

CONFIDENTIAL

NOTES OF AMBASSADOR BRUNNER'S MEETING WITH MR. FARES BOUEIZ,  
MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF LEBANON

Held at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Lebanon, Beirut,  
on 16 July 1991 at 11.00 a.m.

Present:

Ambassador Brunner	Mr. Fares Boueiz, Minister for Foreign
Ms. Buttenheim	Affairs of Lebanon
Mr. Briscoe	Two aides

The Foreign Minister recalled the days of the 16-year-long civil war in Lebanon, and remarked that despite a blocked port and severed communications, supplies had always somehow been available. In fact, during that time much illegal construction had taken place around Beirut, which Ambassador Brunner would have noticed on his trip from Damascus. Mr. Boueiz had been in Kuwait recently, a country in which everything had been paralysed by the recent hostilities.

Ambassador Brunner expressed the hope that the situation in Lebanon would soon return to normality. He believed that if the current normalization continued, the country would regain the commerce that it had enjoyed before the war.

However, as the Minister was aware, the Ambassador's mission was of a different nature. Ambassador Brunner had been appointed several months ago by the Secretary-General as his Special Representative to the Middle East, in accordance with resolution 242. He had begun his tour of the region in Israel and had also visited Jordan, Egypt and Syria. Although Lebanon was not expressly covered by resolution 242, the Secretary-General had requested him to visit the country. The Ambassador's main objective was to talk to all the parties.

As the Minister was aware, Syria had recently submitted a reply to President Bush's letter to the heads of state of the countries involved in the Arab-Israeli conflict, a response which had been judged positive by the United States. The resolutions of the Security Council should serve as a basis for all that the UN did. As had been seen in the Iraq-Kuwait crisis, 17 resolutions had been implemented against Iraq and there was now a widespread feeling that other Security Council resolutions should be implemented.

As regards the role of the UN in the peace conference, Israel wanted as little involvement as possible, whereas the Arabs were in favour of a larger role. The form of UN participation remained to be defined. It was Ambassador

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Brunner's personal impression that the Secretary-General would not want to play a 'mute' or passive role.

In response to the Foreign Minister's enquiry about his status as a Swiss diplomat, Ambassador Brunner explained that he fulfilled the functions of Switzerland's Ambassador to Washington and the Special Representative at the same time. His predecessor, Ambassador Jarring, had also held two posts, serving simultaneously as Sweden's Ambassador to Moscow. If the peace process were to develop and it became necessary to devote more time to the post as Special Representative, he would have to consider choosing between the two functions.

Mr. Boueiz observed that it was well known that Lebanon had supported the restitution of Kuwaiti sovereignty from the first days of the crisis in the Persian Gulf. It had fully approved the application of international law through the United Nations. This had been despite the certain popularity which Iraq's actions had enjoyed in some Arab countries. The Lebanese authorities had been convinced that Iraq should not upset the fragile equilibrium in the region, nor had the world been prepared to tolerate the redrawing of boundaries. Lebanon had been the first to approve the actions of the Security Council.

Those who lived in the Middle East were sensitive to 'nuance', the Lebanese all the more so because of the diversity of their culture. Lebanon was the first country to interpret for the West events which happened in the Middle East. The Foreign Minister had told Mr. Baker that the American victory in the Persian Gulf was ephemeral, it was a military rather than a political victory. Even if an Arab was guilty, he realized that justice must be applied. During the Gulf war, every sophisticated military device had been mobilized against Iraq, but when the question of implementing other, older resolutions was raised, no one paid attention.

It was Mr. Boueiz' profound conviction that Lebanon would assist in a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. The current Arab leaders were wise, moderate, and ready for peace. Indeed, the absence of a peace process could make life difficult for moderate Arab leaderships, including those in Egypt, some of the Maghreb countries and the Gulf States.

What would be the characteristics of the peace process? The Lebanese position was that it would be sponsored by the UN, with a European presence. The United Nations would be assigned an effective role, and the conference would be held on the basis of UN resolutions, something which Israel refused. When the crisis had erupted between Iraq and Kuwait, the European Community had mobilised. Even France, a longtime friend of Iraq, had become involved. Lebanon favoured European involvement because the European concept of international justice was more developed.

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The Foreign Minister applauded Syria's reply, which he considered very important. Syria, one of the three most important sites in Islamic teaching, was influential in the Arab world. The Abbasids had originated in Iraq, the Fatimids in Egypt (which had achieved peace at Camp David) and the Umayyads in Syria.

The peace conference would be very important and it was essential that peace be founded on regional stability. The ball was now in Israel's court. Israel needed a historical leader to seize the opportunity in these exceptional circumstances. It was "not every day" that the Arab leaders were politically moderate and that détente existed between the US and the USSR.

Ambassador Brunner reported that he had met Mr. Levy, Mr. Shamir, Mr. Arens, Mr. Ben-Elissar and Mr. Peres, as well as a number of other personalities during his stay in Israel. His discourse with Mr. Peres had been the only conversation which had differed in tone from the others.

It was indeed a very propitious moment for the peace process. Some elements remained to be resolved. Israel was confronted by three problems: first, how to absorb its new immigrants; second, how to obtain the necessary financing for this (in this regard, the US had guaranteed \$10 billion); and third, how to maintain the current ruling coalition. Mr. Shamir was not a visionary, he was a man who administered his country by conscience. He wanted to be remembered as having increased the Jewish population of Israel. His policy on settlements was an indication of that.

Israel did not view all the occupied territories in the same way. By returning the Sinai to Egypt, it considered that it had fulfilled most of resolution 242. It was "not interested in Gaza". Mr. Boueiz inquired about Israel's position regarding the Golan Heights and South Lebanon to which Ambassador Brunner replied that it held no historical claim to those areas (Mr. Boueiz: "ce sont des cartes politiques"). As for the West Bank, Israel considered that it had a historical right to it and was not ready to relinquish control. By contrast, when the Camp David Accords had been negotiated, the terms had been clear: Israel had gained recognition by Egypt in return for the Sinai.

Mr. Boueiz wondered whether Israel would be able to accept the current peace initiative, to which Ambassador Brunner replied that if Mr. Shamir were to accept an invitation to peace talks, ten members of his coalition would leave. The choice was therefore between new elections, a new coalition or a rejection of the peace process. The UN did not insist on a monopoly in a peace conference, yet UN documents should provide the foundation of negotiations. Talks would not evolve spontaneously, but

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should take the resolutions of the Security Council as their basis.

Three obstacles remained in the present US peace initiative: the role of the UN, the possibility of reconvening the conference and the composition of the Palestinian delegation. The United Nations would not become involved in the latter. As for the role of the UN, the Secretary-General would not accept the role of observer, which did not conform to his conception of the Organization's involvement. In Syria and Egypt the Ambassador's interlocutors had spoken of a role comprising something between an observer and a sponsor.

When the conference moved to bilateral negotiations, there would be a need for mediators and aides, who might be drawn from representatives of the UN, the EC, the US or the USSR. The United States was the only party able to exert some influence; the USSR no longer provided a counter-balance; the Europeans' influence was limited and they held a different conception of the peace process from that of the Americans. (Mr. Boueiz: "They'll intervene as friends of the United States"). One should find a formula to allow third parties to assist also in the bilateral negotiations. The UN would be able to aid and influence the talks. Many of the details would be resolved not in a conference hall but in the corridors and elsewhere (Mr. Boueiz: "Dans la salle de conférence et la salle à manger").

One way to involve the United Nations, which would be difficult to refuse, would be to hold the peace conference in Geneva. The Organization could provide security, translation and secretariat services. The Soviet Union had already accepted this proposal, (Mr. Boueiz: "the Syrians wouldn't refuse"), while the US was still deliberating holding the talks in Washington. Another venue under discussion was Cairo. Geneva was an international centre and the city itself was not 'political'.

It was Ambassador Brunner's impression that President Bush and Mr. Baker were determined to accomplish something in the peace process and he considered their efforts to be sincere. The situation in the Middle East had been part of their foreign policy agenda when they first took office. However, the unification of Germany, domestic upheaval in the Soviet Union, political turmoil in Europe, and the crisis in the Persian Gulf had all delayed the initiative. Now President Bush was returning to his original agenda; he certainly had tenacity. The Minister had surely also witnessed Mr. Baker's stubbornness. The Ambassador had been told by Mr. Baker that he planned to apply pressure on all the parties, and that he intended to succeed in his undertaking.

Mr. Boueiz felt that this was the first time that the United States had been liberated of many of its problems, such as those

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which had dominated earlier Administrations, including the 'Watergate' and 'Irangate' affairs. All previous Presidents had had to contend with a number of different issues, including maintaining strategic equilibrium with the USSR. Moreover, President Bush had also fought a successful war. Freed of so many burdens, he was therefore in a position to apply more pressure on Israel.

Ambassador Brunner added that there was also currently a 'constellation' of moderate Arab leaders and that the Palestinians living in the occupied territories were exhibiting a greater will for peace. In addition, said the Minister, the influence of the PLO was waning. President Bush was clearly in control of foreign policy and was less sensitive towards Israel than previous Presidents had been. Despite the forthcoming elections he would not fail to occupy himself with foreign policy.

Ambassador Brunner concurred. President Bush had been trained in foreign affairs. The Israelis were afraid of a president serving his second mandate since he could not run for another term of office and would feel less encumbered in his actions. In fact, Israel was already feeling pressure during President Bush's first mandate. Members of Congress seeking re-election had to be more sensitive to the opinions of the electorate.

Returning to his current mission, Ambassador Brunner stressed that the United Nations was at the disposal of all the parties to the peace process. Some progress was likely before the end of the year. He did not wish to interfere; the UN was there to listen and to assist.

The Foreign Minister enquired whether Ambassador Brunner considered that progress in the implementation of resolution 425 would prove possible. The central Government of Lebanon was now strong, undermining the Israeli justification for retaining troops in southern Lebanon, namely the charge that the Lebanese authorities were unable to exert control. For the Lebanese it would be very important to see progress on this issue. Ambassador Brunner replied by repeating the words of Israeli Defense Minister Arens, that "we are ready to discuss the issue: it has to be a bilateral approach". Ambassador Brunner had told Mr. Arens that the Lebanese would not engage in peace talks without the involvement of the other Arab parties.

Mr. Boueiz agreed that Lebanon could not engage in such negotiations alone. Even Egypt, which was a far larger country than Lebanon, had faced great difficulties following the conclusion of the Camp David Accords. Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, the Palestinians and Egypt should all start discussions with Israel over the modalities of peace talks. One could not just

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"say hello, goodbye and leave". President Mubarak had said that Egypt could not participate in negotiations without Syria, proving the Arab adage that there could be no war without Egypt and no peace without Syria.

Ambassador Brunner felt that the world stood on the eve of an important event and stressed that the UN would make every effort to facilitate progress.

Neil Briscoe.

Neil Briscoe  
23 July 1991