

ConfidentialNotes of Ambassador Brunner's meeting with the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Lebanon

Held in the Hotel Santo Mauro, Madrid  
on 29 October 1991 at 6:00 p.m.

Present:

Ambassador Brunner  
Ms. Buttenheim  
Mr. Briscoe

H.E. Mr. Fares Boueiz, Minister  
for Foreign Affairs of Lebanon  
Head of the Lebanese Delegation to  
the Middle East Peace Conference  
Mr. Ghassan Salame, Delegate  
One aide

Ambassador Brunner recalled his visit to Lebanon that summer, when it had not been certain that a Middle East Peace Conference would take place, who would attend and on what conditions. The very fact that the parties had come to Madrid was significant and he hoped that the process would prove successful. Clearly, there were obstacles in the near- and mid-term future, particularly with respect to the bilateral and multilateral negotiations and the question of reconvening the conference. Things should become clearer in the following two to three days and decisions would be taken not only in the conference room but in the halls and corridors.

Mr. Boueiz felt that each of the countries represented had its own internal problems. Jordan, for example, was suffering considerable domestic political pressure. The Palestinians also had problems, if not because of Mr. Arafat then because of Hamas. Mr. Habash seemed to hold his own views too. In Beirut certain factions had called for the blood of all those participating in the conference. The Israelis had also received threats. The threats against the delegations should give them a certain solidarity in favour of peace.

Lebanon was present in two capacities. First, as an Arab state and a co-founder of the Arab League, it was very involved in Arab affairs and was concerned with the Palestinian question. Lebanon was home to many Palestinians who wished for a solution to that question. It was also a 'border state' and was affected by discussions about resolution 242.

This was distinct from its own territorial problem, and it hoped that the conference would lift obstacles to the implementation of resolution 425. This was independent of the other discussions: Lebanon did not want its participation in the talks to entail a renegotiation of resolution 425. Moreover, if the conference were to fail, this should not imply the failure of



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that resolution. It was a delicate situation. Ambassador Brunner believed that resolution 425, which was less well known than 242 and 338, should be easier to implement. To this, Mr. Boueiz observed that a procedure for the implementation of resolution 425 already existed in resolution 426. Israel had recognized the validity of withdrawal in 1983 but had not executed this decision. On the contrary, Lebanon continued to suffer daily incursions, attacks, and the visits of certain ministers.

Ambassador Brunner asked about the status of the bilateral negotiations. Mr. Boueiz replied that decisions were still being taken. Did the Ambassador think that the bilateral talks would be held in Madrid? Ambassador Brunner said that there seemed to be no consensus over the location. As for the participants, Israel was insisting on one-on-one talks without the presence of the co-sponsors. He predicted that the first session would convene on 3 or 4 November in Madrid. He thought that Mr. Baker would remain in Madrid for the beginning of the talks. The United States was clearly intending to profit from the momentum of the opening conference to launch the bilateral talks. It would be up to the parties to decide about the presence of other actors. What was Lebanon's position?

Mr. Boueiz responded that the Israelis were seeking to divide the Arab solidarity and thus to complicate their position. He thought that the presence of the United States was essential: it had the capacity to renew the pressure. Ambassador Brunner recalled his visit to Israel that July, when it had not yet been decided whether the United Nations would be present or absent. Mr. Arens had suggested that the United Nations might be an observer in the bilateral talks. This position had changed in recent weeks, however. Israel now understood that it could not rely upon the United States, especially since the decision to postpone the release of \$10 billion in loan guarantees.

In reply to Mr. Boueiz's question about his own status, Ambassador Brunner explained that he was at the conference because the Secretary-General had not wished to participate under the conditions which had been assigned to the United Nations, but had not wished to hinder progress towards peace. An observer role for the United Nations was the maximum which Israel had accepted. Many of the participants believed that the Organization should take part in the regional talks, and indeed its activities relating to water, refugees and disarmament would make its involvement appropriate. However, it had not yet received an invitation. The phrase "those parties who wished to attend" was attracting interest from many countries, including Turkey, Italy and Greece. Mr. Salame asked whether Israel's position on the United Nations was as firm for the multilateral phase.

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-- At this point the meeting was interrupted by the arrival of a camera crew. Ambassador Brunner commented on the historic nature of the conference and noted that this was the first time that all the parties would sit around a table. There were new and positive factors. Mr. Boueiz elaborated that the meeting would take place out of the shadow of the Cold War and at a time when the United States Administration was stronger, with more room to manoeuvre, than previous Administrations. It was not weakened by incidents such as 'Watergate', 'Irangate' or the Vietnam war. Moreover, there was a certain equilibrium which had been reinforced by the war in the Persian Gulf. Without opposition from the Soviet Union, the United States could impose an independent policy. Finally, this was the first time that the Arab nations were guided by some 'realism', rather than by revolutionary forces. --

Returning to the earlier question, Ambassador Brunner said that if the parties wished for the United Nations to be present in bilateral talks it would attend. For Lebanon, negotiations about resolution 425 might be facilitated by the fact that its May 1983 Accord had set a precedent for agreement with Israel.

-- The arrival of a second camera crew interrupted the meeting again. The Ambassador complimented the Spanish on their organization of the conference, to which Mr. Boueiz added that the location had been decided at very short notice. The present atmosphere was one in which each delegation was isolated. It was "absurd" to think that it would not take time to overcome the long-standing isolation of the delegations, and certain countries would need more time. Both Lebanon and the United States had been the subject of threats. One caller had said that the CIA and President Bush wished to hurt the Arab countries. --

Mr. Boueiz then asked what impression Ambassador Brunner had of the Israeli delegation. Ambassador Brunner thought that the choice of negotiators by Israel was revealing. They had selected their 'hardest' officials, for example Mr. Rubinstein and Mr. Ben-Aharon. Mr. Salame declared that Mr. Rubinstein was "a lawyer who would drive them [the Palestinians] crazy". Ambassador Brunner suspected that the Israelis would feel that a major success of the conference had been the exclusion of the United Nations as a participant. Mr. Lubrani always maintained correct relations with the Organization and tended to be less dogmatic. He needed the Secretary-General for his role in the hostage issue and had recently been in frequent contact with him.

It was not for the United Nations to propose its inclusion in the multilateral talks, rather it was for the parties to say that the Organization should be there. Ms. Buttenheim felt that, on the Israeli side, it would be Mr. Shamir who would take the decision. Mr. Boueiz added that if the Israelis accepted the United Nations at this stage, that would set a precedent for the

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future. If the Israelis were willing to negotiate with Lebanon, they would not negotiate over resolution 425 and would want direct talks independent of that resolution.

Ambassador Brunner said that, in effect, the United Nations was the only one of all the participants, including the United States, Soviet Union and the European Community, which had no real means of exerting pressure on Israel. Nevertheless, there could be many surprises: the negotiations could develop and the United Nations might be consulted about how a settlement should be implemented. He asked how the Foreign Minister saw the development of the bilateral talks.

Mr. Boueiz then described the Syrians' position: they would refuse to begin multilateral talks until sufficient progress had been achieved in the bilateral phase. They would reject talk of multilateralism at a time of crisis with Israel and would ask how relations could be normalised before the achievement of peace. Multilateral talks signified recognition and a normalisation which, logically, could not precede peace. This was not possible while Israel remained in the occupied territories, "We are at war, even if it is not a military one. The Syrian position is like ours." There was a need to reach peace first. Mr. Boueiz knew the Americans and what they would want. They would say that there was a need to increase the volume of negotiations in order to give the bilateral talks more chance of success. If the Israelis encountered problems in bilateral discussions, it might be argued that the beginning of multilateral talks could help. However, at a time when Israel was mobilised, keeping it in isolation could create a positive shock and maintain pressure on Mr. Shamir, or at least reinforce his opponents in favour of peace.

Ambassador Brunner asked whether Jordan and the Palestinians would begin talks without the other parties. Mr. Boueiz doubted that the Palestinians would, but there was confusion in the Arab position. One month after the end of the war in the Persian Gulf some countries, including Morocco, had supported the initiative. Mr. Boueiz had recently spoken to King Hassan whose logic appeared to be "very poor". Mr. Boueiz had told him that the entrance of the Arab Maghreb Union and the Gulf Cooperation Council into the peace process was a card in the hand of the co-sponsors. King Hassan had replied that entering the peace process was rather like going into a cinema. Once you had paid your money and gone in, you could not leave again without missing the film. Thus when Israel had bought its ticket it would no longer be able to leave. Mr. Boueiz repeated his opinion that King Hassan's logic was weak.

When five of the Arab Foreign Ministers had met in Damascus the Syrian Foreign Minister had drawn attention to King Fahd's declaration that he would not participate in the process before

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the five. Foreign Minister Al-Faysal's reply had been vague. Mr. Boueiz did not know how King Hussein would act: some people said that he might participate in the process personally once he was convinced that progress was possible. Lebanon would take part in bilateral talks, although Mr. Boueiz feared that they would be derailed.

*Neil Briscoe*

Neil Briscoe  
11 November 1991