of research and builds on the assumption that states care about their ontological security. The seeking of ontological security is understood as a motive that can be attributed to states and that counts for or against certain types of state behaviour.

It is important to note, however, that this does not imply that ontological security is necessarily an explanatory reason for policymakers to act in a certain way or that policymakers consciously weigh the ontological security implications of their actions. This makes it quite challenging to find direct empirical evidence for the influence of ontological security motives. Our empirical analysis therefore relies on indirect evidence in the form of references and historical accounts in German political discourse that ideally meet the following two requirements: (1) They should support the notion that Germany as a collective entity (as opposed to only the government, political parties, or single individuals) has special responsibilities to Israel. (2) They should explicitly or implicitly characterise the German-Israeli special relationship as a constitutive element of German political culture or general foreign policy orientation after the Second World War, signalling an identity component that makes the special relationship indispensable for Germany's self-conception and, thus, ontological security. Examples would be statements that picture the relationship as a 'cornerstone of German foreign policy' or '*raison d'état*'.

Besides these methodological challenges, an important debate in scholarship on ontological security in International Relations is about whether the sources of state ontological security and insecurity are primarily external or internal to states.[49] While psychological and individualistic approaches foreground reflexive self-understandings of state identity, a more sociological perspective prioritises the role of relationships and interactions with others in the ontological

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[40]Catarina Kinnvall, 'Globalization and religious nationalism: Self, identity, and the search for ontological security', *Political Psychology*, 25:4 (2004), p. 746.

[41]Zarakol, 'States and ontological security'.

[42]Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations*, pp. 15–20.

[43]Felix Berenskoetter, 'Parameters of a national biography', *European Journal of International Relations*, 20:1 (2014), pp. 268–70.

[44]Mitzen, 'Ontological security in world politics', p. 352.

[45]Mitzen, 'Ontological security in world politics'.

[46]Berenskoetter, 'Friends, there are no friends?'.

[47]Ayşe Zarakol, 'Ontological (in)security and state denial of historical crimes: Turkey and Japan', *International Relations*, 24:1 (2010), pp. 3–23.

[48]Ibid., p. 3.

[49]Ibid., pp. 6–7.

security process. In this debate, the article sides more with the latter view in that it emphasises the inherently relational character of ontological security and the role of predictable relationships as a source of ontological security for states.[50] At the same time, it acknowledges that the study of a state's international relationships cannot be fully separated from internal understandings of self-identity and that the two stand in a co-constitutive relationship to each other.[51] In other words, the relationships of states with other international actors shape the self-identity of states as much as they are shaped by it.

From such a sociological perspective on ontological security, in turn, one key mechanism on which the basic trust system of states relies is the routinisation of their relationships to significant others.[52] Routinised relationships involve habitual patterns of interaction and are an important source of cognitive certainty. They are thus essential defences of social actors against threats to their self-identity. Since the routines embedded in international relationships are crucial anchors of a state's sense of self and biographical narrative, they become loaded with emotional significance. States become attached to routinised relations in international politics because of their anxiety that on the other side of these routines 'chaos lurks'.[53] The ontological security needs of states are thus an important cognitive-affective stabiliser of their international relations.[54] At the same time, the reliance of states on routinised relationships for their ontological security links the fulfilment of their ontological security needs to the appraisal of significant others and to the predictable behaviour of their partners within these relationships.[55]

More specifically, the argument of the article is that the ontological security needs of states can usefully be conceptualised as the most fundamental 'motivational glue'[56] to their special relationships and that this provides a promising theoretical angle for studying the emergence, stability, and maintenance of such relationships in international politics as well as asymmetric power relations within them. Such an approach appears to have three advantages over more traditional perspectives on special relationships, which would emphasise the role of material power capabilities, mutual interests, or shared values and norms.[57]

First, it adds to our understanding of the motivations behind the establishment of special relationships and is well positioned to account for their stability and durability. For one thing, the argument is that states establish special relationships partly because of the ontological security they provide. This motive should be particularly prominent for states that have experienced traumatic events and insecure self-identities.[58] Moreover, states are expected to keep special relationships up over time because they become attached to the routines embedded in these relationships. Notably, ontological security seekers should be motivated to stabilise their special relationships particularly in critical situations[59] that create 'ontological stress'[60] and threaten their self-identity. States should thus be expected to work to maintain their special relationships even if material or normative incentives for doing so are weak or ambiguous.

It is precisely the endurance of special relationships in the face of crises, power shifts, or changes in the interests or normative outlooks of their partners that is one of their core features

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[50]Christopher S. Browning and Pertti Joenniemi, 'From fratricide to security community: Re-theorising difference in the constitution of Nordic peace', *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 16:4 (2013), pp. 495–6.

[51]Kinnvall, 'Globalization and religious nationalism', pp. 747–9.

[52]Mitzen, 'Ontological security in world politics', pp. 346–7.

[53]Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, p. 36.

[54]Mitzen, 'Anchoring Europe's civilizing identity', pp. 271–2.

[55]Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, p. 38.

[56]Mitzen, 'Anchoring Europe's civilizing identity', p. 279.

[57]Harnisch, 'Special relationships'.

[58]Kinnvall, 'Globalization and religious nationalism', pp. 752–7.

[59]Brent J. Steele, 'Ontological security and the power of self-identity: British neutrality and the American Civil War', *Review of International Studies*, 31:3 (2005), p. 538.

[60]Jelena Subotić, 'Narrative, ontological security, and foreign policy change', *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 12:4 (2016), p. 624.

and that remains a puzzle for many existing works on such relationships. Cases in point are studies that have long predicted the demise of the Anglo-American special relationship.[61] In contrast, the ontological security perspective would emphasise the intrinsic emotional attachment of states to the cognitive certainty of special relationships and thus predict their stability and capacity to outlive changes in their environment. At the same time, states are expected to have the capacity to reflexively monitor the routines embedded in a special relationship and to update and restructure them accordingly.[62] The partners of a special relationship should be able to cope with the uncertainties that come with such adjustments insofar as they trust that routinised relations will be re-established and that the 'specialness' of the relationship is not placed into doubt.

Second, the assumption of states as ontological security seekers is useful for understanding a set of interrelated practices through which special relationships are being maintained. Specifically, the ontological security framework points to the importance of what is being said about special relationships in political discourse. Such discourse not only describes special relationships, but helps (re)constitute them and the ontological security they provide.[63] The reciprocal use of the language of special relations by the two partners is an expression of the mutual recognition of their self-identities, which serves to legitimise and validate these self-identities.[64] From this perspective the mutual assurances and symbolic affirmations of 'specialness' that are often integral to the routines of special relationships should not be seen as inconsequential rhetoric and mere window-dressing. Rather, they serve the ontological security needs of the partners to special relationships and are thus part and parcel of the value they attach to their relations. At the same time, the partners to special relationships can employ discursive strategies to remind each other of how their self-identities depend on the relationship. They can thus 'shame' each other into a behaviour that is congruent with the mutual expectations in the special relationship.[65] Also, the ontological security perspective suggests that states view domestic critics of a special relationship as threats to their self-identity. This might lead them to try to 'silence' such 'internal strangers',[66] which, in turn, contributes to maintaining the special relationship.

Third, the concept of ontological security opens up new perspectives on power relations within special relationships. Specifically, the dependence of states on a special relationship for their ontological security may well be asymmetrical. Some states may have more alternative sources of their ontological security and are less vulnerable in their self-identity than others. One partner to a special relationship may thus be more attached to it than the other. What is more, states might be aware of such asymmetries and of what makes their partners insecure. They may thus be able to strategically 'exploit' the ontological security needs of their partners in that they threaten to 'insecuritise' them.[67] For example, they might challenge the self-identity of their partners by accusing them of violating the expectations of a special relationship. This, in turn, may 'shame' a partner into adapting its behaviour in a way that benefits the other state and sustains the special relationship.[68] For one thing, such dynamics can be seen as a further stabiliser of special relationships. For another, they add a new dimension to attempts at understanding

[61]John Dickie, 'Special' No More: Anglo-American Relations: Rhetoric and Reality (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1994).

[62]Mitzen, 'Anchoring Europe's civilizing identity', pp. 350–1.

[63]Subotić, 'Narrative, ontological security, and foreign policy change', pp. 612–15.

[64]Nava Löwenheim, 'A haunted past: Requesting forgiveness for wrongdoing in International Relations', Review of International Studies, 35:3 (2009), pp. 544–5.

[65]Steele, Ontological Security in International Relations, pp. 50–5.

[66]Jef Huysmans, 'Security! What do you mean? From concept to thick signifier', European Journal of International Relations, 4:2 (1998), pp. 238–44.

[67]Steele, Ontological Security in International Relations, pp. 74–5.

[68]Steele, 'Ontological security and the power of self-identity', p. 539.

how 'junior partners' to special relationships can succeed in influencing what are in a material sense the stronger partners in such relationships.[69]

Ontological security seeking and the German-Israeli special relationship

The following case study on German-Israeli relations illustrates our theoretical argument. It is divided into three parts. The first focuses on the emergence and stability of the special relationship. It will argue that ontological security was an important driver in establishing the relationship and has been a key stabiliser of the relationship ever since. We also make the case that several instances of Israeli frustrations with Germany's perceived lack of commitment to the special relationship point not to German *realpolitik* but to the influence of countervailing ontological security pressures on German decision-makers. The second part of the case study zooms in on the practices of maintaining the special relationship. Our argument here is that these practices are driven primarily by German ontological security needs and are critical in sustaining the relationship. Finally, we turn to the power relations between Germany and Israel and argue that Israel has benefited from asymmetries in the ontological security needs of the two partners, which have enabled it to secure advantageous bargains in the special relationship.

Emergence and stability of the German-Israeli special relationship

What led to the emergence of the German-Israeli special relationship? A good starting point is Chancellor Adenauer's acknowledgment of Germany's obligation to 'moral and material reparations' to the Jewish people as a result of their 'unmeasurable' suffering during Nazi rule.[70] On this basis, the Israeli government agreed to enter into negotiations that eventually led to the Luxembourg accord of September 1952. In that agreement, Germany committed to pay Israel three billion mark over 14 years as compensation for losses of Jewish livelihood and property during the Second World War.[71] Considering the hard bargaining of the German delegation, one is easily led to discount any moral considerations on the German side.[72] This probably applies to some German decision-makers, such as Finance Minister Fritz Schäffer and financial adviser Hermann Josef Abs, who both opposed the agreement.[73]

As far as Adenauer and other government members, including the Minister for the Economy and later Chancellor Erhard are concerned, however, a mixture of opportunistic and moral motivations seems more plausible.[74] On one hand, Adenauer was convinced that material aid to Israel would be the price for Germany to become a respected member within the international community.[75] On the other hand, the chancellor emphasised the unique responsibility of the Federal Republic towards Israel in internal government communications.[76] He also established a trustful, even friendly, relationship with the President of the World Jewish Congress, Nahum

[69]For the UK-US special relationship, see William Wallace and Christopher Phillips, 'Reassessing the special relationship', *International Affairs*, 85:2 (2009), pp. 263–84.

[70]Cited in Yeshayahu Jelinek (ed.), *Zwischen Macht und Moralpolitik: Eine Dokumentensammlung* (Gerlingen: Bleicher Verlag, 1997), p. 174.

[71]Paul Belkin, *Germany's Relations with Israel: Background and Implications for German Middle East Policy* (Washington: Congressional Research Service, 2007), p. 2, available at: {https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL33808.pdf} accessed 22 January 2016.

[72]Gardner Feldman, *The Special Relationship between West Germany and Israel*, p. 62.

[73]Yeshayahu Jelinek, *Deutschland und Israel 1945–1965: Ein neurotisches Verhältnis* (München: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2004), pp. 179–84.

[74]Löwenheim, 'A haunted past', pp. 549–53; Gardner Feldman, 'The principle and practice of "reconciliation" in German foreign policy', p. 340; Gardner Feldman, *The Special Relationship between West Germany and Israel*, pp. 49–53; Lavy, *Germany and Israel*, p. 134.

[75]Markus A. Weingardt, *Deutsche Israel- und Nahostpolitik: Die Geschichte einer Gratwanderung seit 1949* (Frankfurt a.M.: Campus Verlag, 2002), p. 74; Jelinek, *Deutschland und Israel 1945–1965*, pp. 86–7, 185–6.

[76]Jelinek, *Deutschland und Israel 1945–1965*, p. 161.

Goldman, whom he assured that he regarded reparations a 'honorable duty of the German people'.[77] Adenauer ignored a sceptical public opinion and at critical junctures went against key figures in his cabinet and party by meeting Israeli demands.[78]

During the implementation phase of the agreement, the German government made all efforts to fulfil its obligations, despite numerous Arab interventions.[79] Furthermore, the nascent German-Israeli relationship passed a critical litmus test during the Suez Crisis, when the United States urged Germany to threaten Israel with suspending the delivery of goods and aid in order to force it to withdraw from the Sinai. The German government, however, publicly made clear that it would not even consider such a move.[80] Rather, Adenauer, in confidential talks with the head of the Israel Mission in Cologne, declared Israel's intervention legitimate.[81]

The German government's de facto positioning in favour of Israel undermined the US strategy of economic sanctions.[82] Partly as a result of this risky decision to go against the will of its US protector, something that is unparalleled in the history of the Federal Republic's early foreign policy, even political opponents of Adenauer confirmed the authenticity of the chancellors' commitment to *Shilumim*, as Ben Gurion explained to fellow party members:

> My estimate [of Adenauer's attitude] is based on information received from his German and Austrian political opponents … The Israel issue is a question of conscience and religion to him.[83]

German representatives in the 1950s emphasised Germany's 'moral obligation' to Israel and the 'very special character' of the German-Israeli relationship not only in talks with their Israeli counterparts but also *vis-á-vis* third parties.[84] American sources testified that key figures in the Adenauer administration truly believed in a moral obligation to Israel.[85] In the mid-1950s, however, the German government was no longer prepared to take the initiative on establishing official German-Israeli diplomatic relations. While rationalist explanations would point to structural incentives from the bipolar international system or the importance of German-Arab business ties, we argue that at the heart of the matter was a clash of German moral obligations and identity needs.[86] West Germany's political establishment, following historicist ideas about state- and nationhood, saw the Federal Republic as a transitory entity whose primary respon-sibility was to restore German unity.[87] Anything that would compromise the Federal Republic's ability to speak on behalf of all Germans was to be avoided. Against this backdrop, Arab states threatened to recognise the GDR should West Germany deepen its relationship with Israel. As a result, the German leadership felt unable to establish official diplomatic relations with Israel without failing to meet its perceived obligations to Germans on both sides of the iron curtain.[88]

Israel, for her part, protested not only against Germany's indecisive diplomacy but also against the continued presence of German rocket scientists in Egypt and the Federal Republics'

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[77]Cited in Jelinek (ed.), *Zwischen Macht und Moralpolitik*, p. 178.

[78]See Jelinek, *Deutschland und Israel 1945–1965*, pp. 140–1.

[79]Weingardt, *Deutsche Israel- und Nahostpolitik*, pp. 99–103.

[80]Jelinek, *Deutschland und Israel 1945–1965*, pp. 298–9; Jelinek (ed.), *Zwischen Macht und Moralpolitik*, p. 443.

[81]Jelinek (ed.), *Zwischen Macht und Moralpolitik*, p. 417.

[82]Niels Hansen, 'Moral als Staatsräson: Zur Politik Konrad Adenauers gegenüber Israel und den Juden', *Die politische Meinung*, 373 (2002), p. 26.

[83]Cited in Jelinek (ed.), *Zwischen Macht und Moralpolitik*, p. 476.

[84]Foreign Minister Heinrich von Brentano in talks with the ambassador of Iraq, cited in Jelinek (ed.), *Zwischen Macht und Moralpolitik*, p. 447.

[85]See Jelinek (ed.), *Zwischen Macht und Moralpolitik*, p. 442.

[86]Jelinek, *Deutschland und Israel 1945–1965*, pp. 276–89; Weingardt, *Deutsche Israel- und Nahostpolitik*, pp. 106–12.

[87]Hannfried von Hindenburg, *Demonstrating Reconciliation: State and Society in West German Foreign Policy toward Israel, 1952–1965* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2007), pp. 20–6.

[88]Ibid., p. 54.

unwillingness to extent the statute of limitations for murder.[89] At the same time, it is indicative of the importance Israel attributed to the relationship that there was no breakup of bilateral contacts. One reason might be secret arms transfers with which West Germany sought to compensate Israel for its policy of non-recognition after 1957.[90] While internal documents of the German Foreign Ministry show the predominance of quid pro quo thinking behind such offers and the granting of financial aid, many German parliamentarians perceived the above-mentioned issues 'exclusively from the viewpoint of the German people's moral burden'.[91] Hence, these episodes show both the emergence and the limited influence of an identity component underlying Germany's Israel policy up to the early 1960s.

What contributed to the eventual decision to end the anomaly of increasingly special but unofficial relations was a slow readjustment of Germany's ontological security needs encouraged by parts of West German civil society. Starting already in the early 1950s, writers, student organisations, church groups, and trade unions pushed for a new kind of political thinking, enabling a separate West German identity that was wedded to the concept of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* ('coming to terms with the past') and a moral commitment to reconciliation and historical justice towards Israel.[92] In the early 1960s, leading parliamentary figures from both major parties came out in support of the pro-Israel movement and prioritised reconciliation over national interests and the idea of representing the whole German nation (*Alleinvertretungsanspruch*). Eventually, it was both the need of living up to the promise of an ethically transformed Germany and the prospect of increasing popular support that motivated Chancellor Erhard to change course, offering the exchange of ambassadors to Israel in March 1965.[93]

In the following bilateral negotiations, Germany still sought to appease Arab countries by refusing to publicly confirm the special character of the German-Israel relationship. But after Israel insisted on such a characterisation, Erhard, in a note accompanying the agreement, affirmed that his country 'was aware of the peculiar position of Germans in relation to Jews all over the world, including in Israel'.[94] Fear of hostile Arab reactions also prevented the new CDU-SPD coalition government from officially siding with Israel in the 1967 war. Foreign Minister Brandt, however, emphasised that 'nonintervention and neutrality in terms of international law should not be seen as equivalent to moral indifference and insensible hearts'.[95] In order to contribute to the security of Israeli citizens, Germany shipped trucks and gas masks to Israel and logistically supported the delivery of US-manufactured weapons through German territory.[96] Six years later in the Yom Kippur War, under different domestic and international circumstances, Germany not only remained silent about US weapon deliveries via Bremerhaven until Israel gained the upper hand, but secretly provided electronic equipment to Israel.[97]

While in the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s German public opinion facilitated a deepening of political relations with Israel, from the 1970s onwards it needed to be occasionally sidelined in order to sustain the special relationship. The fact that German governments in the 1970s and 1980s refused to reconsider their relationship with Israel despite growing domestic criticism particularly against Israel's occupation of the West Bank lends further credibility to the

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[89]Ibid., pp. 68–84.

[90]Michael Wolffsohn and Thomas Brechenmacher, 'Israel', in Siegmar Schmidt, Gunther Hellmann, and Reinhard Wolf (eds), *Handbuch zur deutschen Außenpolitik* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag, 2007), pp. 506–20.

[91]Cited in von Hindenburg, *Demonstrating Reconciliation*, p. 75.

[92]von Hindenburg, *Demonstrating Reconciliation*, pp. 26–34, 50–4, 114–17; Jelinek, *Deutschland und Israel 1945–1965*, pp. 126, 128.

[93]von Hindenburg, *Demonstrating Reconciliation*, pp. 146–55.

[94]Cited in ibid., p. 162.

[95]Deutscher Bundestag, 'Plenarprotokoll', *111. Sitzung, Bonn* (7 June 1967), p. 5304.

[96]Weingardt, *Deutsche Israel- und Nahostpolitik*, p. 190.

[97]Klaus Harpprecht, 'Der falsche Verdacht: Eine geheime Episode in der Geschichte deutsch-amerikanischer Beziehungen', *Die Zeit* (27 April 2000), available at: {http://www.zeit.de/2000/18/Der_falsche_Verdacht} accessed 21 January 2016.

argument that ontological security seeking had emerged as a significant driver behind Germany's policy towards Israel. In addition, Germany, because of its oil-dependency, faced strong economic incentives to side with Arab countries and to withdraw support from Israel. Yet Chancellor Brandt, even though he promoted a 'balanced approach' in the Middle East and pursued the re-establishment of official diplomatic relations with Arab states on numerous occasions re-emphasised the special character of German-Israeli relations.[98]

In particular, his historic gesture of humility toward the victims of the Warsaw Ghetto uprisings in December 1970 gained him much respect in Tel Aviv. This was true also for his Cologne speech of 1971 in which he countered allegations that Israel would be a victim of his *Ostpolitik* by reaffirming that 'nobody shall be exempt from the burden of history' and that 'we cannot accept questioning Israel's right to exist'.[99] It therefore was no coincidence that in June 1973, Brandt was the first acting chancellor who visited Israel. In Israel, Brandt reaffirmed the 'special historical and moral character' of German-Israeli relations while Aharon Yadlin, the general secretary of the Israeli Labour party, reminded him that 'you will remain the people we are bound to through special relations, inevitably'.[100]

Brandts successor, Helmut Schmidt, as well as Foreign Minister Genscher also repeatedly confirmed the special quality of German-Israeli relations. Schmidt had the honour to host Yitzhak Rabin as the first Israeli prime minister to visit Germany, which, according to Schmidt, was a visit 'of a special kind'.[101] The Schmidt government in 1976 offered Israel a renewal of the bilateral economic aid programme that resembled the favourable conditions offered only to developing countries. At the same time, however, with Israel becoming a strong military and economic power in the Middle East and against the background of the Palestinian uprisings, German decision-makers updated their understanding of Germany's day-to-day obligations to Israel.[102] Since Israel's survival appeared less threatened than in the 1950s when it was internationally isolated, Germany felt able to take more critical positions towards Israeli policies without risking the security of the Jewish state or violating core elements of its own self-identity. Thus, while Germany's historic guilt required it to stand up for Israel's right to exist, as one SPD member of the *Bundestag* explained at the height of the 1982 Lebanon War, Israeli decision-makers should not expect Germany to support each and every Israeli decision. Furthermore, the argument was made that Germany's 'historical responsibility' indirectly also applied to the suffering of Arabs in the Middle East[103] and entailed a duty to contribute to a peaceful settlement in the region, something already implied by Brandt's Cologne speech in 1971.

Although the new German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, who came into office in 1982, initially caused irritation because his dictum of the '*Gnade der späten Geburt*' (grace of late birth) appeared to question Germany's ongoing moral debt to Israel,[104] his government subsequently reaffirmed Germany's commitment to the special relationship. For example, between 1982 and 1987 there were on average five ministerial visits per year between the two countries,[105] which shows how deeply engrained and routinised the special relations had by then become.

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[98]Weingardt, *Deutsche Israel- und Nahostpolitik*, p. 210; Wolfgang Schmidt, 'Aus historischer Verantwortung, moralischer Verpflichtung und politischer Überzeugung: Wie sich Bundeskanzler Willy Brandt um Israel und den Frieden im Nahen Osten bemühte' (Berlin: Bundeskanzler-Willy-Brandt-Stiftung, 2014), available at: {http://www.willy-brandt.de/fileadmin/stiftung/Downloads/Schriftenreihe/Heft_26_Nahost.pdf} accessed 21 January 2016.

[99]Cited in ibid., pp. 83–5.

[100]Dietrich Strothmann, 'Stirbt die Sünde mit den Menschen? Der Bundeskanzler schlug ein neues Kapitel auf', *Die Zeit* (15 June 1973), available at: {http://www.zeit.de/1973/25/stirbt-die-suende-mit-den-menschen} accessed 21 January 2016.

[101]Cited in Gardner Feldman, *The Special Relationship between West Germany and Israel*, p. 186.

[102]Weingardt, *Deutsche Israel- und Nahostpolitik*, p. 338.

[103]Deutscher Bundestag, 'Plenarprotokoll', *105. Sitzung, Bonn* (9 June 1982), pp. 6343–4.

[104]Jürgen Leinemann, 'Einen schönen Salat hat man euch serviert', *Der Spiegel* (30 January 1984), available at: {http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-13510455.html} accessed 22 January 2016.

[105]See Weingardt, *Deutsche Israel- und Nahostpolitik*, p. 322.

The stability of the German-Israeli special relationship in the 1970s and 1980s is even more remarkable in light of the increasing Europeanisation of Germany's Middle East policies.[106] Here, European integration as another source of the Federal Republic's ontological security comes into play. The more Germany developed an identity as a European nation and the more it sought to promote European unity also in foreign policy, the less it was able to pursue unilateral policies towards the Middle East. Rather, it had to find common ground with some decisively pro-Arab countries, most importantly France.[107] Thus, Germany, much to the dismay of Israel, subscribed to a number of EC declarations that called for an Israeli retreat from occupied territories, a resettlement of Palestinian refugees and negotiations with the PLO. That being said, Israel acknowledged that Germany repeatedly watered down pro-Arab declarations.[108] What is more, Germany, time and again, took care of Israeli economic interests, for example by pushing for European-Israeli trade agreements in 1970 and 1975 or by putting on the agenda the establishment of a European-Israeli trade chamber in 1986.[109] It is because of these efforts that Prime Minister Ehud Barak in 1999 called Germany 'our good ambassador in Europe'.[110]

Finally, new challenges for the special relationship appeared to arise with German reunification and Israeli fears that, in the words of Prime Minister Shamir, 'a reunited Germany may constitute a new and deadly threat to all Jews'.[111] Yet once again, German governments worked to dispel such concerns and remained committed to the special relationship. Both Chancellor Schröder and Foreign Minister Fischer left no doubt that they accepted Germany's historical burden and that they regarded Israel as one of the most significant others when it came to defining Germany's foreign policy identity. Thus, during his time in office, Schröder reaffirmed Germany's 'particular responsibility', ruled out any boycott or embargo against Israel, and defended German military aid:

> Let me say this in the most unmistakable manner: Israel will always get what it needs to uphold its security, at the time when it is needed.[112]

The German government, in line with this promise, successfully blocked proposals for EU sanctions against Israel in 2002.[113] Foreign Minister Fischer later explained that

> Germany unconditionally supports Israel's right of existence … This commitment to Israel … is not negotiable and is the foundation on which the special relationship between our two countries is built. It is a cornerstone of German foreign policy and will remain so.[114]

The fact that Germany and Israel, time and again, were able to defuse critical situations and to overcome policy disagreements underlines the 'specialness' of their relationship.[115] The resilience of German-Israeli relations derives from Germany's ontological security needs and Israel's readiness to contribute to fulfilling these needs. Both factors have become stronger, not weaker, over time. The historical record suggests that Germany's ontological security needs were already

[106]Gardner Feldman, 'The principle and practice of "reconciliation" in German foreign policy', p. 356.

[107]Weingardt, *Deutsche Israel- und Nahostpolitik*, pp. 207–08.

[108]Belkin, *Germany's Relations with Israel*, p. 3.

[109]Schmidt, 'Aus historischer Verantwortung'; Gardner Feldmann, 'The principle and practice of "reconciliation" in German foreign policy', p. 345.

[110]Cited in in Asseburg and Busse, 'Deutschlands Politik gegenüber Israel', p. 697.

[111]Cited in Weingardt, *Deutsche Israel- und Nahostpolitik*, p. 334.

[112]Deutscher Bundestag, 'Plenarprotokoll', *233. Sitzung, Berlin* (25 April 2002), p. 23115.

[113]Belkin, *Germany's Relations with Israel*, p. 9.

[114]Cited in Britain Israel Communications & Research Center, 'Israel's Foreign Relations: The Israel-German Special Relationship' (23 November 2005), available at: {http://web.archive.org/web/20070312180139/http://www.bicom.org.uk/publications/israels_foreign_relations/s/1207/the-israel-german-special-relationship/} accessed 22 January 2016.

[115]Lorena de Vita, 'German and Israeli ties in 2015 and 1965: the difficult special relationship', *International Affairs*, 91:4 (2015), p. 839.

part of the drivers behind the establishment of the special relationship after the Second World War. As German-Israeli relations developed, Germany's ontological security became ever more entwined with this relationship, which explains its unshakeable commitment to upholding the special relationship. Ontological security seeking has thus been central to the establishment and in particular the stability and endurance of the German-Israeli special relationship.

The politics of maintaining the special relationship

Understanding the German-Israeli special relationship through the lens of ontological security offers new perspectives on three interrelated practices of maintaining that relationship over time. These practices involve recurrent symbolic reaffirmations of the 'specialness' of the relationship; Israeli reminders of Germany's moral debt to Israel; and the 'silencing' of critics of the special relationship in German political discourse.

German-Israeli relations are marked by recurrent symbolic reaffirmations of the special bonds between the two countries. Such affirmations serve as mutual assurances and public commitments to the special relationship and are thus integral to the ontological security the relationship provides. Among the most significant examples for this practice have been the high-profile speeches of Israeli presidents in the Bundestag and of German presidents and chancellors in the Knesset. While reciprocal invitations to speak to the Israeli and German parliaments are in themselves symbolic affirmations of the 'specialness' of the relationship, these occasions are also routinely used by both sides to emphasise the special character they ascribe to their relations.

The first Israeli president to speak in the Bundestag was Ezer Weizman in 1996, followed by Moshe Katsav in 2005 and Shimon Peres on the occasion of the international Memorial Day for the victims of the Shoah in 2010. These speeches were recognised as highly symbolic events at the time and received exceptional attention in German public debate. They also followed a similar script in the sense that they all built bridges between the memory of the Holocaust and the good relations between Israel and Germany that have since developed. The presidents brought back to life the 'pillars of smoke from the Holocaust'[116] and the 'memory of the atrocious past',[117] which 'can neither be forgiven nor excused'.[118] They reminded their audiences of Germany's historic guilt and its moral debt to Israel deriving from this guilt, but at the same time applauded the 'new Germany'[119] for recognising its responsibilities and being a reliable supporter of Israel.

In particular, each president gave expression to the closeness of what have become 'special relations between Germany and Israel'.[120] President Weizman thanked Germany for the 'friendship' between Israel and Germany and the intimate cooperation between the two countries in 'economic, security, cultural and many other fields'.[121] President Peres explicitly linked the achievement of special relations to the remembrance of the past:

> Unique ties developed between Germany and Israel. The friendship that was established did not develop at the expense of forsaking the memory of the Holocaust, but from the memory of the dark hours of the past.[122]

[116]Ezer Weizman, 'Rede vor dem Deutschen Bundestag', *Bonn* (16 January 1996), available at: {https://www.bundestag.de/kulturundgeschichte/geschichte/gastredner/weizman/weizman/197116} accessed 30 September 2016.

[117]Shimon Peres, 'Address by the President of the State of Israel, H. E. Shimon Peres, at the German Bundestag', Berlin (27 January 2010), available at: {https://www.bundestag.de/kulturundgeschichte/geschichte/gastredner/peres/speech/248112} accessed 30 September 2016.

[118]Moshe Katsav, 'Rede vor dem Deutschen Bundestag und Bundesrat', Berlin (31 May 2005), available at: {https://www.bundestag.de/kulturundgeschichte/geschichte/gastredner/katsav/rede_katsav} accessed 30 September 2016.

[119]Peres, 'Address by the President of the State of Israel'.

[120]Katsav, 'Rede vor dem Deutschen Bundestag und Bundesrat'.

[121]Weizmann, 'Rede vor dem Deutschen Bundestag'.

[122]Peres, 'Address by the President of the State of Israel'.

Such Israeli affirmations of the special quality of German-Israeli relations were significant external validations[123] of Germany's uncertain post-Second World War identity, which is intrinsically linked to reconciliation with Israel, and thereby contributed to fulfilling Germany's ontological security needs. That contribution has been recognised and valued, in turn, by German governments. In the words of Germany's then foreign minister, Joschka Fischer, at the special session of the UN General Assembly on 24 January 2005 in commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the liberation of the Nazi concentration camps: 'The fact that Israel sees us as a reliable partner today is by no means to be taken for granted and fills us with profound gratitude.'[124]

Similarly, post-Second World War German self-identity has been externally validated by several invitations to German heads of state or government to visit Israel. These visits were used to affirm that identity and to express Germany's unwavering commitment to, in the words of Joachim Gauck, 'the forever special German-Israeli friendship'.[125] Among the most powerful occasions for such symbolic confirmations of the 'special character'[126] of German-Israeli relations were a number of high-profile speeches of German presidents and chancellors in front of the Knesset. Having been introduced by the Speaker of the Knesset Abraham Burg as 'Israel's greatest friend',[127] the speech delivered by President Johannes Rau in 2000 is a memorable case in point:

> The relationship between our countries will always be special. In the knowledge of what has happened, we keep the memories alive. With the lessons of the past, we shape our common future. … The shared responsibility for Israel is a fundamental principle of German foreign policy since the foundation of our State.[128]

Using similar language, President Horst Köhler in his 2005 speech to the Knesset described 'the responsibility for the Shoah' as 'part of German identity' and declared that 'between Germany and Israel there cannot be what one calls normality'.[129] Chancellor Angela Merkel also used her 2008 speech to Israel's parliament, which was the first ever speech of a foreign head of government in the Knesset, to commit Germany to its 'unique relationship' to Israel:

> Germany and Israel are and will always remain linked in a special way by the memory of the Shoah. … Here of all places I want to explicitly stress that every German Government and every German Chancellor before me has shouldered Germany's special historical responsibility for Israel's security. This historical responsibility is part of my country's *raison d'être*. … Yes, our relations are special, indeed unique – marked by enduring responsibility for the past, shared values, mutual trust, abiding solidarity for one another and shared confidence. … In this spirit, Germany will never forsake Israel but will remain a true friend and partner.[130]

[123]Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, p. 38.

[124]UN General Assembly, 'Twenty-eighth Special Session, Official Record', A/S-28/PV.1, New York (24 January 2005), pp. 1–19, available at: {https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N05/216/36/PDF/N0521636.pdf?OpenElement}, accessed 30 September 2016.

[125]Bundespräsidialamt, 'Staatsbankett, gegeben vom Präsidenten des Staates Israel', Jerusalem (29 May 2012), available at: {http://www.bundespraesident.de/SharedDocs/Reden/DE/Joachim-Gauck/Reden/2012/05/120529-Israel-Staatsbankett.html} accessed 3 April 2016.

[126]Roman Herzog, cited in Weingardt, *Deutsche Israel- und Nahostpolitik*, p. 359.

[127]Kloke, '40 Jahre deutsch-israelische Beziehungen'.

[128]Bundespräsidialamt, 'Ansprache vor der Knesset', Jerusalem (16 February 2000), available at: {http://www.bundespraesident.de/SharedDocs/Reden/DE/Johannes-Rau/Reden/2000/02/20000216_Rede.html} accessed 22 January 2016.

[129]Bundespräsidialamt, 'Ansprache von Bundespräsident Horst Köhler vor der Knesset in Jerusalem', Jerusalem (2 February 2005), available at: {http://www.bundespraesident.de/SharedDocs/Reden/DE/Horst-Koehler/Reden/2005/02/20050202_Rede.html} accessed 3 April 2016.

[130]Deutsche Bundesregierung, 'Rede von Bundeskanzlerin Angela Merkel vor der Knesset in Jerusalem'.

Moreover, such affirmations of the 'specialness' of German-Israeli relations by German presidents and chancellors in Israel represent not only self-assurances of Germany's post-Second World War identity but also serve to externally validate Israel's uncertain collective identity as a secure home for Jewish life after the Holocaust.[131] This has been recognised and welcomed, in turn, by Israel. For example, in his speech to the Bundestag in 2010, President Peres explicitly took up Horst Köhler's 2005 dictum in the Knesset that the Shoah was part of Germany's identity: 'We give you great credit for that.'[132] In the same speech, Peres emphasised that Israel 'will never forget' Angela Merkel's 'stirring words of indissoluble support'[133] when she pledged that 'whoever threatens Israel also threatens us' in her 2009 address to the US Congress.[134]

More broadly, representatives of both Israel and Germany regularly employ a whole range of bilateral and international arenas to express the special character of their relationship. On the bilateral level, a recurring occasion for such expressions are the regular cabinet-level consultations between the two countries. When Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu visited Berlin for one of the latest of these consultations in February 2016, for example, he as a matter of course emphasised the 'unique partnership which we have today between our two nations': 'When we are in Germany, we know we are among good friends.'[135] The Israeli prime minister thus reaffirmed the special relationship despite rising bilateral tensions about Israeli settlement policies and a deepening personal rift between himself and Chancellor Angela Merkel. Two years earlier, in 2014, Merkel and Netanyahu during a press conference explicitly disagreed on the issue of new Israeli settlements in the West Bank. Most tellingly, however, Netanyahu, at the same event, honoured the bilateral government consultations as a unique form of cooperation and something of utmost historical and emotional importance for Holocaust survivors. Both episodes support the view of the special relationship as an enduring social institution that is resilient against policy disagreements and interpersonal animosities.

As for international forums, the speech of German Foreign Minister Fischer at the UN General Assembly is a good case in point:

> For us, German-Israeli relations will always have a very special character. The State of Israel's right to exist and the security of its citizens will forever remain non-negotiable fixtures of German foreign policy. On that Israel can always rely.[136]

Taken as a whole, therefore, symbolic reaffirmations of the 'specialness' of German-Israeli relations in various shapes and forms are ubiquitous in this relationship. Such reaffirmations, in turn, serve as confirmations of Germany's biographical narrative and self-identity.[137] What is more, mechanisms to maintain the special relations are particularly important for the stability of the relationship at times when its special character appears to be in doubt or is being questioned. In such 'critical situations',[138] the ontological security needs of Germany pushes it to engage in practices to avoid a process of 'estrangement'[139] that would otherwise produce anxiety and undermine its self-identity. It is precisely the threat to Germany's, and to a lesser extent, Israel's

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[131]See Daniel Levy, 'The future of the past: Historiographical disputes and competing memories in Germany and Israel', *History and Theory*, 38:1 (1999), pp. 59–61.

[132]Peres, 'Address by the President of the State of Israel'.

[133]Ibid.

[134]Angela Merkel, 'Speech to the US Congress', Washington (3 November 2009), available at: {http://www.german-way.com/notable-people/featured-bios/angela-merkel/angela-merkels-2009-speech-to-the-us-congress/} accessed 3 April 2016.

[135]Israeli Mission to the European Union, 'PM Netanyahu and Chancellor Merkel Issue Joint Statement at the Inter-governmental Consultations', Berlin (16 February 2016), available at: {http://embassies.gov.il/eu/NewsAndEvents/Pages/Israel-Germany-G2G-Joint-Statement.aspx} accessed 6 April 2016.

[136]United Nations General Assembly (2005), p. 18.

[137]Berenskoetter, 'Germany and Israel'.

[138]Steele, 'Ontological security and the power of self-identity', p. 526.

[139]Felix Berenskoetter and Bastian Giegerich, 'From NATO to ESDP: a social constructivist analysis of German strategic adjustment after the end of the Cold War', *Security Studies*, 19:3 (2010), pp. 407–52.

ontological security that an existential crisis in their special relationship would entail, which triggers mechanisms to protect the relationship from such crises.

Specifically, one important mechanism to this effect consists of Israeli reminders of Germany's moral debt to Israel whenever German representatives appeared to question the 'specialness' of the relationship. Such reminders highlight the dependency of Germany's post-Second World War identity on Israel's confirmation that Germany lives up to its historical responsibilities. They work as threats to Germany's identity, which help contain dissonance in German-Israeli relations.[140] This pattern is evident, in particular, in Israel's resistance to any German hints at a 'normalisation' of the relationship.[141] Such attempts would be countered by Israeli assertions that its moral claims on Germany were timeless and that forgiveness for the Holocaust was impossible.[142] In consequence, this 'moral entrapment'[143] of Germany works to discredit and undermine attempts of German representatives to challenge the 'specialness' of German-Israeli relations. Remarks from a German foreign minister such as those of Walter Scheel to an Israeli newspaper in 1969, that 'our relation to Israel resembles our relations to other countries … there is nothing special about it', while already controversial at the time, would virtually be unthinkable today.[144]

Along similar lines, Israel invokes reminders to Germany's historical guilt and moral duty to counter German behaviour, which it sees as disregarding the special nature of the relationship. One of the most prominent cases in point is the fallout between German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin in April 1981 after a number of pro-Palestinian statements of Chancellor Schmidt. In response, Begin attacked Schmidt for his role in the *Wehrmacht* in the Second World War and accused him of having a cynical attitude towards the crimes committed by Germans in the Holocaust.[145] More recent examples include the disappointment expressed by Prime Minister Netanyahu with Germany's abstention in a 2012 UN General Assembly vote to grant Palestine non-member observer status at the UN and with German criticisms of Israel's settlement policy in the West Bank as well as the complaints of Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman to his German counterpart Frank-Walter Steinmeier in January 2014 that Germany did not do enough to support Israel in the international arena.[146] Such Israeli reproaches that Germany fails to live up to its moral responsibilities, when seen in isolation, could well be interpreted as a sign of a disintegrating special relationship. Yet inasmuch as they provoke German reaffirmations of its special responsibilities to Israel they ultimately contribute to sustaining the relationship. In particular, they link conflicts and policy disagreements in German-Israeli relations to German identity needs and foreground the significance of the relationship for Germany as a source of ontological security. This, in turn, pushes German decision-makers to contain disagreements with Israel and to reaffirm their attachment to the special relationship.

A further mechanism that protects German-Israeli relations from internal challenges can be described as the 'silencing' or marginalisation of voices in the German discourse that appear to cross the line between criticising the policies of Israeli governments and putting into question Germany's special responsibilities towards Israel (as well as denying threats to Israel's physical security). Such voices represent threats to Germany's and Israel's ontological security and therefore provoke rejection within both Germany and Israel. As a case in point, Jürgen W. Möllemann, a former German vice chancellor and influential figure in the German liberal party (FDP) with close ties to Arab business communities, provoked an outcry in the German media

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[140]Bially Mattern, 'The power politics of identity', pp. 358–65.
[141]Gardner Feldman, 'The principle and practice of "reconciliation" in German foreign policy', pp. 340–2.
[142]Gardner Feldman, *The Special Relationship between West Germany and Israel*, p. 44; Lavy, *Germany and Israel*, p. 210.
[143]Berenskoetter, 'Germany and Israel'.
[144]Cited in Weingard, *Deutsche Israel- und Nahostpolitik*, p. 198.
[145]Wolffsohn and Brechenmacher, 'Israel', p. 512.
[146]De Vita, 'German and Israeli ties in 2015 and 1965', pp. 836–7.

and the Bundestag, including accusations of anti-Semitism, when he used anti-Israeli campaign slogans in the 2002 general election campaign that were widely condemned across the German political spectrum, not least by the Central Council of Jews in Germany. Möllemann was forced to publicly apologise and later resigned from his position as leader of the FDP in Germany's biggest state.[147]

A more recent example is the controversial 2012 poem 'What Must Be Said' by Günter Grass, a German novelist and Nobel Laureate in literature, in which he accuses Israel of endangering world peace and criticises the 'universal silence' over this in German discourse, which, Grass argues, is sustained by Germany's perceived moral obligations to Israel. The poem instigated an impassioned debate, but the response from Germany and Israel was overwhelmingly negative.[148] Perhaps the strongest attack on Grass came from a leading conservative broadsheet in Germany, which dubbed him 'the eternal anti-Semite'.[149] For the American Jewish committee in Berlin, Grass had done 'terrible harm to German-Israeli friendship'[150] and Prime Minister Netanyahu called the poem an 'absolute scandal' that reveals 'a collapse of moral judgment'.[151]

Power asymmetries in the special relationship

This part of our case study explores the effects of asymmetric ontological security needs on power relations within the German-Israeli relationship. We argue that the greater dependency of Germany on the special relationship for its ontological security explains why Israel was time and again able to achieve favourable negotiation agreements despite Germany's superior material power resources.

The fact that Israeli decision-makers from the beginning of the special relationship were aware of the opportunities opened up by this asymmetry in ontological security needs[152] is evidenced by internal records of the Israeli Foreign Ministry:

> We have a somewhat odd relationship with Germany … As long as there remains a feeling of guilt inside Germany, this situation can go on without requiring us to offer anything in exchange [for German concessions].[153]

Along similar lines, Nahum Goldmann, the President of the World Jewish Congress, commented on the negotiations about the Luxembourg accord in 1952 that 'We are not dealing with a quid pro quo. Nobody is saying to the Germans: You pay us, we forgive you.'[154]

To be sure, this approach was occasionally criticised in Germany in the early period of the special relationship as an instrumentalisation of the past, for example by the Federal Republic's first ambassador to Israel Rolf Friedemann Pauls.[155] In the longer term, however, German

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[147]'Möllemann weicht zurück', *Berliner Zeitung* (7 June 2002), available at: {http://www.berliner-zeitung.de/archiv/fdp-vize-entschuldigt-sich-bei-den-juden–nicht-aber-bei-friedman-karsli-verlaesst-fraktion—westerwelle–verletzungen-koennen-heilen-moellemann-weicht-zurueck,10810590,10001912.html} accessed 22 January 2016.

[148]Felix Berenskoetter, 'An Act of Friendship? Re-reading Grass on German-Israeli Relations', LSE Ideas (1 October 2012), available at: {http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/ideas/2012/10/an-act-of-friendship-re-reading-grass-on-german-israeli-relations/} accessed 8 April 2016.

[149]'Günter Grass, der ewige Antisemit', *Die Welt* (4 April 2012).

[150]Gareth Jones, 'German author Grass says Israel endangers world peace', *Reuters* (4 April 2012), available at: {http://www.reuters.com/article/us-germany-israel-grass-idUSBRE8330J020120404} accessed 8 April 2016.

[151]'Klare Mehrheit der Deutschen steht an Israels Seite', *Die Welt* (21 April 2012).

[152]Given the unsurprisingly very strong domestic opposition against any interaction with representatives from the country that had murdered six million European Jews, a reciprocal relationship with Germany was politically and morally inconceivable from the perspective of the Israeli government at the time. The fact that it negotiated with Germany at all enabled the 'miracle' (Auswärtiges Amt 2015) of the German-Israeli special relationship.

[153]Meeting in the Israeli Foreign Ministry (1953), cited in Jelinek (ed.), *Zwischen Macht und Moralpolitik*, p. 246.

[154]Cited in Gardner Feldman, *The Special Relationship between West Germany and Israel*, p. 43.

[155]Lavy, *Germany and Israel*, p. 139.

decision-makers came to accept that Germany's immeasurable historical guilt could never be paid off and that its support of Israel was to be permanent and unconditional. Adenauer's remarks after his visit to Israel in 1966 are exemplary in this regard:

> To those who think that restitution must come to an end and that the German people cannot condemn itself to the slavery of eternal guilt I want to say that one cannot put figures to a moral obligation nor pay it off penny by penny.[156]

What this implies is both a refusal to normalise relations with Israel and the understanding that conventional bargaining is inappropriate for Germany in this relationship. Most notably, negotiation tactics involving threats to withdraw basic material or diplomatic support for Israel would have been at odds with the very core of Germany's foreign policy identity and were therefore anathema to Adenauer and his successors. In consequence, as the special relationship stabilised over time, material power imbalances and asymmetric policy interdependence in Germany's favour became ever more meaningless.

The corollary of this was increasing Israeli leverage *vis-à-vis* Germany. As a recent case in point, the German-Israeli negotiations about the delivery of German submarines to Israel exemplify how Israeli interlocutors have been able to 'exploit' the ontological security needs of their German partners to achieve a highly favourable deal.

Our focus on this series of talks between 1999 and 2015 is informed by three considerations. First, they constitute a critical test for our theoretical argument because of their post-Cold War setting. While competing explanatory approaches would expect Germany to enjoy superior bargaining power in this period, our analytical perspective suggests that Germany's ontological security needs after reunification reinforced the dependency of its foreign policy identity on the special relationship, which should have weakened its negotiating position *vis-à-vis* Israel. Second, the arms deals in question are difficult to reconcile with Germany's political guidelines for arms exports prohibiting the delivery of weapons into conflict areas. German arms exports in the Middle East also regularly provoke media criticism and go against public opinion. Any concession to Israel on this high-profile issue therefore carried significant reputational costs for Germany both domestically and internationally. That Germany still agreed to a deal that met Israel's key demands must remain puzzling from a utilitarian cost-benefit perspective. Third, the availability of detailed media reports, some of which are based on insider knowledge, enables us not only to assess the negotiation outcomes but also to infer initial preferences at the outset of the negotiations.

After the Kohl government agreed to the Israeli procurement of Dolphin-class submarines and to considerable German state subsidies, three submarines were delivered to Israel in 1999–2000. Criticism at that time was muted, arguably because of the progress made in the Middle East peace process. In the early 2000s, after the second Intifada and with both Israeli and Palestinian governments refusing to enter into new peace talks, further arms deals were more difficult to legitimate. This might explain why the red-green government under Chancellor Schröder waited until November 2005, only a couple of days before it left office, to authorise the delivery of a fourth and fifth submarine. In 2010, the Merkel-led coalition government started negotiations about German financial support for producing a sixth submarine despite widespread frustration with increasing Israeli settlements in the West Bank and the open scepticism of the Israeli leadership towards a two-state solution. Under such adverse political circumstances, the Merkel government feared major domestic controversies if it agreed to a bilateral deal without renewed reassurances of Israel's commitment to peaceful conflict resolution. As Israel's ambassador to Berlin between 2008 and 2012, Yoram Ben Zeev recalled:

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[156]Adenauer cited in Lavy, *Germany and Israel*, p. 141.

> The Germans told us: 'We need to get [the deal] through Parliament; give us tools to deal with this.'[157]

In this context, it was reportedly Chancellor Merkel herself who, encouraged by a similar US position, asked Prime Minister Netanyahu to stop new settlement plans, allow the completion of a German-funded sewage treatment plant funded in Gaza, and unfreeze Palestinian tax money. Yet, Netanyahu refused to meet the first two demands and only agreed to authorise financial transactions to the Palestinian authorities after the negotiations were in serious deadlock.[158] While that relatively small concession enabled the German government to save face domestically and to satisfy some critical voices within the coalition parties, it was certainly Israel, not Germany, who had the upper hand in these negotiations.

What is more, a number of public statements of German government officials support the conclusion that Germany gave in to Israeli demands in part with a view to the detrimental effects of a breakdown of negotiations for Germany's foreign policy identity and its ontological security. For example, German decision-makers consistently deny that they were at any point during the negotiations ready to veto the submarine deal. Moreover, government statements implicitly confirm that Germany's responsibility for the special relationship was eventually prioritised over other normative considerations. Thus, government spokesman Steffen Seibert refused to comment on the compatibility of the deal with German export control guidelines and instead referred to Chancellor Merkel's 2007 UN speech in which she had defined responsibility for Israel's existence as part of the Federal Republic's *raison d'état*. The delivery of submarines, Seibert explained, was a manifestation of that unique responsibility.[159] More explicitly, Israel's chief negotiator Ben Zeev acknowledged the impact of non-negotiable moral commitments for the negotiating outcome:

> In the end, responsibility for Israel's security is a policy principle in Germany and a personal principle of Merkel … With her, this overrides politics, personal tensions and any other consideration.[160]

Asked why Germany agreed to deliver four battle ships in addition to the sixth submarine, Merkel, in 2015, confirmed the exceptional status of German-Israeli relations, saying that she believed in the need to provide particular support to Israel against the backdrop of the Holocaust.[161]

More recently, in October 2017, the German government agreed to provide up to 540 million Euros in support of another three replacements of Israeli submarines.[162] The decision was taken despite official Israeli investigations into earlier submarine deals and allegations of bribery against the inner circle of the Israeli administration. It is reported that the German government initially wanted to postpone the arms deal until all investigations were concluded. Yet, as expected from an ontological security perspective, it quickly changed its position after the Israeli President Reuven Rivlin declared the submarines essential for Israel's security during his Berlin

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[157]Cited in 'Behind the scenes of Israel's new submarine deal with Germany', *Haaretz* (25 March 2012), available at: {http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/behind-the-scenes-of-israel-s-new-submarine-deal-with-germany-1.420551} accessed 30 September 2016.

[158]'Made in Germany', *Der Spiegel* (2 March 2012), pp. 20–33.

[159]'Deutsche U-Boote für Israel: Historische Verantwortung sticht politische Grundsätze', *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (5 June 2012), available at: {http://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/deutsche-u-boote-fuer-israel-historische-verantwortung-sticht-politische-grundsaetze-1.1374358} accessed 21 May 2016.

[160]*Haaretz*, Behind the scenes of Israel's new submarine deal with Germany'.

[161]'Merkel begründet Waffendeal mit Israels Marine', *Die Welt* (12 May 2015), available at: {http://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article140854190/Merkel-begruendet-Waffendeal-mit-Israels-Marine.html} accessed 21 May 2016.

[162]'Bund zahlt bis zu 540 Millionen Euro für U-Boot-Deal mit Israel', *Handelsblatt* (23 October 2017), available at: {http://www.handelsblatt.com/politik/deutschland/ruestungsgeschaeft-bund-zahlt-bis-zu-540-millionen-euro-fuer-u-boot-deal-mit-israel/20491544.html} accessed 16 November 2017.

visit in September 2017.[163] Only a few weeks later, German decision-makers justified their support of the arms deal with references to Germany's historical responsibility to Israel and a government spokesperson emphasised that Germany's support was unconditional and that 'no strings were attached'.[164]

What is clear from these episodes is that German decision-makers, in each particular instance, were unwilling to engage in conventional bargaining with Israel and to risk a breakdown of the negotiations. This would have triggered a major crisis in the German-Israeli special relationship to which Germany's ontological security is indissolubly tied. Germany was therefore not able to get more than a minor concession from Israel. Starting out from asymmetries in the ontological security needs of partners to special relationships arguably offers a valuable theoretical perspective on power relations and negotiation dynamics within such relationships.

Conclusion

The German-Israeli reconciliation after the Holocaust and the special relationship between the two countries that has since developed stand out among the most remarkable and unlikely achievements in post-Second World War international politics. How this achievement was possible and how German-Israeli relations have developed ever since can be fruitfully explored through the lens of ontological security. Specifically, the special relationship has been formative for Germany's and Israel's identity and is an important source of ontological security above all for Germany. Putting the ontological security that the relationship provides to Germany centre stage sheds new light on the establishment and stability of the special relations as well as on how they are being maintained and on how negotiations between Germany and Israel play out. The ontological security perspective also serves to emphasise how much Germany, in particular, has benefited from the special relationship and how critical it is for its self-identity and international reputation. This helps explain why post-unification Germany remains fundamentally attached to the special relationship and willing to sign up to what in a narrow material sense appear to be uneven bargains in favour of Israel. The expectation, therefore, is that the German-Israeli relationship will continue to buck trends towards a 'normalisation' of German foreign policy. Such trends have been observed, for example, in Germany's approach to international military missions and its European policy.[165]

Beyond the case of German-Israeli relations, the broader claim of this article is that the concept of ontological security promises to address limitations of existing scholarship on special relationships more generally. This is the case in particular regarding the motivations of states to establish and uphold special relations, their stability and durability, the politics and mechanisms of sustaining special relationships, and the power relations within them. It would be for further studies to explore to what extent and under what conditions that promise holds. Prya Chacko's study of the development of US-Indian cooperation indicates that ontological security seeking indeed motivated the establishment of a special relationship in another case.[166] Scholars might also explore the question to what extent the erosion of special relationships can be explained as a result of changing ontological security needs as our analysis implies. Ultimately, what is needed are comparative research designs to systematically test the plausibility of our claims across different cases and contexts.

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[163]'Israel drängt Kanzleramt zur Zustimmung zum U-Boot-Deal', *Die Zeit* (11 October 2017), available at: {http://www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2017-10/israel-u-boote-export-thyssenkrupp} accessed 16 November 2017.

[164]Ibid.

[165]Regina Karp, 'Germany: a "normal' global actor?', *German Politics*, 18:1 (2009), pp. 12–35.

[166]Prya Chacko, 'A new "special relationship"?: Power transitions, ontological security, and India-US relations', *International Studies Perspectives*, 15:3 (2014), pp. 329–46.

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