

ConfidentialNOTES OF AMBASSADOR BRUNNER'S MEETING WITH MR. SHIMON PERES,  
LEADER OF THE LABOUR OPPOSITION IN ISRAEL

Held in the Israeli Knesset, Jerusalem,  
on 8 July 1991 at 6.00 p.m.

Present:

Ambassador Brunner  
Ms. Bутtenheim  
Mr. Briscoe

Mr. Shimon Peres, Leader of the  
Labour Opposition  
Mr. Yossi Beilin, Labour Member  
of the Knesset  
Ambassador Yochanan Bein, Deputy Head,  
International Organizations  
Division, Ministry for Foreign  
Affairs  
One aide

Ambassador Brunner explained that he was in Israel to exchange views about the current peace process in the Middle East. He did not intend to interfere in the present initiative of the United States and merely wished to be helpful in that process or in any other way. The problems that existed in Secretary Baker's initiative had been demonstrated during the previous week. The Ambassador was not sure that, at a certain moment, another process would not become necessary.

Mr. Peres saw the future of peace as bright, but not the present. He was worried that more obstacles had been added to the existing process. It was no secret that he did not see eye-to-eye with Mr. Shamir whose policies were "catastrophic for our country" -- and not just the policies relating to the Arabs. Mr. Shamir was creating a situation comparable to that in Yugoslavia, Lebanon, or Ireland, "When the guns of policy are quiet, the bombs of demography become active". Soon Israel could find itself in a situation beyond repair. "We are not dealing with territories, but with people. Gaza is not a territory, it is a people," (Ambassador Brunner: "An overcrowded territory"). Mr. Peres continued, "Gaza belongs to those who live there and to control them needs more and more force". Israel was playing in an age when weapons were becoming extremely dangerous. Non-conventional arms were spreading, ecology was being commercialized and the world population was growing.

The 'double-track' policy (being pursued by Secretary Baker in the US peace initiative) was "a mistake". There seemed to be a belief that if progress was obstructed on one track, one should try two tracks. If one track produced no one to talk to, a second track simply produced nothing to talk about. The



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introduction of Syria to the process in order to bring Israel closer to the Palestinians had also been a mistake. "Linkage will simply make tough things tougher. We can't tell the United States to solve our problems. If the US volunteers to help, it must be in a position to do something. To be involved in nothing is not making the situation better." Ambassador Brunner commented that the situation was "gloomy".

However, in Mr. Peres' view, an opportunity had presented itself which should not be wasted. Time was crucial. If nothing was gained from peace, everything stood to be resolved through confrontation. People should be made aware of how dangerous the current situation was. The proposal of a Jordanian-Palestinian solution was the best, and would be very much like the Swiss Confederation. There would be three main entities: (1) the Jordanian Kingdom, with its own government and army; (2) a demilitarized Gaza Strip; and (3) a demilitarized West Bank. Both the Gaza Strip and the West Bank should be linked to Jordan. The Jordan River would present the dividing line between the armed and unarmed areas: everything to the west of it should be demilitarized. Yet the Arabs were unable to administer Gaza on their own. "Wherever there is agreement, you don't have shootings". Many people asked what would happen to Ashqelon, since it was located so close to the Gaza Strip, but shooting did not take place in Eilat or Aqaba; nor were there ever problems with arms or casualties along the Egyptian-Israeli border. Even a partial agreement would put an end to the killing and violence. Without it, violence and terror would continue.

Ambassador Brunner received Mr. Peres' confirmation that he was not in favour of a 'double-track' approach, and would prefer instead to deal with one issue after another; Jordanian-Palestinian issues should be resolved first. This would mean direct negotiations instead of a full peace conference. In the Ambassador's opinion, the main obstacle to a conference was the composition of the Palestinian delegation. Mr. Peres agreed, stating that this issue would remain. The problem of the composition should therefore be separated from other questions. Israel should also decide whether it was prepared to return land. This would dictate its negotiating strategy and tactics. An 'internal' solution would be infeasible and he doubted that such an interim or "half-way" approach could be successful. He held reservations over the possibility of Palestinian autonomy. He had "no reading on the future".

To Ambassador Brunner's enquiry whether one could revert to a 'single-track' approach, Mr. Peres predicted that this would happen. In this case, it would be a mistake to proceed on the basis of an exclusively Palestinian delegation: joint Jordanian-Palestinian representation was the only option. A second mistake would be to involve the Syrians, who would compound all the other problems and produce more. If this first 'track' were

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successful, a planning group should immediately be created to tackle the second. After the war in the Persian Gulf, all problems had taken on a regional character. One could not achieve a settlement when the range of solutions was less than the number of problems. As regards the water issue, there was no solution; this was the only non-political issue.

Ambassador Brunner asked whether these ideas were shared among the Israeli population, to which Mr. Peres replied that the population of Israel was "one people with many moods". Mr. Beilin explained that 58 percent of the population were for compromise. For years this figure had been approximately half, depending on the "tangibility of the solution". Before the Camp David Accords, a majority of the population had been opposed to giving up control of the Sinai.

The Ambassador felt that the 'window of opportunity' which was said to have appeared at the end of the war in the Persian Gulf was perceived in different ways. In Washington, the Administration had believed that all the countries in the Middle East owed the Americans a debt of gratitude. They had heard promises, or 'half-promises', that a double-track approach would be successful. In Israel, the 'window of opportunity' was viewed differently. It was felt that Israel's restraint during the Gulf war should be rewarded by the United States. The Arabs, on the other hand, felt that the full implementation by the Security Council of its resolutions relating to the situation in Kuwait should be applied to those pertaining to the Arab-Israeli conflict. The three windows did not correspond to each other.

Mr. Peres agreed, stating that the window was in one place and the opportunity was elsewhere. The United States had won the war in the Persian Gulf but had been faced with the unpleasant surprise that Saddam Hussein remained in power. Then the issue of the Kurds in Iraq had arisen. Finally, Mr. Baker was labouring under a false assumption in his approach to the peace process. He thought that he could come closer to Mr. Shamir on procedural matters and to the Arabs on points of substance, yet he could not come close enough to either side. He would not enjoy much success in this contradictory approach. He was speaking to two different audiences. Ambassador Brunner agreed that Mr. Baker should not speak with different voices.

Mr. Peres felt that the United States had been able to convince the members of the coalition that there was a chance for peace in the Middle East, whereas Israel had foreseen the obstacle of the Palestinian delegation from the beginning. Mr. Baker "did quite well, but not well enough for Shamir". It would not be a "tragedy" if an international conference were not convened. The Soviet Union was now cooperating; the situation would have been very complicated if the Soviet Union had supported the Arabs (Ambassador Brunner: "the Russians are no

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longer a factor"). The dynamics in this sort of negotiations were very important. It was necessary to adopt a central position if one wanted to be respected, "We are not fighting for the US, for the UN, for the Palestinians or for Jordan but for our own destiny". There existed a real opportunity for progress. The Middle East was an old region in which the Americans had started a new process. "You can destroy Scuds but you can't destroy the knowledge (of how to build them)". There had to be a political solution, for time was running out.

In the next weeks, Ambassador Brunner continued, Israel could face difficult decisions. When the present US Administration had come to office, it had adopted one international political agenda, namely peace in the Middle East. For two years, it had been distracted by the end of the Cold War, the unification of Germany and the war in the Persian Gulf. Those events were now in the past and the Americans could return to their original agenda. Mr. Baker was persistent (Mr. Peres: "Is he?"). He did not like to meet failure and if nothing were to happen in the current initiative, this could be construed as failure. He would reflect on the progress so far, invite the countries to an inaugural meeting and see who came. It was a gamble but the Administration could then say that it had tried.

"The Washington you describe is more determined than what I see," rejoined Mr. Peres. Ambassador Brunner recalled that he had been in the House of Congress when President Bush had spoken on the subject of 'land for peace'. It would be difficult for the President to "eat his words". Mr. Peres asked whether the Syrians had yet submitted a reply to President Bush's letter. Ambassador Brunner replied in the negative, saying that the United States was awaiting a response and would gauge its own actions on the Syrian position. If this Administration were not prepared to take the gamble, one would return to seeking a 'single-track' approach.

No one had asked the United Nations to be present at a peace conference and the Ambassador's reading was that the Secretary-General would be unwilling to attend if he were to serve only as a "photo opportunity". Mr. Peres quipped that the Secretary-General could be "silent and blind"; Ambassador Brunner viewed this as inappropriate after all that the Secretary-General had been asked to do. Mr. Beilin reflected that the UN had not played an active role during the Camp David talks, to which Ambassador Brunner retorted that the activity was irrelevant, but that the status was important: according to the Egyptians, at Mena House the United Nations had enjoyed the same status as the other parties in attendance. The Syrians were taking an extreme position over UN involvement. They might compromise, but they still desired a meaningful role for the Organization. The question of reconvening the conference was proving problematic

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too. Mr. Peres noted that the duration of the conference was also at issue.

Mr. Beilin wondered how Ambassador Brunner perceived his functions as Special Representative. The Ambassador responded that he had not come to the region to take a position one way or the other on the issue (Mr. Beilin: "We welcome you,"). He had not wanted to undertake a trip to the Middle East while Secretary Baker had been engaged in his shuttle diplomacy. Before leaving Washington, Ambassador Brunner had spoken to Mr. Baker, who had raised no objection to the Ambassador's mission. Whichever process Israel chose in order to enter into negotiations, it should know that the United Nations was willing to assist in bringing peace and security to the region. It could not impose its presence, but, as Mr. Peres knew, certain resolutions existed, including 242 and 338 -- and now resolution 425 was more relevant than it had been a couple of weeks earlier. Even on a single-track approach, Israel would require help from outsiders, not necessarily for the negotiations, but perhaps for the convening of the conference. Mr Peres was surely aware how attached the Arabs were to the United Nations, for reasons of their own. A way should be found to make the nature of UN involvement acceptable to the Arabs.

Would the Ambassador be returning to Washington at the end of his mission? Mr. Beilin asked, and did the UN provide him with a staff and a budget? Ambassador Brunner stated that he would, upon his return, report to the Secretary-General and then see what developed. He could imagine that UN involvement could be achieved by holding a peace conference in the United Nations building in Geneva.

Changing the subject, Mr. Peres asked whether there would be "a small bang in Iraq". The Iraqis surprised the world even when they spoke the truth. Ambassador Brunner considered that it would be very difficult to track down the Iraqi nuclear material to which Mr. Peres was referring. Moreover, the Arabs could not be flexible in their position on Iraq. Mr. Peres sought clarification of this statement and Ambassador Brunner explained that although Saddam Hussein had been beaten militarily, he had survived politically. He would become an element to deal with in the Arab world and might even stage a political and diplomatic comeback. At the same time, he should be cautious about public opinion.

*Neil Briscoe.*

Neil Briscoe  
26 July 1991