

CONFIDENTIAL

NOTES OF AMBASSADOR BRUNNER'S MEETING WITH MR. AMRE MOUSSA,
MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF EGYPTHeld at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Egypt, Cairo,
on 11 July 1991 at 12.30 p.m.Present:

Ambassador Brunner	Mr. Amre Moussa, Minister for Foreign
Ms. Bутtenheim	Affairs of Egypt
Mr. Briscoe	Ambassador Mounir Zahran, Head,
	International Organizations
	Department, Ministry for Foreign
	Affairs
	Mr. Ahmed Aboul-Gheit
	Mr. Nabil Fahmy
	Two aides

Mr. Moussa noted that Ambassador Brunner was visiting Egypt at a very crucial time in the evolution of the Middle East peace process. Ambassador Brunner agreed and said that he had no intention of disturbing the peace initiative currently being pursued by Secretary of State Baker, to whom he wished success. On the other hand, the Secretary-General had made clear that the role of the United Nations could not simply be ignored. The UN was able to make its own contribution to the process. It was true that the participation of the Organization was itself a source of contention. The Arab countries desired UN involvement, while the Israelis were opposed to any participation. Mr. Baker had spoken of a compromise over the issue of a UN observer; the Ambassador was not certain that the Secretary-General would be willing to attend talks in the capacity of observer. There was a question of dignity: he must be something more than a mere 'photo opportunity'. The UN had distinct responsibilities in the Middle East, as illustrated by the presence of UN observers throughout the region, even in Israel.

A further problem to be addressed was the question of the reconvening of a conference. Israel's position on this was unambiguous: it wanted a short opening ceremony, not a conference. It would then move to bilateral negotiations.

This was a very important point and was not that simple, noted Mr. Moussa. The position so far adopted by Israel over UN participation was based on preconceived ideas. The presence of the Organization was important, regardless of the nature of its involvement and should be treated with objectivity. The opening meeting would be more than a 'photo session': it would provide a record of the parties which participated at the beginning of the process. (Ambassador Brunner and the Foreign Minister agreed that labelling the opening event a 'ceremony', 'photo session', etc., was unnecessary.)



- 2 -

Ambassador Brunner continued that the main purpose of the conference would be to facilitate bilateral talks between the parties. At the end they could reconvene to register the results of their discussions. It would thus not be a conference where Israel would feel 'alone'. It would feel in a stronger position during the bilateral talks. For Israel's part it would probably object to the presence of any third party in such talks, except, perhaps, the United States. Israel now enjoyed good relations with the Soviet Union. It had established diplomatic relations and had gained the benefit of immigration for Soviet Jews to Israel. The USSR was in such a weak position internationally that it could not afford to adopt a stance contrary to that of the US. Were the Americans prepared to apply pressure on Israel? Many observers were unsure. The situation was undoubtedly complicated.

Mr. Moussa informed the Ambassador that Syria had the previous day been expected to submit a reply to the letter sent by President Bush to the respective heads of state of the parties to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Yet, as of the time of the meeting, nothing had been received from Mr. Al-Shara. If there were no news by later that afternoon, the Foreign Minister would contact the Syrian authorities. President Bush had announced that he expected a Syrian response 'very soon'. The Egyptians had reason to believe that the reply would "not derogate from the affirmative", even if it included some "understandings". Mr. Moussa had held more than one session with Mr. Al-Shara, discussing the various alternatives. Syria had been very flexible and forthcoming. He hoped that the reply would be sent very soon.

He understood that Ambassador Brunner had a 'certain history' in Egypt, just as he did in Switzerland. In fact, Mr. Moussa's first posting in the Foreign Ministry had been to Switzerland. He identified with the Swiss people.

The status of the United Nations in a peace conference would not be that of a silent observer, but, according to the American proposals, would comprise more than one component. First, the terms of reference of the conference would be Security Council resolutions 242 and 338; second, there would be a "physical UN presence", with the Organization represented in person by the Secretary-General or his Special Representative; third, there would be periodic reports to the Secretary-General; and fourth, the results of agreements reached would be deposited with the United Nations or the Security Council, without excluding the possibility of endorsement by them. Thus, these four components amounted to more than a 'silent observer'. The second and third points would in fact lead to the complete involvement of the Secretary-General or his Special Representative, who would report to him, "You'll be around" (Ambassador Brunner: "At dinner", Mr. Moussa: "You will also have contacts."). The two convening

- 3 -

parties would report to the Secretary-General. Where, therefore, was the derogation of the dignity of the UN?

Ambassador Brunner and Ms. Bittenheim agreed that what the Minister had revealed was new information. Ambassador Brunner asked whether Israel understood the UN role as just described. Mr. Moussa responded that this was "the logic of things. It consists of what is on the table". Israel understood that resolutions 242 and 338 constituted the terms of reference of the conference; a representative of the Secretary-General would, in any case, be attending the ceremony; no-one had excluded the provision that reports would be submitted to the Secretary-General (Ambassador Brunner: "It is none of Israel's business"). The reporting procedure was built into resolution 242. Whatever information the Secretary-General received he could, as he saw fit, transmit to the Five or to the Security Council.

Ambassador Brunner asked, "So this is your understanding?" to which Mr. Moussa replied, "Absolutely, it is only logical". Finally, the agreements would be deposited with the UN. These points comprised the UN's status; Israel would not offer opposition, since the details were "built into the system". Israel objected in principle to including the words 'United Nations' in the name of the conference. Ambassador Brunner observed that those points provided for the physical presence of the United Nations. Mr. Moussa added that Israel would accept under pressure. Such UN participation was not the main obstacle: Israel wished to trade a UN role for the abrogation of the 'Zionism-racism' resolution. As for the matter of continuity, it should not pose a problem; no-one was calling for the conference to meet every day. Either, at a certain stage, the conveners would engage in consultations over this issue, or a reconvening would take place based on the consensus of the parties. The former had not yet been agreed to (i.e., that the two conveners could call for a resumption), but it was the view held by the Egyptian Government. The process would indeed occur within the framework of direct negotiations rather than a conference: it would be on the basis of direct negotiations.

Israeli-Palestinian talks would be held within the context of the Israel-Jordan-Palestinian talks. Bilateral talks would be held simultaneously. The US and the USSR had told Mr. Al-Shara in Lisbon that they were ready to attend all negotiations and all committees. This would provide a valuable guarantee. As Egypt had learned from the Camp David experience, the presence of the United States was indispensable because it would have to exert pressure on Israel. The US would be able to intervene with certain formulations and compromises.

As for Egypt's role, it would attend the opening conference, which would be important, and a UN presence there would also be important. When the talks broke into committees the Palestinians

- 4 -

"will need us around". Egypt had contacts with both the US and Israel. Egypt did not plan to attend every 'bilateral committee', but "if they need us, we'll be there". Egypt intended to be involved in the 'multilateral committees' which would debate a range of issues, "We intend to be very seriously involved". Egyptian representatives had spoken to the Syrians; the following day Abu Mazen would be in Cairo to discuss the composition of the Palestinian delegation; Egypt had also hosted Palestinian representatives from the occupied territories. By the end of the month, Mr. Levy would visit, which would be announced during the following week. In light of the expected positive reply from Syria, Mr. Moussa would meet Mr. Baker in Athens. The question remained whether the US and the USSR would issue invitations for a preparatory meeting. Many issues were left to be discussed.

Another possibility would be for all the Arab parties to meet to coordinate their policies. "I predict very active steps immediately. The US won't wait. If the Syrian reply is positive, they'll try to cash in. My assessment [of whether the initiative would succeed] is 50-50". Egypt would commence discussions with the Palestinians and with Jordan on forming a delegation. It had already discussed with them, the US and the Israelis the names of some Palestinians. It would be important for everything to be in place before an invitation was issued, which would not be sent without prior confirmation that it would be accepted.

The Minister had received conflicting information over whether the US and the USSR would proceed with the invitation. There was a natural tendency "to go ahead and see what happens" on the assumption that if an invitation were made at the highest level there would be pressure to accept rather than to be blamed for hindering the process. Would the Israelis take the risk?

Ambassador Brunner felt that Mr. Shamir would have to take into account the fact that his coalition included some 'hardliners'. The present situation was very important. It was now that the process could be 'done or undone'. Mr. Moussa had first started to say that the chances were 50-50 two months ago.

Changing the subject, Ambassador Brunner observed that only one super-power remained in the world, but that Iraq also remained a factor in the Middle East. It was a country against which a US-led coalition had fought a war. The US was not ready to recommence military operations. There were two main elements to the American policy towards Iraq. It did not wish to encourage the possibility of an independent Kurdistan and would do nothing to encourage the Kurdish secessionists, out of consideration for its ally Turkey. The second point, which the Ambassador was making in his capacity as a Swiss representative, was that Iraq was still considered a 'buffer state' against Iran,

- 5 -

which the United States perceived as a long-standing threat. The US felt insecure with Iran, a feeling shared by Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Allowing Iraq to break apart, especially given the affinity of the Shi'ites in the South with Iran, was undesirable to the US. Then there was the instability in Central and Eastern Europe and the crisis in Yugoslavia, which could have been expected. The instability in that country might spread to include Czechoslovakia, Romania, Hungary and the USSR. It was a Pandora's box, and the United States was "very frightened". Yet, despite this, it felt obliged to support the principle of self-determination. Now was certainly not 'the end of history'.

Mr. Moussa agreed: it was the end of one phase, and the beginning of a new phase. Ambassador Brunner considered the situation in the Middle East to be part of this complex state of affairs. The US possessed the best team of foreign policy experts it had had in a long time. It was now that President Bush and Mr. Baker should try to solve the problems of the Middle East. Their plan of establishing a peace process for the region had been interrupted by the end of the Cold War, the unification of Germany and the war in the Persian Gulf: now they were returning to their original agenda. The United Nations did not wish to interfere; if asked, it would become engaged in the current initiative. If the UN could in any other way be helpful, it was at the disposal of the parties. For example, the location of the talks was still under discussion. Geneva might be a possibility, either in connection with the UN or in a capacity distinct from the Organization.

The Minister agreed that Geneva might be a suitable choice. Recent international developments had been an important factor in the current progress in the peace process. The US had been "very eminent" since about 1986 and had assumed the role of the only super-power since the end of the 1980s. There were two qualifications to this view. The first had been Iraq: Saddam Hussein had seriously believed that he could challenge the US. He had said this to former Egyptian Foreign Minister Abdel-Meguid when they met in November 1990. The other country was Israel, which was felt to be in a position not to challenge, but rather to manage 'the super-power'. Yet this perception was not entirely accurate. Ultimately, the United States was capable of 'managing' Israel in certain situations: the potential of the US to apply pressure on Israel was not to be excluded. With reference to the war in the Persian Gulf, Ambassador Brunner commented that there had been "so many miscalculations". Mr. Moussa rejoined "Not so many".

Ambassador Brunner felt that the Swiss had in some part been responsible for the meeting between Mr. Aziz and Secretary Baker in January 1991. The Swiss President had offered Geneva as a venue. The Ambassador had been present. He recalled watching the subsequent press conference on television and had felt that

- 6 -

Mr. Aziz' response to the question whether Iraq would attack Israel in the event of hostilities had been a decisive moment. Until the time that Mr. Aziz had responded "Certainly," there had been no majority in the US Senate in favour of declaring war on Iraq. Yet that single word had 'clinched it'.

"It was arrogance, a miscalculation," agreed Mr. Moussa. The Iraqis had been convinced that the US would not attack. That miscalculation, observed Ambassador Brunner, was the reason why the former Iraqi Ambassador to Washington was now living in Canada. Iraq was no Vietnam: the US had fought the Gulf war with a professional, rather than a conscript army, with the result that there had been no widespread call to "bring the boys back". Moreover, in contrast to the Vietnam era, the present state of international relations was completely different. During the Vietnam war, the US had been very much alone, without even the support of its own allies. In the Iraq-Kuwait crisis both the USSR and China had remained neutral. Mr. Moussa felt that the war had been America's "finest hour". The US had also held a different (i.e. negative) opinion of the potential of the Iraqi army than other countries.

Furthermore, stated Ambassador Brunner, Israel enjoyed influence in the United States. There were only two countries which possessed insight into American politics. The first, by reason of history and its traditionally close relationship with America, was the United Kingdom. The second was Israel. Even Germany and France did not have the same position. Yet Israel would be nervous if President Bush were reelected. Any US President in his second term felt relieved of the responsibility for the next electoral campaign because of the restriction of not being able to serve more than two terms. Mr. Moussa concurred, and, in fact, Israel had been afraid of President Bush since the first day of his current term. Ambassador Brunner was of the view that the relationship between the Israeli and American Governments was "tainted by the Jewish lobby". Mr. Moussa maintained that the United States could apply pressure on Israel through the Jewish lobby. President Bush was "practically invulnerable". The question was whether any Democrat would sacrifice his chances of election by appearing to be pro-Arab. Ambassador Brunner replied that the only Democrat likely to risk this was Senator Rockefeller of West Virginia, who had the advantage of a well-known surname. Yet he had a different agenda from that of President Bush.

The meeting concluded with a brief discussion of US domestic affairs.

Neil Briscoe .

Neil Briscoe
18 July 1991