

Crucial Visit

In her historic visit to Jerusalem to commemorate Israel's 60th anniversary, Chancellor Angela Merkel cemented Germany's status as one of Israel's most important allies.

Postwar Germany's contribution to Israel's security and economic prosperity is long-standing. Germany accepted full responsibility for the Holocaust in the early 1950s and provided Israel with vital assistance in the form of reparations for the economic losses incurred during the Nazi period. Full diplomatic relations and military assistance followed in the 1960s.

Close security cooperation between the two countries culminated after the 1991 Gulf War with Germany's provision to Israel of Patriot anti-missile batteries, as well as two top-of-the-line submarines and financing for a third. Two additional submarines now being built will be sold at a discount, providing Israel, according to press reports, with a strategic capability against Iran.

As security cooperation and intelligence sharing continue to expand, bilateral relations in various academic and economic fields are also growing closer. Germany is Israel's largest trading partner in Europe, and is second only to the United States in the world.

Merkel's visit took the Germany-Israel relationship to a new level. She became the first German chancellor to address the Knesset, where she said, "I bow my head before the victims of the Holocaust," and was the first head of government in history to bring to Israel a large delegation of Cabinet ministers for substantive meetings with their Israeli counterparts.

Rejecting the growing calls in Germany to "normalize" relations with Israel, Merkel constantly emphasized that Berlin and Jerusalem have a special relationship based on Germany's moral responsibility for the Holocaust.

In addition, Merkel made strong statements about the need to stop Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons. Her statements have been matched by the German government's reduction in recent years of export credit insurance for German companies dealing with Iran, leading to a steep decline in German exports to the Islamic Republic.

Holocaust survivor and former chairman of the Yad Vashem Council Professor Shevah Weiss said Merkel's Knesset speech, for which she received a standing ovation, "was an outstanding display of the continued friendship on the part of Germany and its leaders towards the State of Israel and the Jewish people." More than 60 years after the Holocaust, it is essential that both nations continue to nurture this unique relationship.