

NOTES OF AMBASSADOR BRUNNER'S MEETING WITH MR. TAHER AL-MASRI,
PRIME MINISTER OF JORDAN

Held in the Prime Minister's Office, Amman, on 9 July 1991
at 11.15 a.m.

Present

Ambassador Brunner	Mr. Taher Al-Masri, Prime Minister of Jordan
Ms. Buttenheim	Mr. Abdullah Ensour, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Jordan
Mr. Briscoe	Mr. Abdullah Salah, Permanent Representative of Jordan to the United Nations
	One aide

Ambassador Brunner explained that he was trying to collect as much information as possible on the positions of the parties concerned with the Arab-Israeli peace process. The process was at an important juncture, and it was not clear how it would start. He was very much of the opinion that the process should be given a chance to succeed. The United Nations should not try to disturb the current initiative of the United States, yet, at the same time, the Ambassador was informing the interested parties that the UN stood at their disposal, either within the framework of the process or otherwise, if the initiative was unsuccessful. The United Nations would make efforts to bring about peace in accordance with Security Council resolutions. He believed that it was only fair to the United States not to send signals which might disturb their efforts.

The Prime Minister stated that his Government had welcomed Ambassador Brunner's appointment and had commended the Secretary-General's choice. The Ambassador had already met Jordan's Foreign Minister, indeed everyone was ready to cooperate to the fullest. Ambassador Brunner and the Prime Minister had talked to each other a few years ago, and nothing had changed since. Yes, Mr. Bush and Mr. Baker were doing their best, but Mr. Al-Masri did not see progress in the peace process. Secretary Baker had presented specific ideas, not all of which were to Jordan's liking. Yet because Jordan was very eager to see the peace process starting it had agreed to them. The Secretary-General knew very well that Jordan preferred a larger role for the United Nations, such as a conference sponsored by the UN. Whenever Mr. Al-Masri met the Secretary-General in New York he impressed on him the importance of emphasising the Organization's role.

From the first day of the crisis in the Persian Gulf the United States had referred the issue to the United Nations. It had pursued every action under the auspices of the UN. This was a worthy principle. Yet the US and some of the coalition partners apparently felt that any effort by the United Nations on the Palestinian question could be "an interference" and



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embarrassing. The Prime Minister knew that they were behaving in this way because of Israeli objections. Yet this was extremely difficult to explain to the Jordanian public and, indeed, the Government itself felt this explanation was unacceptable. Following the Security Council's active role in the Persian Gulf crisis, during which every action was preceded by a very detailed resolution, he was unable to imagine that the same principles would not be applied to the Palestinian issue. He could not see that a country would object to the presence of European countries at a Middle East peace conference, given the proximity of Europe to the region. Yet this was deemed to be a big concession from Israel.

The question of settlements was the most explosive issue. Israel was "swallowing land" very quickly: at the present rate, the West Bank could be absorbed by the end of 1991. Mr. Al-Masri was also concerned by immigration into Israel and by the construction of settlements, which was occurring in addition to land confiscation. Jordan had appealed to the US. What could Jordan do? Nothing. It could criticise Israel, but the US remained a good friend and continued to send money. Israel simply did not see any sign of determination on America's part; Mr. Shamir and the Government did not feel pressured to the point where they would do something tangible. President Bush and Mr. Baker had good intentions, but whenever they criticised Israel, Secretary Cheney would make a mollifying statement the following day. Israel was playing for time, which was in its favour. In less than one year, it could colonise all the occupied territories. It was receiving tens of thousands of immigrants every month. The USSR was providing the human element, while the United States produced the finances. Above all was the Likud ideology in favour of settlements. No-one should believe that Mr. Baker, despite all of the Arab flexibility, would compel Mr. Shamir to do anything tangible.

In Mr. Al-Masri's view, Ambassador Brunner was beginning his mission at a very difficult time. Jordan was saying it was in favour of international legitimacy; it did not wish to see a process on the basis of resolution 242, rather it desired the implementation of the resolution. The Prime Minister had informed Secretary Baker of this in Geneva, who had not been "too happy". What would Ambassador Brunner's role be? What would he do? Would he collect information? Would he mediate? When, during the Gulf crisis, the Secretary-General had considered appointing a new Special Representative, and had discussed the idea with President Bush, it had been an attempt on his part to show that the UN was making efforts for peace. The Secretary-General had not wanted to be left out of the American peace process, he had been trying to send a positive signal to the countries concerned. Israel had rejected involvement by the UN

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and Mr. Al-Masri feared that there would not be a practical role for the Organization.

In response, Ambassador Brunner said that he shared the Prime Minister's analysis of events after the war in the Persian Gulf. Mr. Baker, Mr. Bush, Mr. Al-Masri, and the leaders of the Arab countries had drawn the same conclusions from the events of the Gulf war: they had realised that it was time to implement other resolutions of the Security Council. Concurrently with the end of the hostilities, Mr. Baker had begun his initiative and had visited many capitals. He had tried to put together a plan with a small 'couverture' of an international conference, which should reconvene as little as possible. The Ambassador did not know whether Lebanon and Syria would accept these proposals. Mr. Baker had tried to offer a compromise, which was not much of a compromise, in the form of a United Nations observer. There remained the question of whether the UN would accept this role. Much would depend on the willingness of the Arab participants to accept this framework to talk to the Israelis, a situation which was to Israel's advantage. If events developed in this manner, Ambassador Brunner's role and the role of the UN would be "muted or even zero", because even if the UN were present it would be not be acting within the framework of United Nations resolutions.

What could the United Nations do? If one were to suppose that the ideas promoted by the United States did not come to fruition, then the UN could initiate something new, with a new spirit. Yet the Ambassador had to stress caution, for he did not feel that there would be much progress with the present Israeli Government. Israel felt strong domestically and wondered why it should make concessions. The fact that it had accepted the participation of the Soviet Union was because it was completely irrelevant. Moreover, the USSR was providing new immigrants. As for involvement by the European Community, it had to be borne in mind that 60% of Israel's trade was with the EC. For this reason it had not refused the presence of the EC 'troika'. This was in any case a symbolic gesture, for the Europeans would have nothing to say. They would simply go back home at the end. Israel did not want participation by the UK, France or China. As the 1992 American Presidential elections approached, the US Administration would be less inclined to apply pressure on Mr. Shamir. The influence of the Jewish lobby was significant. "We see eye to eye," commented Mr. Al-Masri.

Ambassador Brunner felt that if the US accepted a role for the United Nations and were able to persuade the Israelis to do the same, a UN presence would not be an obstacle to progress. What concession would it be? If the Secretary-General were allowed to sit in an opening meeting for an hour, that would not

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be a concession. The reply from Syria to President Bush's letter would therefore be important, especially if it accepted a muted UN presence. The United States was so eager to obtain Israeli involvement that it would not seek to alter the Israeli position.

Mr. Al-Masri recalled that Secretary Baker had enquired why he was insisting on UN participation and had said, "You think the UN can bring something? I'll bring something. Without me, a UN presence won't help". Mr. Baker was right in practical terms, but wrong in others. This was an immensely complicated issue that had persisted for more than four decades. In bilateral negotiations, the Jordanians knew that they would sit face-to-face with Israel. Syria and the PLO had also accepted that fact. Yet the problems to be dealt with were so complicated that there was no way for the parties at the table to make progress on their own. Jordan needed help, it needed the pressure of a conference and the moral weight of a UN presence. If the UN were omitted, Israel could complicate matters and the talks would break down: that was why Jordan wanted a conference. "We're willing to do whatever is possible, but we won't commit suicide". Mr. Shamir had proposed that the parties submit a report to the conference every six months, while the Arabs hoped that the main issues could be resolved in that period. The time framework implied by such a suggestion meant that the process would drag on for years and years. The game that was going on was ridiculous and there was no doubt about Israel's intentions. As a mediator, the UN would be able to assist.

In Geneva, Mr. Al-Masri had told Secretary Baker that "I wouldn't even dare to ask you to do to Israel one tenth of what you did to Iraq". But one could use the United Nations, resolution 242, the resolutions pertaining to the construction of settlements. President Bush's recent Middle East arms initiative had also included Israel. If Secretary Baker were to fail, the French had preserved the idea of taking the issue back to the Security Council. In fact Jordan's ideas conformed much more to those of France than the US, but the latter was the superpower and Jordan was dealing with "realities". Many people said that he, as a Prime Minister of Palestinian origin would start talks, but he could not enter into negotiations if he harboured serious doubts about the chances of success. Failure would simply mean endorsing Israeli actions.

Ambassador Brunner had spoken to some Americans about what the US could contribute to the process. The frequent assertion that the United States could contribute a great deal was ultimately not true. If it were true, the US would be applying pressure on Israel to compromise on their position. Nor did the Ambassador detect any real pressure over the question of settlements. The Israelis had been very frank and somewhat cynical about the question of the United Nations role. Their

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position was that the presence of the UN would give the whole process the air of a conference. They did not accept the interpretation of resolution 242 as "land for peace". They had been very harsh, had not exhibited any degree of flexibility, nor had the US brought any pressure to bear.

Mr. Al-Masri agreed, "This is their dream coming true, that is, Israel will soon be all of Palestine"; by the end of 1992, hundreds of thousands of immigrants would have arrived in Israel and the occupied territories. Construction began immediately after the land had been appropriated. The settlements used local stone and did not look 'foreign'. They had surrounded all the population centres. If, by the end of 1993 1 million people immigrated from the USSR, 700,000 of them could have settled in the occupied territories, equal to the Palestinian population. The Israelis would then agree to allow self-determination and those who supported the Palestinians would abandon the cause of self-determination. Mr. Shamir was determined not to give in before June 1992. By then, he would have colonised the occupied territories, and would avoid any kind of threat. If that came true, then the seeds of war would have been planted. Israel was developing a clear policy and the Arabs had lost all their cards.

Jordan was in a difficult situation. The occupied territories had been "smashed", no schools or universities were allowed to open, a whole nation was becoming illiterate. The Jewish population in the occupied territories was increasing, and the Palestinians were ready to leave. Next, pressure would be applied on Jordan to allow the Palestinians to enter. Jordan was still in a state of siege. Its border with Saudi Arabia was closed, Iraq no longer existed, and the port of Aqaba was being blockaded by the US Navy. It would be very easy to destabilise Jordan. Mr. Shamir's plan could be implemented as early as 1993. Moreover, what would happen to the Palestinians in Lebanon? Jordan would face many difficulties, even now it was having problems with fundamentalists. The whole region was being destabilised, and what would the United States do? Was Mr. Bush serious about the "new world order", and if so, what could he achieve? It would not be a new world order if it excluded the Middle East.

Ambassador Brunner agreed that the Prime Minister was right to be pessimistic. The Ambassador did not see any light either. President Bush and Secretary Baker were serious in their attempt to achieve peace, yet they dared not challenge the Jewish lobby in the United States and so the Israelis felt safe. Mr. Arens had told the Ambassador that in the elections to the Hebron Chamber of Commerce, the fundamentalists had gained 6 seats, the PLO 4 and an independent candidate had won the other seat. Mr. Arens had not objected to that result for it meant that he could avoid facing the real issue.

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Mr. Al-Masri believed that the Israelis had indirectly encouraged the growth of fundamentalism. In three years of the intifadah, they had succeeded in destroying the leadership in the occupied territories. They had left the mosques alone; Hamas was alive and receiving money from abroad. The poverty in the occupied territories was such that people were joining Hamas in order to survive. Israel would then tell the West that it was threatened by the right wing.

Ambassador Brunner was very doubtful that negotiations of a serious nature would start in the near future. Then perhaps it would be for France or the Security Council to try to bring to the negotiating table the countries interested in promoting peace. But even if Mr. Shamir were pressured, he still probably would not agree to the American idea of a conference. The Israelis would not attend in the next six months. If there were elections in Israel Mr. Shamir would win. However, the new immigrants might bring pressure to reach peace if they felt that a new war was likely. They had not immigrated only to face the prospect of a conflict. ("But there will be no war," Mr. Al-Masri interjected). Shimon Peres had told Ambassador Brunner that the issue was not 'land for peace', but 'people for peace'. If Israel were to retain control of the occupied territories it would mean having to administer a sizable and hostile population.

Mr. Al-Masri concurred, "They're planning to get rid of the Palestinians". If Jordan were to change its [immigration] policies it would have to accept tens of thousands of Palestinian immigrants. If it allowed students to enrol in Jordanian schools tens of thousands of families would follow.

Neil Briscoe

Neil Briscoe
15 July 1991