

Confidential

Orig.: SG  
 b/f: VD/JCA  
 cc: Ambassador Brunner

Note to the FileMeeting with the Special Representative to the Middle East

On 1 May 1991, Ambassador Brunner called on the Secretary-General, who was accompanied by Mr. Aimé and the undersigned, in order to brief him on discussions he had held recently in Europe -- in particular in Geneva, where he had met with representatives of all the concerned parties, except the PLO. He had also met with British and French officials in their respective capitals and, the previous day, had had a 90-minute meeting with Dennis Ross, the Director of Policy Planning at the State Department. Ambassador Brunner said that, except for the Israelis, everyone with whom he had met was in agreement as to the nature of the procedural obstacles that stood in the way of convening a peace conference. In decreasing order of difficulty these obstacles were as follows:

1. Framework. Israel has agreed to US-Soviet sponsorship of the conference, in which the Europeans may also participate. It does not, however, accept that the conference be convened under UN auspices -- a point upon which Syria insists. The US would like the UN to be involved, though perhaps not in as authoritative a manner as Syria would prefer.

2. Continuing role of conference. In his most recent meeting with Secretary Baker in Jerusalem on 26 April, Foreign Minister Levy had conveyed his government's acceptance that the conference could reconvene every six months to inform the co-sponsors of progress being made. Such meetings would take place only if the parties were in mutual agreement. This "concession" was, however, almost immediately retracted by Prime Minister Shamir. The US believes the Shamir position to be unreasonable, arguing that periodic meetings of the conference could focus on a variety of important regional issues such as water, arms control, etc.

3. Palestinian representation. Israel's insistence on determining "suitable" Palestinians with whom to negotiate is viewed as unreasonable by the US and unacceptable by the other Arab parties. Nevertheless, Israel continues to oppose the participation of Palestinians with clear links to the PLO and/or who are residents of East Jerusalem. (Apparently, these conditions also apply to a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation.)





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4. Venue. As yet undecided. Cairo is keen to host the talks, but other Arab states will probably not agree. Washington and New York (i.e. UN Headquarters) might be perceived as insufficiently neutral. Geneva remains a clear possibility.

#### Position of the parties

Ambassador Brunner alluded to the well-known divisions on the Arab side. Ironically, the one issue on which there was general Arab agreement was that the international conference should be convened under UN auspices and that longstanding Security Council resolutions such as 242, 338 and 425 could not be abandoned. Meanwhile, in his meetings with Israeli Cabinet Secretary Eli Rubenstein and Director-General of the Prime Ministry Yossi Ben-Aharon, Ambassador Brunner had underlined the important services that the UN could provide in support of an international conference: interpretation and translation, security, confidentiality, a multiplicity of meeting rooms, etc. Such facilities would be indispensable for any international gathering and the UN was in a unique position to offer them. Ambassador Brunner tried to dispel Israeli suspicions concerning the UN. He recalled to them that even the Camp David accords envisaged a (peacekeeping) role for the UN in the Sinai. He added, moreover, that Security Council resolutions 242, 338 and 425 would continue to exist whether or not the conference was held under UN auspices. For their part, the Israeli officials indicated (somewhat paradoxically) that a UN mediating role in the context of bilateral discussions might be helpful.

#### US plans

In their meeting, Mr. Ross had informed Ambassador Brunner that it was unclear what steps Mr. Baker would take next because he was still in Houston (following the death of his mother) and had not yet seen President Bush following his most recent Middle East trip. Mr. Ross was willing "to bet", however, that the Secretary would return to the area and would not abandon his initiative. The latter had left with the Israeli authorities a set of questions regarding the modalities of a conference to which he wished to receive clear answers. In Ambassador Brunner's view, US public opinion would not view sympathetically Israel's unwillingness to attend more than a single meeting of the conference and its opposition to any role for the UN. (By contrast, American public opinion would be more understanding with regard to Israel's refusal to deal with Chairman Arafat.)

#### Soviet role

Ambassador Brunner noted, in that connection, that Soviet Foreign Minister Bessmertnykh was also expected to travel to the Middle East in the coming weeks in support of Mr. Baker's initiative. The latter had convinced his Soviet counterpart to



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work in tandem on the peace process; it had been agreed during the Secretary's 24 April visit to the Soviet Union that the US and USSR would co-sponsor the international conference. In any event, the Soviets were eager to play a greater role regarding the Arab-Israeli conference and they had an important card to play: the restoration of diplomatic relations with Israel. Ambassador Vorontsov had informed Ambassador Brunner that his government would undertake such a step if Israel agreed to attend an international conference based on certain criteria.

#### Secretary-General's visit to the area

As for the Secretary-General's own visit to the region (which had tentatively been planned for May), Ambassador Brunner recommended that he wait until Secretary Baker's plans became clear. If he returned to the area -- which was viewed as the most likely scenario -- then it would quickly become evident whether headway with the Israelis was possible. In the event of a breakthrough on the convening of a conference, there might be some merit in a visit by the Secretary-General following that of Mr. Baker in order to clarify or discuss certain aspects of the UN role. On the other hand, if the Baker initiative were to collapse, it would be advisable to allow some time to pass before starting down a new path.

#### Conclusion

The Secretary-General said that Ambassador Brunner's analysis coincided with his own assessment of the situation, and he agreed that it was preferable to postpone a visit to the Middle East until the outcome of Mr. Baker's efforts became more clear. The Secretary-General noted that he would be undertaking a working visit to Washington from 8-10 May. He had been informed that Mr. Baker might not be present for the meetings, which could be an indication that he would be in the Middle East at that time. In any event, the peace process would certainly be on the agenda for topics of discussion with President Bush. Ambassador Brunner proposed that in their meeting, the Secretary-General might suggest to the President that -- following Mr. Baker's several rounds of discussions with the parties, during which he had conveyed ideas and listened to their objections -- the time had come for the US to put a working paper on the table. It was agreed that the Ambassador would call on the Secretary-General at Blair House on the morning of 10 May.

  
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