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### **Mutuality of interests**

WEST GERMAN Chancellor Helmut Kohl, who is due in Israel next week on an official visit, said in a recent interview on German television that “arms sales to third countries are not a topic for discussion in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem.”

His desire to avoid, during his friendly visit, any controversy over the possibility that Germany will sell Leopard-2 tanks to Saudi Arabia is understandable. Despite the hint in his statement that such a sale to a “third party” is not really Israel’s business, he knows, of course, that in Israel such a transaction is seen very definitely as Israel’s “business.”

Saudi Arabia is not just a “third country,” but an implacable, intensively motivated enemy of Israel; and that country needs Leopard-2 tanks only for its declared build-up of an all-Arab arsenal for a “final” assault on the Jewish State.

However, if Chancellor Kohl wishes to postpone the inevitable diplomatic clash with Israel on the subject, no doubt he has the right, as a welcome visitor, to avoid the issue during his visit – especially as he has asserted that no negotiations are in progress on the proposed sale to Saudi Arabia.

In his television interview, however, Kohl made a remark that recalls the strain in the relations between the two countries that developed in the year before he took office. The moral significance of that remark may well affect the future of those relations. Asked how he felt about his projected meeting with Prime Minister Begin, Kohl declared that his advantage was that “the accusations that had been unjustly raised against his predecessor, Helmut Schmidt, could not be held against him since he had been 15 years old when the war ended” (*The Jerusalem Post*, August 14).

Kohl was referring to Begin’s angry reaction to then chancellor Schmidt’s television interview on April 30, 1981. Prime Minister Begin attacked Schmidt personally and insinuated that his past was not free of identification with the Nazi regime.

Whether Begin’s charge was justified or not, it certainly was irrelevant to the issues raised in Schmidt’s televised remarks. Those remarks, however, gave birth to accusations against Schmidt that were very relevant and very justified, indeed; and their significance has not grown less important to this day.

CHANCELLOR SCHMIDT’s April 1981 television interview took place on his return from a visit to Saudi Arabia. Four days later, Asher Ben-Natan, former ambassador to West Germany (where he had won great prestige and popularity) and chairman of the Israeli-German Friendship League, called a press conference in Tel Aviv and expressed revulsion at some of the things Schmidt had said.

Schmidt’s theme in the interview was Germany’s relationship with Saudi Arabia. He explained why that relationship was a very special one. Saudi Arabia, he said, was – outside of Europe and apart from the United States – Germany’s “most important political and economic partner.” He went on to explain that in fact the relationship with all the Arab states was special.

“In that part of the world,” he said, “we Germans have a historic advantage. In other places, we bear the terrible burden of the past, the guilt which rests on the previous generation and also on our foreign policy. We are burdened with it in relation to the

Dutch, the Danes, and the Norwegians, whose countries we invaded under Hitler's leadership; to the French, the Greeks, and the Italians, to mention only a few. The Arab peoples are practically the only ones in the whole world who had no negative experience with the Germans. This must not be forgotten . . . it plays a role in the open-hearted friendship with which they approach us."

WHAT WAS glaringly missing in Schmidt's presentation of the historic facts was the reason *why* the Arabs had had no negative experience with Hitler's Germany. The reason, in fact, was that the Arabs shared with Nazi Germany the dream of destroying the Jewish people. Wherever feasible, they cooperated with the Nazis. Ben-Natan at his press conference gave as examples of the "horrible foundations" of Germany's friendly relations with the Arabs, the pro-German revolt in Iraq in 1941 and the help given by the Mufti of Jerusalem in establishing a Moslem unit in the German army to cooperate in killing Jews.

Schmidt made it clear later in the television interview that Saudi Arabia's friendship for Germany was "not only based on moral grounds, but has grown out of certain parallel interests." The result was that Germany enjoyed practical economic benefits – in the supply and pricing of oil. Schmidt's unabashed message was that the German people, by virtue of their "historic advantage," should enjoy the fruits of friendship with the Arab peoples bequeathed to them by the Nazis.

DISTURBING and indeed repulsive as Schmidt's unconcealed satisfaction with the roots of that friendship was, one can say, that its aftermath was even more shocking. There was no public outcry in Germany. Nobody protested. Nobody was visibly horrified. Evidently neither the press, nor the intellectuals, nor the organized "Friends of Israel" saw anything untoward in what Schmidt had said, or in his leaving other things unsaid. Presumably all were prepared to accept the role he had offered them and rejoice in the happy heritage from the Nazi era.

It was the abysmal phenomenon that engendered a sense of outrage in Israel. It was this that triggered Ben-Natan's dismayed reaction. On the fourth day after Schmidt's interview, Ben-Natan said at his press conference that Israel was still expecting to hear from Germany "expressions of protest and disavowal of the terrible things Mr. Schmidt said on his return from Saudi Arabia."

He appealed to the friends of Israel in Germany to disavow the statements made by the chancellor. He warned that otherwise it was doubtful whether the relations that had been so laboriously built up between the two countries would be able to continue.

It was also only after those four days of German silence that Prime Minister Begin reacted to the chancellor's statements. Only then did German public opinion come to life. Still not a word about Mr. Schmidt, but a flood of unbridled and unprecedented fury against the prime minister of Israel – which undoubtedly added a new dimension to the relations between the two nations.

To this day, no German public body has made any sign to dissociate itself from the political philosophy propounded by Schmidt. Nor has any public figure.

CHANCELLOR KOHL has shown a friendly attitude to Israel, and one would be tempted to refrain from comment were it not for his off-the-cuff remark suggesting that Helmut Schmidt had merely been the poor victim of “unjustified accusations.”

His silence on the guilt of Schmidt as the cause and origin of the quarrel seems clearly to reflect the continued failure of Germany to comprehend the significance of the very idea of Germany helping to arm the Arab states.

The Arabs, who were friendly to the Nazis because of their anti-Semitism, were encouraged by their victories, and by their atrocities in Europe, to look forward to similar success in the Middle East, to anticipate the concomitant destruction of the Jews of Palestine and of the Jewish national home. The historic link conjured up by Schmidt assumes a gruesome relevance in light of the fact that the Arabs have never given up that purpose.

Notwithstanding all internal feuds, rivalries, even mutual bloodletting, that have always marked inter-Arab relations, notwithstanding differences in nuances and in tactics, the destruction of the Jewish State remains the common ambition of all the Arab states.

The supply of arms to Saudi Arabia means, therefore, to arm precisely the people whose objective is to complete, at least in Palestine, the work left undone by Hitler.

The questions that arise can be answered only by the German people.