

NOTES OF AMBASSADOR BRUNNER'S MEETING WITH MR. YITZHAK SHAMIR,  
PRIME MINISTER OF ISRAEL

Held in the Prime Minister's Office, Jerusalem, on 8 July 1991  
at 10.00 a.m.

Present

Ambassador Brunner	Mr. Yitzhak Shamir, Prime Minister of Israel
Ms. Buttenheim	Mr. Yossi Ben-Aharon, Director-General of the Prime Ministry
Mr. Briscoe	Mr. Eli Rubinstein, Cabinet Secretary
	Mr. Avi Pazner, Spokesman for the Prime Minister
	Mr. Yossi Ahimeir, Director of the Prime Minister's Cabinet
	Ambassador Yochanan Bein, Deputy Head, International Organizations Division, Ministry for Foreign Affairs
	Mr. Benjamin Oron
	Two aides

Ambassador Brunner explained that this was his first visit to the region in his capacity as Special Representative to the Middle East and that he would also be travelling to Jordan, Egypt, Syria and Lebanon. The Secretary-General had instructed him to introduce himself in the countries concerned. He was there to listen and to inform himself, not to interfere with Israel's involvement in the current peace process. He was not sure where things stood in that process; he gathered that a Syrian reply was still awaited to the letter which President Bush had sent to the respective heads of state. He had not come to Israel to counsel or advise, indeed, the Prime Minister knew better than he the interests of his own country. Mr. Shamir noted that Ambassador Brunner's predecessor had been known in Israel. He recalled that Ambassador Jarring had served as Sweden's Ambassador to the Soviet Union and enquired whether he had ever visited Israel. Ambassador Bein replied that Ambassador Jarring had last paid a visit in 1972. Ambassador Brunner reflected that the last time he personally had been in the country had been during the Second World War, even before the creation of the State of Israel. He remembered staying in the King David Hotel in Jerusalem, while his father had been Swiss Ambassador to Egypt.

"This quest for peace is a very popular product" observed Mr. Shamir. Now everyone in the world was asking for peace. Very few knew how to produce it. It was, and always had been Israel's policy that peace should be reached with its neighbours by means of face-to-face negotiations with representatives of every country without preconditions. Preconditions would make the



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talks more complicated. The chances of progress in a conference with all of Israel's neighbours together were very slim. This had always been the Israeli position. He believed it was useless to look for other ways and means, because one could try many ways to do something without achieving any results. This was, after all, the normal way to reach peace.

There had to be one precondition, however, namely that the parties were genuinely interested in reaching peace. They had to act out of a serious desire for peace, not just for political reasons. No-one could doubt Israel's commitment to peace. To this day, it was the only country of its kind; it did not belong to any organised group of countries; it was the only democracy in the region. The fact that the other countries concerned were not democracies made the achievement of peace more complicated. It was very rare to see wars between democratic countries. Indeed, such an occurrence would be sensational. What the world was now witnessing in Yugoslavia was contrary to what one would have expected, a democratic country in conflict. Ambassador Bein commented that Yugoslavia was not yet a democracy.

Ambassador Brunner was concerned that events in Yugoslavia were a sign of things to come. The Prime Minister reflected that Western countries were having problems with ethnic groups. Ambassador Brunner then explained that in countries such as Spain and Canada minorities could express themselves freely. The Nationalists in Spain usually received 15-20% of the vote. In Slovenia, however, 95% wished to secede from the Yugoslav federation. One should respect the freely expressed will of the population: this was the democratic way. Mr. Shamir said that he was unaware that the great majority of the population in Yugoslavia was opposed to the central Government. Ambassador Brunner added that the Albanians in Yugoslavia did not wish to remain in that country. Ambassador Bein felt that the turbulence there was having an effect on other countries. Ambassador Brunner considered this to be a tragedy. Czechoslovakia and Romania had lost their independence after behaving badly during the time of Hitler. The situation in Yugoslavia was awful. Mr. Shamir: "That would be a real job for the United Nations to find a solution," Ambassador Brunner: "They would say we were interfering in their internal affairs," Mr. Shamir: "Conflicts need mediators."

Continuing, Ambassador Brunner said that both the EC 'troika' and the CSCE in Prague were trying to assist. The latter had adopted some resolutions and had sent observers and officials to help the Slovenes and Croats negotiate with the central Government. The army in Yugoslavia was also a factor. The Prime Minister said that the army had its own interests and acknowledged that military people were not easy to change. In response to a question by Mr. Shamir about Swiss politics,

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Ambassador Brunner explained that Switzerland had 23 cantons, which were not divided according to confession or language. The majority always gave the minority proportionately more representation than they were entitled to in the Government. So, concluded Mr. Shamir, the minority had no motivation to change the situation.

Ambassador Brunner recalled the role of William Tell in Swiss history, to which Mr. Shamir rejoined that the story of William Tell had been recorded by Schiller. Before the Confederation had been established, Switzerland had suffered many civil wars. The Ambassador elaborated that in the last civil war, 150 years ago, the more liberal-minded and forward-looking side had won. Since then, Switzerland had lived under a constitution; it enjoyed a 'double democracy', both in the Parliament and in the people, to whom important issues were referred by means of referenda. The Minister of Finance had recently grown desperate because the population had refused to ratify an increase in Value Added Tax in order to balance the budget, "Like our Committee of Finance in the Knesset" commented Mr. Shamir. Had any population ever voted to raise taxes, wondered Ambassador Bein, to which Ambassador Brunner replied that all Swiss taxes were voted by referendum.

The world was becoming more complex, he continued. Despite promises of a better future, the end of the Cold War had brought to the fore other conflicts which had been frozen for a longer time. Those which had been forgotten under Communist rule were now returning and should be dealt with. Israel, too, was in a region where there had been many conflicts. The peace process was complicated.

In Mr. Shamir's view, one should accept that it was very difficult to find permanent, durable solutions. The main energy should be dedicated to finding even temporary solutions for a few years, to search for ways to extend peace thereafter, while in the meantime enjoying a normal life, "I have long life". It was difficult to find permanent solutions when there was a human conflict. A real conflict was more difficult to solve than an artificial or civil conflict between two segments of one people. Israel, however, found itself in conflict with many people and nations. The Camp David agreements were the right way to find an interim solution for a certain period during which the foundations could be laid for the future. This was the best way when the source of the conflict lay deep. This was Israel's basic approach.

Stressing that he was thinking aloud, Ambassador Brunner, said that he had two points to make. First, for a long time before the outcome of the war in the Persian Gulf some of the main actors had tried to link the withdrawal by Iraq from Kuwait

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to the Arab-Israeli peace process. The fact that, after the war, attention had turned so quickly to the peace process left an impression of linkage, as if Saddam Hussein had obtained what he wanted. And he was still in power. By moving so promptly towards a conference, linkage was almost realised. ("And what are your conclusions?" asked Mr. Shamir). The Ambassador's second point was influenced by his past experience. It was impossible to speak of the concepts of peace and security in isolation. For 45 years there had been peace in Europe without security. It had not been at war, but it had had to remain mobilised. Everywhere, security was as important as peace for the well-being of countries.

Mr. Shamir felt that everything was relative. True, what had been considered a formal peace in Europe had not been the same as security. But Israel would not oppose such a situation if it were to last for 45 years. President Sadat's slogan had been "no more war" -- he had not spoken of peace. Ancient peoples required patience: the countries concerned would solve all conflicts, all questions and all issues. [An end to the state of war] would be a modest step, but it was something significant. Ambassador Brunner noted that Israel had now had peace with Egypt for 15 years. Mr. Shamir termed it a 'cool peace'; Israel would like a better relationship. There were other aspects to peace, such as humanitarian aspects: Switzerland had experts in such matters. There should be a common effort to avoid violence and to resolve issues such as prisoners-of-war and missing persons ("And hostages" added the Ambassador). Two sides should work together to avoid problems which made life unbearable. This was important even if their relations were not peaceful. Without such reasons for hostility relations could improve.

Ambassador Brunner asked whether, in the Prime Minister's view, Syria and Jordan were willing to enter peace talks at this stage. Mr. Shamir could not detect such a willingness on the part of Syria, which was "a state with a philosophy, an ideology. We know the philosophy of Assad. He is not ready to recognise Israel; for him this would be a catastrophe. He doesn't even speak about peace with Israel. This does not exist in his vocabulary. It is different with Jordan, because there is a history of relations with Jordan. But the situation in Jordan is very interesting now, very complicated. They have many terrible problems, the strength of fundamentalists. What happened during the Gulf crisis is still a burden. The economic crisis is causing terrible problems. It is not a situation that enables steps towards stability, even if there were a willingness. A lot depends on what happens in Iraq. The development of the situation in Iraq could have a great impact on the situation, first of all in Jordan. As long as Saddam Hussein is in power,

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nothing positive can happen in Jordan. They're afraid. It could also have an impact on Syria and in the whole region. People will see that there is a price for everything. There is some justice in international life. [Saddam Hussein's replacement] may be a precondition for some improvement."

Ambassador Brunner believed that the Syrian position was different from that of Jordan, both for historical and personal reasons. Could the Prime Minister imagine that the Syrians would eventually allow the Jordanians and the Palestinians to talk directly to Israel without Syria's presence? "I can't exclude it," said Mr. Shamir. One could not say that Syria would never allow this, even if it was opposed to such talks now. Jordan was unable to take steps alone, it was not strong enough. But other factors should support such a process and convince (Jordan) that it was in its interest. If one accepted as a rule that without Syria nothing was possible, the outlook would be very pessimistic. Syria had always been aggressive and had never paid a real price for its aggression. It had always been luckier than Egypt or Jordan. The Syrians were, to a certain degree, spoilt. Mr. Ben-Aharon commented that the Soviet Union had spoiled the Syrians for many years. The Soviets were no longer there, said Mr. Shamir. The Syrians were now trying to play in the Western world, trying to improve relations with the West. Ambassador Brunner would have an interesting experience there.

Ambassador Brunner informed the Prime Minister that the UN was at his disposal whenever it was needed. It did not wish to force doors where it was not welcome; even the Secretary-General had said, with reference to a possible peace conference, that "if the UN is not there, it's not there". The Secretary-General did not wish to serve as a mere photo opportunity. Mr. Shamir retorted that the Secretary-General had always said that he represented the majority of the UN: he was not acting on his own. Ambassador Brunner replied that the Secretary-General represented the resolutions of the Security Council. Mr. Shamir: "I read somewhere that he's leaving". Ambassador Bein said that the Secretary-General was in poor health, a point rejected by Ms. Buttenheim. In the last two to three years, continued Ambassador Brunner, the United Nations had been busier than ever before, it was becoming more involved in world issues. Ambassador Bein noted that the UN was enjoying success in peace-keeping. "If two nations want peace, why not?" rejoined the Prime Minister.

Ambassador Brunner clarified that he was visiting the region to inform himself, and would tell the press the same. "We are not looking for more conflicts," responded Mr. Shamir.

Neil Briscoe  
13 July 1991