

NOTES OF AMBASSADOR BRUNNER'S MEETING WITH MR. DAVID LEVY,  
MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF ISRAEL

Held at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Israel, Jerusalem,  
on 7 July 1991 at 4.00 p.m.

Present

Ambassador Brunner	Mr. David Levy, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Israel
Ms. Buttenheim	Ambassador Joseph Hadaas, Acting Director General, Ministry for Foreign Affairs
Mr. Briscoe	Ambassador Yochanan Bein, Head, International Organizations Division, Ministry for Foreign Affairs
	Mr. Benjamin Oron

The meeting began with a discussion of developments in Europe. Ambassador Brunner rejected the notion which had recently been debated in the United States that the world had reached 'the end of history'. The resurgence in Europe of conflicts which had been suppressed for the duration of the Cold War implied instead 'the beginning of history'. The USSR, no longer a super-power, was unable to exert control; COMECON was finished; the countries of the former East bloc were lost; and the United States did not wish to become involved. Mr. Levy observed that many responsibilities would fall to the United States, which was faced with the burden of maintaining peace and security and providing financial support. As for Europe, the European Community was speaking with a single voice, and his discussions in Europe had been productive. He had had frank talks with the EC 'troika' (Ambassador Brunner, "It's a good 'troika'"; Mr. Levy, "It's not bad"). The country which was not satisfied, however, was France.

Turning to his current visit, Ambassador Brunner noted that his tour of the region was a new experience. He had followed its problems with interest and had observed recent developments with a mixture of sadness and joy. He was not there to give advice -- or to receive it -- but had come to inform himself and to listen. He would report what he heard to the Secretary-General. He had no intention of interfering in the peace initiative being pursued by the United States and had already been in contact with the US State Department on this matter.

Mr. Levy explained that what Israel wanted was simple and a logical request, especially after the crisis in the Persian Gulf: it wanted direct discussions with the other parties to the Arab-Israeli conflict. The fact that the Arabs refused this seemed a weakness on their part. They claimed to stand for all that the United Nations represented, yet they stated publicly -admittedly less now than in the past- that they wished to destroy Israel, a



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member State of the UN. Following the war in the Persian Gulf, people had believed that there would be an opportunity for change, for a historical compromise. Above all, the US and Europe should make as clear as possible that they would not allow the present state of affairs to continue. For those in the region, the current situation was a powder keg.

The Americans had told Israel that a regional meeting was very important in the eyes of the Arabs; an opening meeting could lead to direct talks the following day. Israel had accepted. Next, the US had asked Israel to accept Soviet participation ("comme un 'parain'"). Yet the Russians had traditionally adopted an extremist position vis-à-vis Israel; they had armed her enemies. In response to Israeli queries as to what role the USSR would play, Secretary of State Baker had replied "a very constructive one". The Russians, he had said, would speak in the same voice as the US and could also be helpful in applying pressure on the Arabs. Moreover, if the USSR were left out of the process it could create obstacles. "We had no choice," continued Mr. Levy; he was "among those who agreed to accept "les deux grandes puissances" (Ambassador Brunner, "puissance et demie"). The USSR was changing, becoming more democratic, freer, and it was facilitating emigration to Israel. Next, the question of European participation had arisen. Mr. Levy had travelled to Europe, and had held three meetings with the 'troika' and one with the Twelve. The Israeli Government had taken a decision on Mr. Levi's proposal and had agreed to allow the EC to participate as it had agreed to the presence of the US and the USSR. But what would come next? China? The whole process was threatening to take on the appearance of a carnival. The situation was arousing anxiety in Israel as the talks were developing into an international conference. There were "les parains sans les mariés".

President Bush had sent a letter concerning the peace process to the respective heads of state, and Israel had replied. After five weeks a reply had still not been forthcoming from Syria. Mr. Levy was pessimistic. It was not right for the world simply to accept a Syrian veto: there had to be either a reply or a decision. As for Jordan, King Hussein had said clearly that he would accept face-to-face negotiations, an end to taboos. He had spoken of a time for peace, which would become a legacy to future generations. The King's manouevrings were making him seem like a burlesque acrobat, at one minute with Assad, at another with Saddam. At one point he had grown a beard like the fundamentalists. For his part, Mr. Levy said that he would prefer a King who was an acrobat to Shi'ites who committed suicide. Israel had supported him during the Gulf crisis and after. It had also told the US to support him. Recent developments had had a destabilising effect on Jordan and extremist influence was growing there. The United States and

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Europe would not allow a new war in the region; if the US were to apply pressure now, there would be movement in the peace process.

President Assad was in the habit of speaking a great deal. With Secretary of State Baker he had spoken for 9 out of the 10 hours of their meetings. Israel did not have the same patience. Mr. Levy had spent less than an hour with the Secretary of State. It was important to say clearly, directly and firmly that Syria would not be permitted to create an obstacle to peace or to prevent others from entering into the peace process. If this did not work, then the failure of the process would be Syria's fault. The ensuing arms race would be terrible. Israel was hoping for a positive decision from Syria, but if it did not receive one, why not begin with Jordan, the Palestinians and even Saudi Arabia? The latter had said it would support the process through a presence of the Gulf Cooperation Council. Egypt, which was in a position to make a valuable contribution, was not showing commitment; he hoped it would. The greatest Syrian fear was to be isolated. After every conflict -- in June 1967 and October 1973 -- Syria had been the last to reach an accord. Yet if a process were made to begin with the other parties, Mr. Levy was certain that Syria would join, "We know their neutrality". Syria would not be foolish enough to start a war on its own against Israel.

As an initial confidence-building measure one could discuss in advance the creation of multilateral groups to collaborate on the economic development of the region. The economic situation in the Middle East would become critical; each country would be affected in a different way since each had its own internal problems.

Ambassador Brunner said he had two questions he wished to pose, the first concerning UN participation in an inaugural meeting. He had read in the press that Israel wished to avoid a UN presence even at such an opening event. He could not speak for the Secretary-General as to whether he would agree to attend such an inaugural ceremony; indeed, he had his own ideas on the role of the United Nations. Syria could give two replies. Either it would accept the UN as an observer or it would ask for a larger UN role, which would be rejected by the United States. But if it opted for the first alternative (i.e., as a symbolic presence) what would be Israel's position?

Surely that was well-known, replied Mr. Levy. The Syrians hoped to have an international conference with an active role for the UN, which Israel would not accept. Yet the Ambassador's question was hypothetical since Syria had not sent a reply to Mr. Bush's letter. In practice, it would be impossible to prevent even a 'silent' observer from asking questions. There

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were so many ways the UN, or various delegations, could interfere once the UN was to become involved. Moreover, in the eyes of the UN Israel was racist and Zionist. If there were a conviction on the part of Syria that peace were necessary, the logical step would be for direct talks. To create conditions was a way of saying 'no', while still retaining the sympathy of the UN membership. There had to be a will to peace. One could not force it. One could and should encourage it. What would assist the peace process would be to agree to direct talks. One "international" meeting was acceptable but if the Arabs asked for more, it meant that they did not want peace. He was still waiting to be convinced that this was their true intention.

In reply to the second question from Ambassador Brunner whether Israel would prefer such bilateral talks to take place during one round, or in successive sessions, Mr. Levy said it did not matter. There was no difficulty in establishing working groups in that part of the world. Ben Gurion had once said that in Israel, a real democracy, there were 3,000,000 presidents. The important thing was to arrive at face-to-face talks. Ambassador Brunner then asked whether Israel would request some sort of UN shuttle diplomacy, as had been the case with Camp David, or would Israel prefer to engage alone in talks with its respective neighbours? "Alone," replied the Minister. "Would you need a broker, like Egypt?" rejoined the Ambassador. "You mean a midwife? I would prefer that the baby comes naturally," said Mr. Levy. The Ambassador asked whether Jordan and the Palestinians could enter into talks without Syria, to which Mr. Levy replied in the affirmative, adding that this would require the support of the US, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Syria should not be permitted to be an obstacle, either by sending a negative reply, or through the absence of a reply. The Ambassador said he had the impression that their reply might be somewhat ambiguous. Mr. Levy said he expected Secretary Baker to return to the region, "He likes it here by now...Our good fortune today is that we are not being accused of the mess in Yugoslavia".

The Ambassador cited the irony that two prominent Palestinians had recently visited the State Department, yet following the meeting, Mr. Baker had only been asked about Yugoslavia by the press corps. He then said, "If you ever feel the United Nations, or the Secretary-General or I can be helpful, maybe not today but at a future stage, we are ready to listen".

Evading a direct reply, Mr. Levy said that he had been very happy to meet Ambassador Brunner. He recalled the visit of Mr. Aimé in March 1991 during which the designation of the Special Representative had been discussed. Without referring the issue to the head of the Government, Mr. Levy had approved Ambassador Brunner's nomination, "Nous sommes pour," -- after all, Ambassador Brunner was not "the UN". As for the peace

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process, there was an initiative and if it was encouraged, it would succeed. Conversely, if obstacles were placed in its path it would founder. The Ambassador could render peace a great service by making clear to all parties that the imposition of conditions could sabotage the process.

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