GERMANY’S FOREIGN POLICY OF RECONCILIATION

from enmity to amity

LILY GARDNER FELDMAN
Germany’s Foreign Policy of Reconciliation
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From Enmity to Amity

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To Shira and Batya
and their deep commitment to justice and peace.
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On March 18, 2008, Angela Merkel became the first chancellor of a united Germany to speak before the Knesset, Israel’s parliament. A minority of Knesset members chose not to attend, either because of the speaker’s country or her mother tongue.

Despite the horror of the Holocaust more than six decades earlier, many Knesset members did listen, and Chancellor Merkel’s words describing reconciliation resonated with them and with a broad Israeli public:

Ladies and gentlemen, Germany and Israel are and will always remain linked in a special way by the memory of the Shoah. . . . It left wounds that have not healed to this day. . . . It is true that places of remembrance are important, places such as the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin or Yad Vashem. They keep memories alive. But it is also true that places alone are not enough once memories become part of the past. Memories must constantly be recalled. Thoughts must become words, and words deeds. . . . 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. . . . [A]s David Ben-Gurion said: Anyone who does not believe in miracles is not a realist. Today when we look back on German-Israeli relations, on the 60th anniversary of the founding of the State of Israel, we know that his words have proven to be just as realistic as they are true. 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, we are celebrating today’s anniversary. In this spirit, Germany will never forsake Israel but will remain a true friend and partner.¹
Just three years later, in March 2011, South Korea and China responded to the earthquake and tsunami in Japan by sending rescue teams and humanitarian aid. These gestures were seen as tentative steps in a reconciliation process that has barely begun in Northeast Asia, in contrast to Europe. The Japanese ambassador to Seoul noted that a “friend who helps in a difficult time is a true friend” and predicted that “South Korea–Japan ties will grow closer as a result.” Although historical background, practical needs, and international context are different in Northeast Asia, both Germany’s complex motivations and multifaceted practical ways in developing international reconciliation are instructive. The uniqueness of the Holocaust does not prevent learning lessons from how Germany chose to address that history in its foreign policy after 1945.

Germany, with few allies, made war on much of the world from 1939 until 1945, and ultimately was surrounded by enemies of its own making. German leaders concluded that Germany needed to return to the family of nations, and had to reconcile with its enemies, for both moral and pragmatic reasons. No country other than Germany in the last half-century has pursued a sustained and complex foreign policy of reconciliation.

My interest in international reconciliation grew first out of my work on the spectacular achievements of the German-Israeli “special relationship” beginning in 1950, and then out of my research on the growing links between American Jewry and Germany that started in the early 1980s. As a student of German foreign policy in general, I began to detect in Germany’s relations with other former enemies some of the same ideas and practices that I found in German-Jewish ties, such that one could begin to identify patterns of reconciliation.

This book is about what Germans, and their leaders, understood by the concept of reconciliation after 1945, focusing on four critical cases—France, Israel, Poland, and Czechoslovakia (subsequently, the Czech Republic). It also is about what each of those bilateral partners understood by the concept. It is about the nuanced German approaches to reconciliation in each case, the what, how, and why it was seeking to accomplish, which defines broadly German foreign policy, all in the shadow of the Cold War, after World War II.

There is an implicit historical sequence. Germany focuses first on reconciling with France, its ancient enemy and neighbor and its primary rival in continental Europe. Then, Germany turns to the European Jewish victims of the Holocaust through the State of Israel that absorbs their surviving rem-
nant. There are repeated challenges to Israel’s very survival, beginning with the state’s creation in 1948, and Germany is summoned to play a critical role repeatedly in the 1956, 1967, and 1973 wars that put Israel in peril. West Germany acts, during the Cold War, on the western side of the Iron Curtain, but as the Cold War thaws it becomes possible to reconcile progressively with states to the east, particularly Poland and the Czech Republic.

The postwar world, with a divided Germany, determines the broad sequence. With the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet bloc and the Soviet Union, the unification of Germany is part of Germany’s reconciliation with Poland and the Czech Republic.

The following analysis of four cases of Germany’s foreign policy of reconciliation covers a sixty-year period, from 1949 to 2009. It begins with the creation of the Federal Republic and ends with the seventieth anniversary of the outbreak of World War II, the catastrophic event that made the passage from enmity to amity a dire necessity for both Germany and the world.

Chapter 1 presents the strengths and weaknesses of various disciplinary perspectives on reconciliation, and then offers the guiding framework for the book. Chapter 2 provides the setting—the contours of German foreign policy over six decades—and the place reconciliation held in the overall context. It then examines Germany’s relations with France (chapter 3), Israel (chapter 4), Poland (chapter 5), and the Czech Republic (chapter 6), using the same categories of history, leadership, institutions, and international context. Chapter 7 draws comparative conclusions about the four country cases, and turns to the other case of international pariah status at the end of World War II, Japan. As I developed my ideas on Germany’s international reconciliation, I was called upon frequently to share my findings with Japanese, South Korean, and Chinese scholars, policymakers, and non-governmental actors, as well as American scholars of Northeast Asia, who wanted to break out of the Japanese mold of ignoring or whitewashing the past. Chapter 7 is an effort, mindful of differences, to show how the features of Germany’s foreign policy of reconciliation can be applied to Japan’s incipient relations with China and South Korea.

A number of institutions and individuals have supported profoundly my research and writing on Germany’s foreign policy of reconciliation over two decades. The Jennings Randolph Fellows Program, then in its infancy, at the United States Institute of Peace generously provided me with a year’s sabbatical from Tufts University, so that I could begin to explore the concept of reconciliation and its practice in German foreign policy. Tufts University
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NOTES


The Narrowness and Breadth of Reconciliation in the International Arena

This chapter is in three parts, all essential for comprehending reconciliation: it defines terms and subsequently offers a model, based on German strategy and experience, for reconciliation generally in international affairs; it assesses disciplinary contributions to understanding the concept; and it previews the role of reconciliation as the very definition of German foreign policy after World War II.

ON UNDERSTANDING RECONCILIATION

“Reconciliation” has become a popular, widely used term with many meanings that depend on who is using it and for what purpose. Because it is equally meaningful as a noun and as a verb (“to reconcile”), it refers to processes, to how something might be changed, and the end product of a process. “Who” uses it refers not only to the particulars of an actor, but to the discipline that defines her perspective. “Purpose” refers to whether the user of the term is offering analysis or prescription, wants to understand something, or is trying to change it.

To translate reconciliation’s many possible meanings into a useful analytical tool, it is necessary to identify the purpose for which the term will be used, the actors who are using it, the process for which they want the term to serve, and the outcome of the process. This book applies the term to international relations. Reconciliation refers here to both process and outcome, to