

P O L I C Y B A C K G R O U N D

THE JARRING TALKS: ISRAEL'S THIRD TRY

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1. Israel, for the third time since 1967, is about to attempt to negotiate peace with its neighbors, Egypt and Jordan, through talks with Gunnar Jarring, the UN Special Representative. This was conveyed in the Government announcement of December 28, 1970. The decision reflects Israel's determination to exhaust every prospect, however slight, to make the Jarring mission work despite the two abortive efforts of the past.

Lessons and Perspectives

2. The diplomatic history of the Jarring mission is important for its lessons and for the perspective it offers in assessing the prospects of the impending talks. Its main elements can be simply told.

In December 1967 Israel began its contacts with Ambassador Jarring. His mandate, as laid down by the Security Council resolution of November '67, required him "to establish and maintain contacts with the States concerned in order to promote agreement and assist efforts to achieve a peaceful and accepted settlement." What followed was, in sum, an attempt by Jarring to bring Israel, Egypt and Jordan together in some form of a negotiation with a view to carrying out his mandate in keeping with the principles of the Security Council resolution. Between December 1967 and June 1968, Gunnar Jarring commuted repeatedly between Jerusalem, Cairo and Amman. He delivered numerous letters from the Government of Israel to the Governments of Egypt and Jordan. This correspondence (containing proposals for a possible negotiation agenda, expressing Israel's desire to hear the other side's views, proposing ideas on the major issues requiring solution, and suggesting means whereby the parties might be brought together for discussion) either went unanswered or failed to elicit substantive response. In March 1968, Ambassador Jarring mooted the idea of convening a meeting between the parties under his auspices. This was rejected by the Arabs. Egypt and Jordan declared their refusal to enter into a peace negotiation with Israel, a posture that was summed up by President Nasser in a speech in Cairo on June 23, 1968. He said:

"The following principles of Egyptian policy are immutable: One - no negotiation with Israel. Two - no peace with Israel. Three - no recognition of Israel. Four - no transactions will be made at the expense of Palestinian territories or the Palestinian people."

These were the elements of policy (originally pronounced at the Khartoum Arab summit in September 1967) that condemned the first Jarring effort to paralysis. The Special Representative persisted through April 1969 in his attempts to establish a meaningful basis for negotiations and in that same month he suspended his mission.

3. The lesson Israel drew from this first Jarring experience was that there could be no progress towards peace so long as the Arab view of no negotiation, no peace, no recognition persisted. President Nasser and the Soviet leaders gave it a name: "political solution", as distinct from the Israel-U.S. formula of a "peace settlement". Just as the term, "peace settlement" had substantive meaning, namely a contractually binding peace freely negotiated between the parties without prior conditions, so did the term "political solution" have a defined meaning in Arab-Soviet parlance. Simply put, it meant a political arrangement much in line with the one imposed on Israel in 1957. The paragraphs of the Security Council resolution were made to read not as principles for a negotiation but as articles requiring automatic "implementation". Hence, Jarring's task was not to bring about a negotiation between the parties for peace, but to draw up what the Arabs and Soviets called a "timetable". That was defined to mean an Israeli commitment to total withdrawal as a precondition for any Arab undertaking. Such an undertaking was not to include peace with Israel but, as in 1957, a series of political arrangements devised through third-party intervention. With this, the Arab conditions of a "political solution" (no negotiation, no peace and no recognition of Israel) were to be fulfilled.

4. The essence of this doctrine was carried forward into the Four Power talks by the U.S.S.R. which sought, unsuccessfully, to win an interpretation of the Security Council resolution in keeping with its terms. Such an interpretation was to serve Jarring as "guidelines" in reviving his mission. The effort was contested by the United States which insisted that the purpose of the Security Council resolution, and hence of the Jarring mission, was a negotiated agreement between the parties with a view to establishing a genuine peace, not a third-party palliative political arrangement.

Direct Soviet Intervention

5. The suspension of the Jarring mission coincided with Nasser's renunciation of the ceasefire and his launching of the war of attrition

in the spring of 1969. The attrition policy was a joint Egyptian-Soviet strategy. Its purpose was to subject Israel to mounting military pressure and compel it and the U.S. to surrender to the Arab-Soviet political terms being pressed in the Four Power forum. When, by January 1970, it became clear that the strategy had failed, Nasser made his secret trip to Moscow. There he obtained a Soviet agreement to involve itself militarily on a combat level so as to make possible the renewal of attrition. Soviet SA-III missiles, manned by Red Army personnel, made their appearance in the Egyptian heartland in March 1970, followed in April by Soviet combat pilots. The presence of Russian combat troops in Egypt manning weapon installations had been denied by both Moscow and Cairo until a few days ago. The admission of their presence was made on January 4 by the new Egyptian President, Anwar Sadat. In a speech in Tanta he acknowledged that Egyptian missile sites were manned by Russian soldiers and disclosed that they had suffered casualties. "The President", (the late Abdul Nasser) Sadat said, "asked for Soviet soldiers until our soldiers completed their training. These soldiers came."

6. The goal of the Soviet military intervention was to eventually extend the ground-to-air missile system forward into the Suez Canal battle zone in an effort to relieve the Egyptian artillery from the harassment of Israeli aircraft and thus permit the reescalation of heavy bombardment. For almost four months this effort was pressed but failed under the impact of Israel's air response.

The U.S. Initiative

7. It was at this juncture, in June 1970, that the U.S. proposed its political initiative and, specifically, the revival of the Jarring mission to be accompanied by a cease-fire standstill agreement to freeze the military situation along the Suez Canal and the Jordan River. What the initiative asked of Israel was two things: to test the intentions of the other side in talks, albeit indirect ones; and to risk a limited ceasefire despite the prospect of it being abused to Egyptian-Russian advantage. Israel's initial hesitation was prompted, principally, by the risk it was required to take with respect to the ceasefire (the Security Council resolution of June 1967 had called for an unlimited and unconditional ceasefire); the notion of an indirect talking procedure through Jarring which had failed before; the consistent refusal of the Arabs to meet face-to-face with Israel,

reflective of a continuing non-recognition policy; and the basically unchanged posture of Egypt and the Soviet Union which continued to speak of a "political solution", not of a genuine peace settlement.

Unilateral Concessions

8. Israel, despite these fears, agreed in August 1970 to accept the U.S. initiative. It did so in the belief that the risks entailed would have proved justified if, indeed, the revived Jarring talks would at least serve as an avenue to a more genuine direct negotiation out of which a peace settlement might emerge. This was the sentiment that motivated Israel to agree to a series of unilateral concessions in an effort to get the talks started: it accepted the procedure of indirect negotiation in the hope that it would ultimately develop into a meaningful face-to-face dialogue; it agreed to a limited ceasefire and concluded an agreement with Egypt on this and on a military standstill; it agreed to New York as the site of the talks, dropping its original request that the talks be held at a venue closer to the Middle East; and it agreed not to make an issue out of the Arab refusal to delegate their Foreign Ministers to the talks as Jarring had requested. Indeed, it may be said in retrospect that no other party did as much and risked as much in order to assure the start of the Jarring talks as did Israel in August 1970.

The Violations

9. What happened, subsequently, is a matter of public record. On September 3, 1970, the United States confirmed Israel's charges that Egypt and the Soviet Union were massively violating the ceasefire-standstill agreement. By their duplicity, they succeeded in achieving in a matter of weeks what they had failed to accomplish in the months prior to the ceasefire. Here was a clear attempt to confront Israel with new military facts in gross violation of a specific agreement which Egypt had entered into. The dense missile system which Egypt, with Soviet connivance, had deployed in the standstill zone under the ceasefire screen created a change in the strategic balance and produced a threat to Israel that had not existed before August 7 when the agreement came into effect. It was a preconceived stroke with a military and political objective. The missiles represented a virtual ultimatum to Israel: either Israel accepts in the Jarring talks the Egyptian-Soviet dictat of a "political solution" or face the consequences of what President Nasser termed a "military solution". Egypt and the Soviet Union were, in fact, seeking to use the U.S. initiative to bring about an Israeli surrender.

10. Israel suspended its participation in the Jarring talks at the beginning of September 1970. The Egyptian-Soviet duplicity and their policies gave Israel no alternative. Israel called for the removal of what observers said was the most sophisticated missile system in the world. It demanded the restoration of the military situation as it had existed on August 7 when the ceasefire-standstill agreement came into effect. This never happened. The missiles are still there, deployed in the standstill zone, and complemented now by ground-to-ground Luna missiles, the first such weapons to be introduced in the Middle East. Their deployment has been admitted by the Egyptian President in his lengthy interview with the New York Times, December 28, 1970.

10. That Israel has agreed now to make a third attempt to talk peace with its neighbors through Jarring, despite all that has occurred, is a reflection of its continuing resolve to leave no stone unturned in its quest to test to the end the prospects of peace. The question is, do the talks have a chance of success now? Certainly, if Egypt and the Soviet Union will change their basic policy of a "political solution". Past experience has shown that peace cannot be made by correspondence or by questionnaires. It can only be achieved through dialogue. As stated by Prime Minister Meir in the Knesset (Parliament) on December 29, 1970:

"In accordance with the guidelines of Government policy we are going into negotiations without prior conditions, willing and prepared not only to put forth our position but also to listen to the proposals of the other parties to these talks. At the same time we reject all threats of the renewal of firing or the putting forward of any prior conditions whatsoever."

She went on:

"The talks will be of value only if they are held in an atmosphere of tolerance and a mutual desire to reach agreement."

9. These conditions are elementary to any kind of a meaningful negotiation. If these intentions are now going to be shared by Egypt and Jordan, the new round of Jarring talks holds out the prospect for peace. Peace certainly will not flow from ultimatums, nor from threats of the kind uttered by Egyptian President Sadat in recent days, to wit, his remarks in Cairo on January 2:

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"We will not allow the ceasefire to become permanent unless there is a seriousness, meaning that there is a timetable for withdrawal and for implementation of the Security Council resolution. If not, we will not abide by the ceasefire."

Again, there is the element of ultimatum and the refrain of the very same basic elements of policy that guaranteed the failure of the first Jarring effort during '68 and '69: the notion that the Security Council resolution has to be automatically "implemented" with Gunnar Jarring laying down a "timetable" for withdrawal, without an agreement on peace and without reciprocal commitments directly contracted between the parties. Such rhetoric is not the stuff of peaceful intent. It originates in a philosophy that declares "Never, never, never" which is what President Sadat answered when asked by the New York Times on December 23, 1970, whether he would ever enter into diplomatic relations with Israel (published in the Times on December 28). The basic condition for the success of the Jarring talks lies in the change of this outlook.

11. The Israel-Arab conflict can be ended only by contractual, binding peace agreements. Until this is achieved and defensible borders agreed upon Israel will maintain the ceasefire lines on all fronts without withdrawal. The Security Council resolution was conceived as a framework for negotiations in order to reach agreement, signature and the implementation of the reciprocal obligations contained in the contractual agreements reached. This is the essence of an Israel-Arab settlement and it is in its pursuit that Israel seeks now to communicate with its neighbors through the Jarring talks.