

INTERVIEW WITH LOWA ELIAV

BT: When did you meet Bruno Kreisky for the first time? Do you remember? And how was your impression?

LE: I think it was in the late fifties, in '58 or '59. And I will tell you the background. It is now known that Israel had established a special unit to work among Jews in the Soviet Union, a unit which was responsible directly to the prime minister, to Ben-Gurion then. The aim of this unit was to get in contact with as many Jews as possible in the Soviet Union. Being Israeli diplomats - we had full diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union - we could send diplomats, first secretary, second secretary, third secretary. And the people we sent there, those people from the unit, were especially engaged in what I call trying to map the Jewish life in the Soviet Union.

BT: Did this group work with the prime minister's office, and the foreign ministry and the Mossad, I suppose?! And they were all Russian speakers?

LE: Yes. They were all Russian speakers.

LE: ... „I will talk with Arafat ... and instead of talking with Lowa Eliav“ - whom he (Kreisky) also liked - „I'll talk with Peres and Rabin, I think.“ Maybe he saw Rabin, too. I don't remember. Rabin was the prime minister and Peres was the defence minister. So I think he started seeing Peres and some other top Israelis through Kahane. „Instead of talking to Eliav who is the head of a small group, a committee of very good people, let us see an Israeli minister.“ And he had a lot of hopes. He thought that as a result of his meetings, these people, especially Peres, will also see the light. But it did not happen.

BT: And that Arafat will see the light.

LE: And that Arafat would see the light, sure. You have to remember that Arafat - we'll come to it later, how Arafat was against Sartawi getting the Kreisky Prize. We will come to it later. But it did not happen. And there was this spirit during '77, when Bruno Kreisky continued to develop the good relationship with me and with Sartawi and at the same time trying to establish high contacts.

BT: Which means, he made what is called in the Roman (novel) by Robert Musil „Mann ohne Eigenschaften“, a Parallelaktion.

LE: Sure, he made a Parallelaktion. Sure. Not, that he was too happy with it.

BT: Did he see very quickly, that he could not move Peres to the lights.

LE: No, he took time. He took time. He saw him again and again.

BT: I think he was quite taken in by his charm.

LE: It seemed so. It took him a good year, maybe, a good year. Wait, I think I am skipping something.

BT: We are still in '76.

LE: No. I have to go back: I have to go back to '73, because we are skipping the fate of Golda Meir, Russian Jewry, the tea party. I was in the security and the first committee, when she told the story about Kreisky not giving her tea. Four days before the Yom Kippur War, on a Wednesday, Golda Meir came from Vienna. She was in Strasbourg and then in Vienna. In Vienna she talked with Kreisky about the situation of Jews coming out of the Soviet Union and having a safe haven in Austria and then there was an attack. And she wanted to speak with him about security arrangements. And she came on Wednesday and she called an immediate session of the foreign affairs-committee.

BT: When she came back home to Israel?

LE: Yes. And we came. It was very urgent. We did not know what she is talking about, what the subject is, but she came from abroad. And she talked and she said - maybe an hour she talked - how she was received by Kreisky at his Ballhausplatz No. 2. And she talked about the security arrangements and that he was very rude. And she continued talking how rude he was, and he did not give her a glass of water. And then she talked again and she said that she did some arrangements for future security, more security for Jews coming out of Soviet Union, but he did not give her a glass of water. So it went on and on and on. And after about an hour or an hour and half of this subject, which was more or less about Kreisky not giving her a glass of water - that was the main subject what a terrible man he is -, then she dismissed us. And after the war of Yom Kippur we knew that at that time she had a pile, a whole pile of cables and assessments that the Egyptians and Syrians are massing up tens of thousands of troops. And she did not even mention this or hint it. And we knew about the Yom Kippur War on Saturday in the synagogue, when we were in the synagogue! But this is beside the point. The point I want to make is this: much later, when I became even much closer to Kreisky, I asked him „What about this glass of water?“ And this was in the Ballhausplatz. And he said, „I don't know what to do with it, because the whole world knows that I did not give Golda Meir a glass of water.“ He called - I think - Margit (note: Margit Schmidt), definitively he called some people who were working in the Ballhausplatz, service people, and he said, „Look, when she came from Strasbourg I said, 'You must be tired, I want to give you coffee or maybe some cakes and there is even a shower.'“

BT: A shower.

LE: You know this? „There is even a shower, if you want to take a shower, rest and we will talk about the security of the Soviet Jews.' She never wanted to take neither coffee nor tea nor anything. And now I do not know what to do with this problem of

the glass of water, because I hear it from the four corners of the earth.“ This is the episode of the glass of water.

BT: But what we should maybe mention also for historical reasons is that he was confronted for the first time in Austria with a Palestinian terrorist attack on Austrian soil against the Jews from Russia. And this is, maybe, interesting, because this was also a meeting with Palestinians in a way.

LE: Sure, sure. But as a chancellor I ought to bring her tea. As a chancellor during the whole period of the late sixties and early seventies, when tens and tens of thousands of Jews went through Vienna, he made it absolutely positive that the strictest security arrangements will be taken by Austrian security people ...

BT: And not by the Israelis? I think that was the quarrel he had with Golda, that he did not the Shim-Bet there.

LE: But later, later there were contacts and good contacts between Israeli security people and Austrian security people for a long time. So to my mind the complaints that Golda made against Kreisky that the security of the Soviet Jews is not close to his heart, is not true, definitely not true.

BT: Why do you think she said ...? I mean, she lied!

LE: She hated his guts! They are both now somewhere. If there is a heaven, they are both in heaven. But she hated his guts. She hated him maybe. She hated Jews who were anti-Zionist. She hated Jews who to her mind were anti-Zionist. She hated Nahum Goldmann like hell and he was the head of the Zionist organisation once and he was the head of the World Jewish Congress. She hated him. But this is not in our story. She hated all Jews who were non-Zionist. Definitely, she hated Bruno Kreisky. So she hated his guts.

BT: So we were actually already at the first official meeting Kreisky gave to Arafat in Vienna.

LE: And then meetings between me and Sartawi in Vienna, in Paris, in other places continued with the aid of Kreisky and Mendès-France. We kept meeting with heads of states, with prime ministers. And then came an episode where Kreisky is not in it, but Mendès-France is: Sartawi wanted that, I and him, we'll meet Bourguiba in his palace in Tunisia. We told Kreisky about it, but Mendès-France was deeply involved. And it came to nought. It was before Sadat. Sartawi had the idea that we need a drama. He said, „Okay, for nearly a year we are running around with heads of states, but we need an open drama.“ We made contact through the wife of Bourguiba. And we had a concept from the Tunisian head of state and prime minister that Sartawi and myself will go before television in Tunisia and say, „Here is the PLO speaking like this and that, here is an Israeli.“ And we will do it in the palace of Bourguiba and then we will go to a synagogue. And it could have created a real drama. And then Arafat scuttled. Arafat scuttled it. It was a terrible disappointment. And a month later came the

elections in Israel, '77, our movement established itself as a political party, Sheli. I was the head of it. Number three was Avneri. We could not bring any real results from our meetings with Sartawi that were by then known all over. It was spread all over. We are meeting with the enemy, we are meeting with murderers, with killers! Kreisky helped us with this Sheli thing. I went to Vienna, I went to Kahane. I said, „All these small groups have merged into one movement and we need some help.“ And they helped us. We did not have a lot of hopes with the mood in Israel. We were winning and the Labour party went down and to have a small party - we knew that it will be small. And a very short time after that, Begin became prime minister, brought in Dayan. Sadat came.

BT: And the whole famous story with the Tohami-meeting and I think this we can skip, because this is another matter.

LE: This has got nothing to do with us.

BT: Exactly. Again, you were then in active politics, head of a party. You continued to meet with Sartawi?

LE: So then came the drama of ...

BT: Sadat came to the country and the peace was signed.

LE: And I called Sartawi, I think in Vienna, he was then in Vienna. And I told him, „Please, go ahead with ... , go ahead, jump on this initiative. Sadat is ready to bring Israelis and Palestinians to Menah-house in Cairo. Because the PLO started cursing Sadat, „He is a traitor. He is a traitor of the Palestinian issue.“ I said to Sartawi, „You are wrong, because Sadat is ready. The Palestinian delegation or Palestinians and Israelis or the PLO, we will meet in Cairo. So what are you going to lose, if you come and the Israelis come. Say „sorry“ quickly, if the Israelis will not come - as I think they would not come - you will say: „We wanted to talk a weekend, here is the whole world, public opinion with hundreds of newspaper men, you'll see, we came, Israel did not come. What are you going to lose?“ „No, we can't do it, we can't do it.“ He went alone, he went it alone. I said, you are wrong, Issam, you are wrong, you are doing the wrong thing. And Kreisky was out of the picture. And Sartawi was out of the picture. And the PLO was out of the picture. And it was the show of Begin and Dayan and Weizman. Then the rotation came in Sheli. At the end of summer of '79, I left my post and Uri Avneri took my place. And I went to Harvard for a year as a guest lecturer and a fellow of the centre for international affairs. And then, in the end of '79, suddenly I got a letter from the Bruno Kreisky-Stiftung that invites me, to get the first Bruno Kreisky Prize in Vienna. I was very touched, because I thought I was out.

BT: Did you know already with whom you would get it? Who would be the second one?

LE: I think, they said it in the letter, I have the correspondence. And I said „I will gladly come.“ And that is a story itself. Because I am going to tell you now this story. And I think this is a very interesting story by itself. Of this I have some documents which maybe you want to copy them and take them. We will see. I said, „I am ready and willing to come to Vienna from Harvard and to meet Sartawi.“ After I did not meet him for a year and a half. And I flew in to Vienna and I was received by the people of this Stiftung. And they brought me to Kahane. I do not know if you know this story. They brought me to Kahane's house. And Kahane was an excellent host and he told me that Sartawi and myself are getting the prize. The first prize is very important. The president will be there and the chancellor will be there. And some others will get it from Latin America. And then he said, „Sartawi should come very soon. He is staying in a hotel, you are staying at my home“ - because of security arrangements from our home places. Kreisky was glad that I am coming. „We will see you tomorrow.“ Sure enough in the evening Sartawi came. We embraced, we had not seen each other, remember we started creating very close relations in '76, '77. And his wife and his children, they ... So he came alone and we started talking and as the evening went on, he started getting telephones. And I saw that he is crestfallen. Some time, around ten, I think it was, he got a telephone in another room from Beirut. He came to Kahane and to myself and he said, „A terrible thing happened. I got an order from the PLO in Beirut not to participate in the ceremony.“ Kahane said, „You must be crazy. The whole thing is set, the invitations, big invitations - I have them here - with gold and what not. You must be crazy! But you knew it way back!“ And he said, „They gave me a green light.“ And I don't think we told it to Kreisky, because we did not want that he will get a heart attack. And as the evening went by, he got more telephones. The whole evening was spoiled - and some time around one o'clock I think he got a telephone. He came back and said, „You know what these people are telling me? You are still in Vienna? Get out! Take the first taxi and get out of Vienna. First of all, we don't want to see you in Vienna, go, take a taxi, go anywhere you want, not in Vienna!“

BT: Because of the prize or because he was in danger?

LE: No. Just because of the prize. Arafat told him some time, twelve o'clock maybe. He came, because the people who talked with him were lower or higher. Then Arafat told him, „Get out! We don't want that you will get a prize with a Zionist.“ That was the reason. I am Zionist. „We don't want that you'll get a prize with a Zionist.“ And he said, „But you gave me green light! You knew who Eliav is.“ „Get out. He is a Zionist and we don't talk.“ And he told, „We can't do it to Kreisky.“ „We don't care.“ And then at one o'clock they said, „Are you still in Vienna? Get a taxi and get out.“ And he left Kahane's place, we did not know what will happen. He was a broken man. And the ceremony was at ten o'clock in the morning.

BT: Next day in the morning.

LE: Yes, in a palace. I have the whole thing here. And at eight o'clock - we did not sleep - at eight o'clock we went to Kahane's office, because Sartawi told us at one

o'clock. „I will not enter a taxi. I will see you at eight o'clock. I will tell you what I decide.“

BT: In Kahane's office?

LE: Yes, we were at eight o'clock with redshot eyes, and we did not sleep. What happened, the whole thing will fall apart and what a scandal it is.

BT: Did Kreisky know by then?

LE: We did not tell him. We did not tell him. So at eight o'clock we were in Kahane's office and I had my speech already typed. And then he came in at nine o'clock, a very short time before the ceremony started. He was also red-eyed and he said, „I'll go. I will go against orders. It's Kreisky, its you. Against orders. I am disobeying orders.“ And in we went. Everybody was there, in this palace, beautiful palace. Do you want to know the name? I will give you the name later. Here was Kreisky, here was the president. What was his name?

BT: Kirchschräger.

LE: Kirchschräger. And here were we in the first row with the Latin American clergyman, a bishop. But everybody's attention was on us. And they gave their reasons that they selected myself and Sartawi, because of what we did during the last couple of years for the friendship of the two people, the Israelis and the Palestinians. And I had to make a speech, which I did, which was to my mind a very nice speech, which could be read tomorrow in Washington. And Issam made a very emotional speech, orally, not from writing, very emotional, very proud. And then we had lunch with the president and Kreisky. I think only at lunchtime did Kahane tell him what happened. So he was very moved of what Sartawi had done, and not only excited, also very worried. In the evening we had tickets for the opera. And the next day Sartawi went. He went out from Vienna. He was reprimanded and he was disgraced, publicly. It was in the press. They made a public announcement in Beirut that he disobeyed orders and that he is out of grace of Arafat and the leadership of the PLO.

BT: Which means that from that moment on he was ...?

LE: Later they brought him back, because they needed him!

BT: Yes, but from that moment on the green light for Abu Nidal was on to chase him?

LE: Yes, he was demoted publicly in the New York Times and in the Jerusalem Post. The PLO said he was officially demoted for getting a peace prize from Kreisky. Sometimes Arafat threw him to the wolves. But after that, they still needed him for a couple of years. But I think he was open prey for killers.

BT: And he knew it?

LE: And he knew it. He knew it even before.

BT: Now, did you have during this day in Vienna a talk with Kreisky? And let's say, did you sort of renew ...?

LE: Sure. I stayed on a day or two or three. And I was at his home for a long talk. Then we made a sort of a tour de horizon, of what is happening. He - I mean - he was not a major player in this Sadat peace agreement, and he was worried. But he said again and again and again, if Begin thinks, or if the Israelis think that by signing the peace treaty with Egypt, which is very important, to solve the problem, they won't solve the problem and if they do not solve the Palestinian issue, they won't solve the problem. So sure we had very long talks, a day or two, after I got the price.

BT: And then you returned to Harvard?

LE: Yes.

BT: Now, I think the next important subject is actually the prisoner exchange, which means the invasion of Arik Sharon into Lebanon.

LE: '82, '83, '84

BT: Now let us come to the famous Knesset decision, how it was voted, which means the majority, including the Labour party, voted for the invasion. And then, do you remember when the first news came that Israeli soldiers were captured?

LE: You want me to start there?

BT: Yes.

LE: I was a teacher in Qiryat Shemona. I was not involved in politics. I came back from Harvard. I started teaching development, first in Or-Akiba. Then, when the Katyushas started falling on Qiryat Shemona, I left Or-Akiba. I went to teach in Qiryat Shemona.

BT: Which is right on the border of Lebanon?

LE: Which is right on the border of Lebanon and which is, was and is, but then was the main target of the Katyusha attacks from Lebanon. It was raining Katyushas on Qiryat Shemona and maybe a third, maybe nearly half of the population left. And only half stayed on. And it was in many ways a ghost town. That was '81. Then came '82, less Katyushas and then an agreement to assail, actually between Arafat and Begin that they have a cease fire on the border. And I kept teaching.

LE: I knew that another war is brewing. So when the war started in June '82, I was a teacher there and I was also in the civil defence. So I saw that my pupils, mostly women, are in the shelters - that was my duty. That was June. June, July, August, September. I was in Qiryat Shemona. One or twice I went into Lebanon with Sneh, because I said then - it was very curious - I said then to Sneh, „Go to the government, go to the headquarters of the army. There are tens and tens of thousands of refugees from Ein Hilweh, from Raschidia. I have experience of settling refugees in transit camps. As far as I know, they are on the beach. So let Israel show magnanimity and not build or Ein Hilweh again, which would be a hotbed for future terrorism. Let us build proper transit camps.“ And he went back with the proposal of mine. And I had the green light to go and see in Sidon and Tyre, to see, so I went to Raschidia and I went to Ein Hilweh). So I gave a suggestion to Begin what to do, how to build proper transit camps for these tens and tens of thousands of refugees.

BT: Lebanese refugees?

LE: No, Palestinian refugees, not Lebanese. The Lebanese are a different problem. They had a home to go back, but there were the big refugee camps of Ein Hilweh and Raschidia with maybe hundred thousands or more Palestinian refugees. These camps were destroyed by us. And I said, „It will be good for the refugees, be good for Israel, for its image that it will build proper transit camps, proper. But let us do that and let us not allow them go back to these terrible places that we nearly destroyed.“

BT: So what did Begin say?

LE: Begin said, „Well, we will give it to ...“ He said, „You know what,“ - I didn't think it - but he said, „that's a suggestion and let's give it to Meridor. Meridor was one of his aids. And later they told me that Meridor said, „The best solution with this refugees - let them go, let them go, they fought with the PLO, they will go to Beirut and from Beirut we will bomb more away and then we will go to Damascus and then end somewhere in the desert between Syria and ...“

BT: Iraq.

LE: „Syria and Iraq or Syria and Jordan. Let them go.“ So this was it. Nobody gave attention to them, but I stayed in Lebanon for about one month. Then came September. I finished my year, I was in Qiryat Shemona in July, August. I was at home in Tel Aviv. I did not know, what I am going to do the next year: I thought I am teaching in another town. And then in September ..., I have the date here. I did not know anything about the prisoners. I did not know a thing.

BT: You only heard about it in the radio or it was not even in the radio?

LE: It was ... I don't think it was an issue. Anyway it was not an issue that I was connected with. And in September I got a call from, the head of personnel in the army. And he says, „Will you help us?“ „Sure, I will. What about?“ At the beginning I was somewhat afraid, that the General is only lying. Because my son was in Lebanon

and my son in law was in Lebanon. I thought one of them was killed. And the general actually only wants to tell me this. But then he said, „Will you help us?“ „Sure, I will.“ I said, „What about?“ He said about the problem of prisoners of war and missing in action in the war. „Sure, I will. When do you want?“

BT: To meet?

LE: He said, „In half an hour come - to my office.“ And I told him - I knew him - I told him, „General, on whose behalf are you talking?“ And he said, „I am talking on behalf of the prime minister.“ I said, „I want to talk with the prime minister, because I will help, but I want to know if the prime minister wants me. It's my record not being an officer ... I am just a teacher, to help you in this ...“ He said, „Okay, I will connect you with the prime minister.“ And then he connected me ...

BT: With Menachem Begin?

LE: With Begin. And Begin said - we were in very good, very correct relations. When I was in opposition and he was in opposition, we used to meet, compare notes. I was in a small party, he helped me out with his secretary, Jona. You know her?

BT: Kimovitzky.

LE: Kimovitzky. He said, „You have a lot of paper work. Let my secretary work for you.“ He was very correct in these things.

BT: So you spoke to him on the telephone?

LE: And he said, „I want you. It's on my behalf, it's my suggestion. I want that you'll help us as much as you can.“ And ... I want to make a remark about Begin's choice. I wasn't his first choice. Only later, when I was already deeply involved in the issue, did I know that the first choice not only of him, of the cabinet in July, August was not me, but to try and bring in Ceausescu and bring in Mitterrand. Ceausescu was a friend of Begin. And Mitterrand had very good relations with Peres and the Socialist party. And they have sent first the ambassadors and then special emissaries, because they had already nearly twenty prisoners of war and missing in action, where we did not know anything about. So it became an issue for the families with children. So they did send a special emissary to Ceausescu. And Ceausescu told this emissary, „I don't understand why are you making such a fuss. You have hundreds of killed soldiers. It's a war. And in every war a number of people are prisoners of war and missing.“ And actually Mitterrand has sent this emissary to the foreign minister. He received him. I think Peres called him also and sent somebody special. He sent him to the foreign minister and the foreign minister sent him to someone lower. And then he said, what do you want from us. It's a non-issue. So Begin whose idea was to try me, did it only after a month or two of trying others. I don't blame him. Because, after all, I think he remembered. He remembered my contacts with the PLO from '76, '77. He must have remembered also this thing of the refugees, my suggestion in the beginning of the war.

Anyway, it was his decision. And when he talked with the army generals, they said, „Okay for us, if it is okay for you, sure.“

BT: Did you have a talk with Begin in details about what he thinks how to start or how to do the whole thing?

LE: No, nothing, nothing.

BT: Which means he did not give you any regulations, how to do it, or with whom?

LE: No, I'll tell you. It will come out later. So I went to the army headquarters to the department of personnel. And there was a colonel there. He was waiting for me, after I had a general talk with the general. And he had all the papers about twenty people, some prisoners, some missing in action. We did not know then who is a prisoner, who is missing in action. We knew very little, if at all, about these twenty people. We did not even know if they are twenty or twenty plus or twenty minus. We knew only that about twenty people did not return, we can't account for them.

BT: Yes. What happened then?

LE: And ... the story was: I said, „Why isn't the Red Cross in it?“ And they said, „These people, neither the Syrian government nor the PLO nor any other Palestinian organisation are letting the Red Cross in. The Red Cross has asked many times to see if there are and how many there are Israeli prisoners.“ what is their condition. They would not let them, they would not talk with them. They wouldn't talk with them. „That is why we asked you to try other ...“

BT: Sources.

LE: „... other channels.“ And I said, „Look I want the files of these twenty people...“ I want to know, where you think they were taken prisoners, what happened to them, what are the last signals you have from them and some vital signals about them.“ Later I got to know their blood and dental records, everything that you know about a man. But at the beginning I just wanted to have general information. And I said this morning, on the same day, I think it was the 22nd of September - I can give you the dates - I said, „I want that you will get me a ticket to Vienna for tomorrow, for tomorrow. I want to go to Vienna tomorrow.“ It was a Thursday. I said, Friday, I want to be in Vienna.“ And they said, „What for?“ I said, „I want to go and see Bruno Kreisky.“

BT: Immediately?

LE: Sure, immediately. That was Thursday. I said, „Friday I want to be in Armbrustergasse.“ And I didn't call Margit from Israel, because I said, „If he will receive me or if he won't receive me, I will be in Vienna. Maybe he is not there. Maybe he is not at home. Maybe he is on vacation, maybe on some state business, but for me it is better to be with these files in Vienna. Because I want to walk through

Vienna." And I told the general, after he had given me the dates, „I am going tomorrow to Vienna to see Dr. Kreisky, or somebody from his entourage. He said okay. Then I said, „I want to talk with Begin and tell him that. I told Begin, „Look, I am going to see Dr. Kreisky. And through him I want to get in touch with the PLO people." And Begin said, „I don't care, if you go and see the devil, as long as you know something. Bring the bodies, bring us a signal, that they are alive. I don't care. And we will give you all the help that we can." And that ended it. And immediately I said, „I want the Israeli embassy in Vienna, and the ambassador Ben-Yaacov." „I want the ambassador to get an order from the foreign ministry and from the prime minister's office that he will give me all the help he can and from the Mossad people." I wanted to get help from anybody who could help me. I did not see the families at the beginning, just because I did not have time. I went the next day. So the next day I took an Austrian airlines - I think it was an Austrian airline, because later I went many times from El Al - Zurich, Zurich - Vienna, they have once or twice a week, a flight.

BT interrupts: So you came to Vienna on a Friday?

LE: On a Friday and I had the number of Margit still from '79 in my files. And here she was. She was on the phone and I said, „Here I am." She didn't hear from me a couple of years. She said, „Yes, what can we do for you?" And I said, „Look, I need a very urgent and personal and secret talk with the chancellor. Can I see him?" She said sure. „When can I see him?" She said, „You can see him tonight at his home." And I went in the evening, Friday, to Armbrustergasse. And she informed him that I am here. She does not know what I want, but that I want an urgent talk with him. And he received me.

BT: He was alone or was there an aid there?

LE: No aid, no nothing. He was alone in his room, which you know very well. And I got the file with the pictures and I said, „I am going to talk about twenty young Israelis. Some are missing, some are prisoners, we don't know their whereabouts." And I told him, „It seems that they have tried other channels. The Red Cross is not responding, they are not responding. And I want to have ..." And he said, „Look, I don't have to tell you that I am against the whole crazy war in Lebanon and what your government is doing is sheer madness. And they won't achieve anything. They are just bringing blood, shit and havoc." „They are just bringing blood, shit and havoc to themselves and to the Palestinians and to the Lebanese. It's a crazy war. There is no chance that they will succeed. Others are saying that, and you come to me on a humanitarian basis, you say." And this I said from the beginning, that I am talking on behalf of the families and the army and the Israeli government. He says, „First of all, I will help you, because you are on a humanitarian mission and you say you act on behalf of the families. I'll help you, as much as I can. How do you think I can help you? And I said, „First of all, do you have any idea where Sartawi is?" He said, „He must be in Paris, but I don't know exactly." But later he thought the whole thing over during the very same evening and he said, „Look, I have an idea. I have a chef de cabinet, Dr. Herbert Amry, who was an ambassador in Beirut. And he knows. He is a

very good man. I promoted him. He works with me and I think he can be of great help to you. Come tomorrow. Come tomorrow ..."

BT: Saturday?

LE: Saturday. „I'll bring Herbert Amry and let us talk the three of us about the whole thing. And so it was. I came back on Saturday and here I met a young man, Dr. Amry, whom I never met before. He was very attentive, he listened to what I had to say. He looked at the file and he said, „First, let us bring Sartawi here, to Vienna.“ I asked him, „Do you know where he is?“ He said, „I have his number. I am in touch with him. He is representing the PLO or maybe part of the PLO in Paris and we are in good touch. And he is a friend not only of Dr. Kreisky, he is my friend as well. And I met his family, he met my family. Let us call him.“ I said, „Go ahead, call him.“ And we called him and there he was. There he was.

BT: Did you speak with him on the telephone?

LE: With Sartawi? I don't think I did, because I did not know exactly what he is doing, who is tapping the telephone. With the bad experience I had in Vienna with the prize I did not want to endanger him. I told Amry, „Don't, don't ...“

BT: ... mention it on the telephone.

LE: „... mention. We had already a bad experience with him, that he suffered. Just tell him that Dr. Kreisky and myself want you urgently in Vienna.“ And he said, „When?“ Amry said, „Tomorrow.“ And there he came. It was a Sunday, I think. And he met me, it was for both very exciting.

BT: You hadn't seen each other for a long time.

LE: We hadn't seen each other for a couple of years, from '79, after this crazy prize, for three years. And I told him about the problem. And then the problem was divided, we divided it. We sat with Amry, because Dr. Kreisky didn't go into the details, but we did it at his home. And Kreisky told us then, „Look, my office ..., you can use my office. You can use Dr. Amry's office, both of you, and Margit will know about it and you can use my place for anything you want.“ And then we divided the issue into three or maybe four subjects. We knew that some prisoners - Sartawi knew - are in the hands of the PLO or actually not the PLO, the Fatah, the main group of the PLO. He knew already about that. He did not know how many, but he knew that some are in the hands of Fatah. And then we said, some may be in the hands of other Palestinian splinter groups and then others may be in the hands of the Syrians, Syrian soldiers who caught them. So we have three or maybe four groups and we have to deal with them separately. And then we met again, on Monday I think. It was in Dr. Kreisky's office.

BT: Ballhausplatz?

LE: Yes. In his office. Or maybe in Dr. Amry's office. I want to stress from the beginning - because it will take us now two, three years - that we really used the offices of the Austrian chancellor in this operation. We did not have any other office, we did it from his office. And sure enough Margit knew all the details and she worked in it. I have to add another thing. From the beginning, both Kreisky and Amry said, „Look, you see, a humanitarian problem, we have to deal with it in a two-way system. You have prisoners, not too many, and they have prisoners, many.“ Because everybody knew that we have already a couple of thousands of prisoners, Palestinians and others. „So I'll work on a humanitarian basis on condition that it is a two-way street.“

BT: That also the Israelis will exchange?

LE: We did not talk about exchange yet. It was way back. With the Red Cross it was reciprocity. The Palestinians did not want to show the Red Cross and we did not show the Red Cross anything either. We had a big prison camp in Ansar, the Ansar I, the real Ansar in Lebanon and we did not show anybody.

BT: When Issam came to Vienna, did he tell you or Kreisky that during this long weekend on Sunday and on Monday, that he informed already someone of the PLO or that Arafat knew about this meeting? When you were sitting then for the first weekday on Monday on the Ballhausplatz to discuss the three-way track, had he then already called the PLO, to tell them that he was involved and that he could get the okay?

LE: I think so, yes. I think so. I think so, yes. I expect he did, he called from Amry's office, not from Kreisky's place, but from Amry's office, he did.

BT: Which means the PLO gave him, the Fatah gave him immediately the okay for the deal?

LE: The channel was not PLO political, but it was military. He called Fatah people in Tunisia. He got from them an okay. That's how it started. I think he called some friends of his on a military level from Fatah. And then he said, we will fly to Paris and see how things go. He will work out of Paris, not out of Vienna.

BT: You wanted to talk about the three- or four-track way, which Amry and Kreisky had proposed.

LE: He'll tackle the Palestinian thing.

BT: From Paris?

LE: From Paris. And he'll go back to Vienna and meet me. And then we had some time, some leeway to tackle the Syrian problem. This was already government to government. Austrian government to Syrian government. And Kreisky - this week already, the same week - wrote a letter.

LE: A few days after we first met and I got to know Dr. Herbert Amry through Dr. Kreisky and after our meeting with Sartawi we together with Dr. Kreisky, Bruno Kreisky, Amry and myself, because Issam Sartawi went to Paris to get information and to see what could be done. It was the first time that I approached him, that we approached him. So he was looking for basic information. And we understood after a while that there are three different roles of allies to try and locate the missing in action and the prisoners of war. Because for us by then, all of them were missing. We didn't have yet full information, who is a prisoner of war, who is missing. And the three were these: Israeli soldiers who were in the hands of the PLO, not the PLO in general, but in the hands of Fatah, the main group of the PLO.

BT: How many?

LE: We did not know but the group in the hands of Fatah. There were others in the hands of the Syrian government and still another group with a question mark, where we thought that they are in the hands maybe of Jibril, maybe, we did not know. And we understood that we have to tackle the problem in three different ways. Because to the Fatah we had an open line through Sartawi. To the Syrians we didn't have yet any open line and to the unknown other Palestinians we didn't know yet. So we started with what we had. Sartawi went to Paris to get information from his people. Whom do they have in their hands? Dr. Kreisky wanted to contact the Syrians on the highest level. And he thought that it's good that he will write a personal letter to Assad and send Amry as his special envoy.

BT: To Damascus?

LE: To Damascus straight to Assad. That was, I think, a very, not only a brave, but a very ...

BT: Unusual way, also.

LE: ... unusual way that a head of state, a chancellor will write to another head of state and send him a special envoy to deliver ...

BT: Now, was the idea to find a contact to Jibril ...?

LE: This was much later.

BT: This came much later? In the moment it was only trying to get the Syrians into the case?

LE: Yes. We did not know if Jibril has prisoners. It came much later. I am talking about the end of '82, October, November '82. I have got the dates here. I am talking about the 22nd of October till the 2nd of November '82, when we had only one open contact, which was Sartawi, Fatah. Now, this date, on the 11th of November, about a week later, Kreisky had the idea - it was his idea - to send Amry with a personal letter to Assad to see what he has. If he has any prisoners of war, who they are, in what

condition they are. It was ..., to my mind it was a very wise decision, because with the Palestinians they were not states, they were organisations, whereas Syria was a state, and here is a head of state talking to another head of state. Ask him for information about prisoners. It is another kind of behaviour. And it worked. He wrote a very touching letter and he asked through diplomatic channels for permission to send his special envoy, for which the Syrians immediately gave the green light and Amry was sent from Vienna to Damascus.

BT: Do you know when that was?

LE: It must have been some time, I am not sure about the date, some time between the 18th of November '82 to the 3rd of December. I have got the dates here.

BT: You were during all this time in Vienna?

LE: Not all the time. I went back to Israel and came back to meet here in Vienna, because I wanted to report. I could report through the embassy, which I did. But I wanted to tell the people in the army. After the talk I had with Begin, the whole issue was in the hands of this General, who was the chief of personnel. Under the chief of personnel in the Israeli army, like in any army, there is a special division for prisoners of war, missing, there is a special division, department. It was natural that all the evidence that is collected goes there and it is an address for relatives as well to this day. So I was attached to the chief of personnel, and to this department, which were really my guides, my mentors and I got from them all the information I needed. So it was not the ministry of defence.

BT: At that time the parents of these people were not even informed?

LE: No. Until I went to Austria. Then the parents knew that their children, their boys, everything ... So they were coming and going day after day to this department in the army.

BT: Were you at that time already in contact with any of the parents?

LE: Just a minute. When I came, when this Austrian connection was established and I came quite early some time end of November, beginning of December '82, we decided here that it is good that the parents, know that there is a new element. Because you have to remember that four months, three, four months - from their capture the parents did not know anything. They were coming here and the ministry did not know what to tell them. We thought it is good, if the parents will see me and I will see them and I will say that I am now devoting all my time to that, which psychologically had a very good effect. By the way, all through my involvement we continued, it had a lot of difficulties, because it had its pros, it had its minuses. Because later on, those who did not get good news were at the throat of the army, so much of difficulties, and you know I am doing whatever I can. But they were at the throats of the army and the government. Now I am talking out of this context: For example with Ron Arad. They are doing it in a different way, the people who are

really doing the so-called black work of contacting, they don't talk. The families don't know about them and they don't know about the families. I am not sure which way is better, but we took the way that I was open to the families. And I told them that ..., I told them nearly everything: that I saw Dr. Kreisky, that he is assigning a special man, that this man is going to Damascus, that we have another man, a Palestinian who is going to see what happens with the Fatah, to make them somewhat more reassured that something is going on, which they did not feel the last couples of months.

BT: How could you be sure that nothing would leak into the press?

LE: There was complete censorship. It couldn't leak. It couldn't leak.

BT: Which means the censor was informed, and the journalists, the chief editors - committee was informed that about this subject nothing was allowed to be printed. So even if one of the parents or one of the family members would have started to gossip which they do, of course,

LE: Nothing leaked until much, much later. Much later.

BT: Now, you came back after ...

LE: I came back in December again and ...

BT: When did you hear about Amry's visit to Damascus?

LE: I was back in Vienna, after I met the army people and the families, I went back to Vienna. At that time Amry went to Damascus and I stayed in Vienna to see what's happening. I told already at the beginning that Kreisky put all his office at our disposal. So Margit Schmidt was in the whole thing. And they knew that I am there, I am coming and going and it was all open for me in his chancellery. And Amry reported by cable that he was received by Assad and by Chadam who was then the foreign minister and they received him well. And they gave him, made him contact with a general, a Syrian general who brought him to ...

BT: Do you remember the name?

LE: It is written here, a Syrian general. Chadam brought him to Assad, who received him. He gave him the letter. He responded well. And they brought to him another Syrian general, who was in charge of the prisoners. And they together with this general, they visited three or four prisoners, who were alive. It was the first time that anybody saw them.

BT: They were in Syria, on Syrian territory?

LE: They were in Syria, in Damascus, in a prison. One was a pilot, one was an infantryman and one was a tank driver.

BT: And Amry was allowed to make notes and to take letters from them, or ...?

LE: No, he didn't. He just saw them, that they were alive.

BT: Did they see him also?

LE: They saw him, too. But funny - , it's not that funny, they did not believe him. They did not believe Amry. He said he comes from Vienna. You have to remember their position: they were for months in prison. Here comes a man who says he is an Austrian and he wants to know about them. And they were very suspicious, the most suspicious of the three was the pilot. The pilot said, „I don't speak English.“ So he started French. He said, „I don't know“. He did not want to speak with him. Only the second time - Amry saw them again; I told Amry, „Tell them that you are a friend of Lowa Eliav and Lowa Eliav is a friend, he is waiting in Vienna“ - they opened up a little. But the effect of Amry coming back to Vienna and having seen the three prisoners in the Syrian hands ...

BT: ... was enormous.

LE: ... was enormous, because it was the first breakthrough in the whole thing. And with this I went back to Israel and I saw the three families. And I told them, „Look,“ „the man with whom I work, Dr. Amry has seen your sons. They are well.“ They also, the Syrians, gave Amry the name of a pilot, a major, who was ...

BT: Captured?

LE: No, who was dead, who was dead. They said, he died, when he and the other pilot parachuted together. One was alive and the Syrians said, the other one died when they found him on the ground. And they said, they know the name, a major, and they have his body. Then they told Amry ...

BT: One was dead and what happened with the other one? The other one was alive or wounded?

LE: Sure, the other one was alive. That is one of the three. And the major - it was in a Phantom-plane and one was a major, one was a captain. „The major,“ they said, „we have the major's body. We'll keep it.“ The captain Amry saw and two others. I think one was an airman, the second an infantryman and then a tank driver. Those he saw. Now the Syrians told Amry that they have four bodies of four Israeli dead soldiers, they found them dead, and they gave their bodies to the Jewish community in Damascus to bury them. With this we had another source of information that it was true. Because we had a videotape of the ceremony that the Syrian army, soldiers, are bringing four bodies or caskets, coffins, to the Jewish community in Damascus to bury them in the cemetery and ...

BT: But what made you sure that these were four Israelis?

LE: Wait, wait. They were not Israelis. It is a very complicated ... and I will try to make it less complicated than it was. And that the rabbi and a hazzan are saying the prayers, the Kaddisch and on the coffins was a Star of David, and they buried them. Now, Amry has asked the Syrians to give him, the names of these four. - Now I am talking about the Syrians. We will come to the Fatah later. It's not chronological, it's approximately the same time, but I want to continue in one ally. - So Amry had asked the Syrians, do they have the names of these four Israeli dead soldiers whom they gave to the Jewish community. And they said, „Yes, we have their names.“ And they allowed him, not him personally, but somebody, the photographer, to make photos of the identity cards. They said, „We have the identity cards of these folk“, military identity cards, soldiers' books and they gave them to Amry. Now Amry brought them, gave them to me. By this time, I think - well, I'll come to it - by this time Amry had been already once or twice in Israel, because I wanted him to meet the families and to meet the general, so they know, with whom I work. And he brought the photos of the soldiers' books and immediately the army checked it. But these four soldiers' books, and the identity cards were of soldiers, that were alive in Israel. That were alive in Israel!

BT: So how did the Syrians get it?

LE: Because it seems that they ran away and they left their battle dress or whatever. And the Syrians found the four identity cards. And Amry, who knew, on his third visit to Damascus he said, „These people are not the ones that are buried. The ones that are buried are people, that are missing.“

BT: How did the Syrians react to that?

LE: They said, „We know that these are these people.“

BT: They insisted on it?

LE: They insisted for a long time. Afterwards it took a long time for them to say „We know that these are other people.“

BT: Why do you think they played this game?

LE: I think at the beginning they wanted to say „Look, we behaved in a very civilised way. They were buried. We gave them to the Jewish community. Here is the Magen David, here are their identity cards. We behaved like a civilised society.“ We started with Amry - look, I am only in one ally - we started with Amry a very long road with the Syrians. He said, „Okay, who is saying the truth?“ We insisted, „These are not these people, they are other people. They are four other people. We are missing tank drivers, we are missing infantry. Open the coffins. Open the graves. And we will then identify, who they are.“ „Well,“ they immediately said, „no Israelis.“ We did not insist. „Let Austrian pathologists open the graves.“ And it took Amry another voyage to Damascus to suggest it, because all this strategy was done in Tel Aviv, Vienna and Damascus together.

BT: The embassy in Damascus was not involved in all in these talks?

LE: It was. But in an indirect way. I mean the ambassador knew exactly that Dr. Kreisky has empowered Dr. Amry as a special envoy, but the ambassador and the others didn't go with Amry anywhere.

BT: He was not informed about anything?

LE: No, not in that. No. Amry kept much of the information to himself. Then, by the way, Kreisky was involved in the whole thing, because he was informed the whole time. And then we had an idea.

BT: You spoke with the pathologists coming that maybe the Syrians would allow Austrians to look at the dead bodies?

LE: They said no. Then we had an idea that maybe an Austrian doctor who serves with the Austrian troops on the Golan Heights - who is anyway there - he'll go. They wouldn't, they wouldn't allow it. During all this time the Syrians said, „We want to know about our missing in action and prisoners of war.“ And Amry went, sure with the okay of the army, went and saw the Syrians, about two hundred Syrian soldiers and officers who were captured by Israel. And he saw them in a special Israeli prison. And here we started the thing, which we did all through this operation - and Kreisky insisted on it, sure enough, it was natural - that the whole operation and everything that Amry will do, will be a two-way road. He will go and see what is happening with the Israelis and at the same time the same man, Amry, will go and see what is happening in Israel with Arab, Syrian or Palestinian prisoners of war. The whole time it was for him a shuttle-mission. He told me many a time, „Look, I am doing it on a purely humanitarian basis. You know my opinion about the folly of the Israeli government, of Begin and Sharon, with this war. But that has got nothing to do with and I will try and solve this humanitarian problem.“ That was that. That was the credo of Kreisky. And I think it should be stressed from the beginning, because that is the way he made the whole thing work.

BT: How did the Syrian prisoners of war react to Amry? Did they have the same suspicious reactions like the Israelis in Damascus.

LE: No, no, no. The Syrians were kept in an open prison in tents and they were in much easier conditions than those in a very closed prison in Damascus and not seeing each other. The three Israelis did not know about each other. They were in separate cells. They never met each other. It was each one for himself. That's why I say that the pilot, the captain, was the most suspicious. Because he was the most intelligent and so the most suspicious. He did not know that there were two more Israelis with him.

BT: And Amry was not allowed to say that?

LE: No, no, no. So during all this ...

BT: ... shuttle.

LE: ... shuttle with the Syrians - we are talking now about the Syrians - the general, whose name I forgot, but I have his name, started asking Amry for a favour. He had two relatives among the prisoners: fishermen. Fishermen, who were caught by, I think, by an Israeli naval commando raid. They were not even soldiers. They were kept in prison with other Syrian soldiers.

BT: How did he know?

LE: He suspected. They were missing from a fishing village somewhere north of Tripoli.

BT: So Amry found out that this was true?

LE: And we, we cooperated fully, because we knew now, the rule was, let us give and take. So we asked for the names and he gave their names. He did not say, they are his relatives, they are two fishermen. „Can you know ..., can you inquire about what is happening with them?“ We looked at the lists and we knew that these people are in prison - we brought them, we videotaped them. And they talked, and they talked, they said they are well, they are in good condition, they send regards ...

BT: But you knew that this general was interested in these two people?

LE: Amry told us. Sure. So we gave the videos to Amry and Amry brought them to the general.

BT: Did Amry fly or drive with a United Nations car from Jerusalem to Damascus?

LE: No, no, no, never, never, never. He never went this way. You have to remember that Amry was one of the bravest and the best and the wisest people I met. He never made this road, because on what capacity would he go? He had no United Nations credibility whatsoever. They did not know about him, neither the Red Cross nor the United Nations. He was not in this line. His line was direct: head of Austrian state - head of Syrian state and he is the in-between. He never went this way. He always went from Vienna to Damascus by air or he went Vienna - Tel Aviv. And in Tel Aviv, whomever he saw, was also kept secret. It was not through the foreign office at all. It was in the army. And only later did he meet politicians. Later he flew from Tel Aviv with a small plane to Cyprus and from Cyprus to Damascus. Or from Damascus to Cyprus and then in small plane coming to Tel Aviv. So it was either Tel Aviv - Vienna - Damascus or Tel Aviv - Cyprus - Damascus. Never, never by road. Never, not one time.

BT: Was this also out of security reasons - you think - that he did not want to know anyone beside the people who knew then, but kept secret that he was shuttling around?

LE: Sure. He did not want anybody, to know. He told me, „I am not doing it, because I will encounter Austrians who will know me and will start thinking.“ He did not want it.

BT: So what happened? You gave him the tape with the fishermen and he went back to Damascus and he gave it to the general?

LE: The price, quota for quota was that he could speak with our soldiers more freely and they agreed to bring them together, which was a great thing and was worth it all.

BT: The three in Damascus?

LE: The three, our three prisoners. And it was worth the whole thing. Because then they started believing him, that this man who says he is an Austrian, who says he is an Austrian ambassador can deliver. And he brings regards - at that time that was twice or three times already - he brings the cards from the families, from father and mother. So this thing already was a great step, was a great step. Because you have to remember that through the whole operation we wanted first signs of life. So we brought signs of life. He was the first one to see them. That at the beginning - then to make easier conditions and then, only then came the third stage, to negotiate exchange.

BT: But it was till now only three and you knew that the four in the coffins were not Israelis or at least not those the Syrians claimed. Now what happened?

LE hesitates.

BT: Because you had many more missing. So how could you be sure that the Syrians were not hiding more?

LE: We knew that they have a body of this major, the pilot, four unknowns and three knowns: - in the hands of the Syrians. And we had missing, but it did not correlate to what they said about the people, who are in the coffins. The people who are in the coffins are others, not the ones they claimed. At long last - I am continuing with the Syrians, because I will come back to the Fatah and I will come back to Jibril - at long last, I think in '84, I have the dates, we came to the third stage with the Syrians. The third stage is negotiating through the Red Cross. You have to remember Amry's work and my work, was so-called underground. It is, as if we did not exist. The Syrians knew it, the Palestinian knew for sure that the Israeli government had assigned a man called Eliav to tackle the problem. The Austrian government had assigned a man called Amry to tackle the problem. But once it came to negotiations, we could not negotiate. It is only the Red Cross who could... You could ask, why didn't they show

the prisoners to the Red Cross from the beginning? Because they wanted to bargain. They wanted to bargain.

BT: When did you find out that they wanted to bargain? With the tape? When the story happened with the tape and the fishermen, it came to your mind that there was a bargain possible, or ...?

LE: More or less at the same time.

BT: Or was it Kreisky, who had the idea that the bargain could be possible?

LE: No. Once we knew that the three prisoners are alive, that they meet each other, that we don't know yet about the four, but we will be ready that they will bring the four bodies, whoever they are. So we had three live-prisoners, one body of a major and four unknowns. That is our package. We don't have more. We had a claim from the Syrians, which lasts to this very day, that they will help us to locate other bodies near the site of the battle. But this we did not press. We knew that. But we could ask that they maybe could deliver in exchange for their two hundred odd prisoners, these three live Israelis, one body of a pilot and four unknown. Let them bring the coffins.

BT: So Amry went to Damascus ...?

LE: ... all through '83.

BT: So by the end of '83 you knew already how many, the parcel, the Syrians had?

LE: More or less. You have to remember - when I come ... - that Amry did not go only to the Syrians.

BT: I know.

LE: He started going to the Fatah and he started going to Jibril. He always had three maybe four assignments, when he went to Damascus: Syrians, Fatah, Jibril and maybe others.

BT: He met all in Damascus or around Damascus?

LE: In or around Damascus.

BT: Did he go into Lebanon also at that time?

LE: Into what?

BT: Into Lebanon.

LE: No, he went into Lebanon with me to Ansar One. I will come to that ...

BT: Did he go during that time while he was in Damascus, did he also go to Lebanon, to meet people?

LE: No. He went to Lebanon through Israel. I will come to it later. But what I want to stress is that I am trying to make it not so much chronologically. And I am talking the whole time about the Syrians, as if the Fatah did not exist and the others. But they did. And much of the effort and time of Amry and Kreisky was with the others, with the Palestinians. So again, with the Syrians we had the three live people, the dead major ...

BT: How did it continue with the Syrians?

LE: Then we, together with the Syrians, we agreed, Amry agreed with them that at a certain stage the whole issue will be turned to the Red Cross. And they agreed and we agreed. And then they agreed that the Red Cross will see the three prisoners and we agreed that the Red Cross will see the Syrian prisoners in Israel. And at that stage I was ..., I and Amry, were out of the picture. And in Geneva, where the Red Cross is based, were representatives of Israel, official representatives, not myself. At a certain stage it was Tamir and at a certain stage ...

BT: Shmuel Tamir?

LE: Shmuel Tamir and before him Marinsky. They are both dead, very famous lawyers and very close to the government, to the Likud government. They are both right wingers, but they were known. And they were empowered officially to meet - not directly, but through intermediaries of the Red Cross - to see the exchange, the real exchange of prisoners.

BT: I remember that, yes.

LE: No, but you have to remember that the whole operation was in three stages. One was signs of life, which Amry got, the second one was to ease the conditions of the prisoners, the third one was the exchange of prisoners. We were not in the real exchange, we were in the bargaining of the exchange and this or that. But once we, meaning Amry, agreed with the people in Damascus and the people in Israel that more or less this is the bargain, it was pushed to Geneva for proper arrangements. Because it is an arrangement. You have to take two hundred and more soldiers and bring them. Where do you bring them? When do you bring your prisoners?

BT: I remember that period, of course. The whole world knew already that there is a prisoner exchange going on and the whole world was looking at it in Geneva. Do you remember when was the first time anything was written here about the Syrian connection in the prisoner exchange?

LE: About '84, I think.

BT: After the Syrians and the Israeli had agreed already on an exchange or before?

LE: After. But even then it was not mentioned that there is a man - Eliav - and that there is a man - Amry - and that the real thing is done in Kreisky's office in Vienna. That was much, much later.

BT: Were you in Geneva when the ...?

LE: No, I was never in Geneva. All through the three years I was never in Geneva and Amry was not in Geneva. I want to stress again: we brought the operation with the Syrians and then with the Palestinians to a stage of fruition where Israeli official representatives and Syrian or Palestinian representatives could meet in Geneva under the auspices of the Red Cross to make final arrangements for the exchange. ... And it has to be stressed, because when we want to give now credit to the whole thing, without Kreisky and Amry the whole thing would not have worked the way it did, it would not have worked at all.

BT: Were there moments of crisis, you remember, where you had the feeling that the Syrians are not moving or that they really don't want, or that they want to screw up the whole situation? And the other question is: were there ever signs of any - I would almost say - attempts of personal relationships, like this general who sort of gave you a hint, „Give me my fishermen and then I will be happy to help you?“ I mean, could you tell us something about it?

LE: I think that with the Syrians there were ... First of all, from Assad down they had a lot of respect for Kreisky, a lot of respect, definitely. And they were stubborn at the beginning. But once - it was not only because of the fishermen, I think, the fishermen were a side job - once they agreed among themselves, Assad gave them an order to try and negotiate through the Red Cross. After this juggling with Amry they behaved correctly, they behaved correctly. Wait, I am not at the end of the story with that. Because what happened was: when the exchange took place at the Israeli-Syrian border on the Golan Heights with the Red Cross and the UN ...

BT: You speak about the first exchange?

LE: With the Syrians - it was only one exchange. With the Syrians it was one exchange. The three prisoners, the body of the major, the four coffins, okay?! And we gave them all their prisoners. And it was ..

BT: on the Golan Heights?

LE: Sure, with all the television and everything. It was open - and in the press. It was very, very touching.

BT: Do you remember what year it was?

LE: '84, but I have to look at the dates. What I am talking about Amry's work is a whole year, the year of '83. What happened was: the exchange was done properly,

very touching, first time that Israeli soldiers were coming back and the families and the whole touching show. And from the other side that the four coffins were opened in Israel and only one of the four was definitely identified as an Israeli lieutenant, Lifshitz, a sergeant or lieutenant. He was definitely identified. He was buried. His family was told to sit Shiv'a, to bury him. The other three were definitely not Israelis.

BT: How can you say this after so many months of being dead?

LE: It's pathology. Definitely. Because we knew all. We had missing, we had people dead.

BT: No, from a pure physical point of view...

LE: Barbara, you can tell after years. You can tell after years. Sure. You can tell after years. But definitely. Look, by their dental, first of all, by their dentals, but also by their bones. But by the dentals. It is a whole science. It is a whole science.

BT: Okay, maybe we don't go into that. But anyway, one of them was Israeli, the three others not.

LE: And we told the Syrians, „Take them back, they are not our soldiers.“

BT: And?

LE: They would not take them back. And they are buried somewhere near the border as unknowns. And our hope that the other three would correspond to three tank drivers which are missing to this very day, talking in 1993, will answer the question of our three missing - it didn't. And we have till today three tank drivers missing from a certain battle called Sultan Jaacov, which was a terrible battle. There was an inquiry how it came about that the Syrians ambushed an Israeli tank column and that they nearly annihilated the whole tank column. It was not a nice battle from our point of view. And so we have till today three tank drivers, Baumel, Feldman and Katz, who are missing. And their parents say, „Give us our boys back.“ And we are trying now, I am jumping now, I think that we tried from the beginning. After they did not agree to pathologists, but they agreed to give the coffins back. And we gave them record, that these are not the people. So what we have tried, doing through Amry at a later stage, is to say, „Okay, we believe you, that you ...“

BT: Meant well.

LE: „... you meant well. You - bona fide - you put some other soldiers, it happens in a battle. Send a neutral team to investigate near the battle scene of this village. Then they can find, or they can hear something about three soldiers. The parents still believe that they are alive, but we think that they are long dead, that maybe they were buried by the villagers or whatever. They would not, they don't agree to look for the Israeli dead. Maybe through peace negotiations. They did not try something now. But this is out of our story. So here is the Syrian ...

BT: The Syrian track. Maybe we go now to the Fatah.

LE: Sure. Again, it's not chronological.

BT: I know, I know. We are going now the one track, Fatah, which is Issam.

LE: I think it's easier the way I do it.

BT: We start again with the very first weekend when Issam went back to Paris to make the research, how many ...

LE: If any and how many.

BT: Yes. What happened?

LE: Issam came back.

BT: To Vienna?

LE: And I came to Vienna, because Vienna was our base. He came and he said yes, he contacted his people in Tunisia, Lebanon and he knows that the Fatah has six Israeli soldiers. That was already the beginning of '83. And we again went through this procedure of signs of life. Remember that. The first thing we said, „Okay, Issam, you have - you say - six. We want a sign of life! Before anything else we want a sign of life.“ And then he said, „I want a sign of life, too. You have four thousand, four thousand Palestinians, in Ansar, in Lebanon. We want a sign of life from them, and especially a sign of life from Salach Tamri.“ We talked about him, I think.

BT: Last time, yes. He was a commander of Fatah?

LE: Not of full Fatah, but of a certain brigade, a youth brigade of Fatah. But he was the highest Fatah officer, who was captured by Israel. And he became the head of a committee of all factions of Palestinian prisoners: Fatah, Jibril, Hawatmeh, Habash and others, who were in Ansar. He became the head of the committee. And he represented, with this committee, then to the authorities. That started in prisons everywhere. I mean, if you don't want to annihilate people in prison, you have to cooperate with them and to have some kind of authority inside the authority ...

BT: We are in Ansar with Salach Tamri. So the Palestinians wanted especially to have a sign of Salach Tamri?

LE: ... Salach Tamri and to hear them reporting to them what happens in Ansar, directly. And we agreed, we in Israel agreed that it is worth it, to have a sign of life on video and pictures of the six and we will give them what they want from Ansar. And Amry and myself we went by helicopter and car into Lebanon, into Ansar I, which is inside Lebanon. We flew in to Ansar with the helicopter the first time. We were a

couple of times in Ansar. And sure enough we took with us a crew of army, intelligence, photographers. And the commander of Ansar, the Israeli commander, called the committee, about six or seven Palestinian prisoners. And it was outside the prison itself, in a sort of quarter of neutral bent, and I went in with Amry.

BT: Why, because they did not want to have the prison on the video or ...?

LE: No, not only that. They wanted to talk free. He informed them that an Austrian is coming. And they said, „Okay, but we will talk to him on a neutral ground, not inside the prison.“ We did it also because of security reasons, because of four thousand people. And as you will hear later, on his second or third visit to Ansar, Amry, who was very brave, went inside. But that will come later. So it was on neutral ground and I came in with Amry and we talked. I said who I am. And immediately nearly all of them knew, who I am, because they had read my books and views. They knew who I am. That is not a new thing for me that the Palestinians in the talk about territories ask for my signature, because my books were translated into Arabic. And so they know about me. They knew who I am. I said, this is Dr. Amry and he is representing Dr. Kreisky. And they knew who he was. It was an intelligent group of people. And I said, I think I will leave you alone. And I went out. This we did all through - as you will hear later - we did it all through these negotiations that I left. We gave complete confidence to Amry, complete confidence.

BT: Now did all these Palestinians speak English there, or French? How did he communicate with them?

LE: But Amry spoke very good English.

BT: Did all of the Palestinians speak English?

LE: It was not a problem. It was not a problem. I think most of them spoke English and Salach Tamri spoke very good English.

BT: So how long did this meeting last? Do you remember?

LE: I have no idea. An hour and a half or two hours. And they told him about their grievances and not only being taken prisoners, but all kinds of grievances. And it was videotaped, the whole group with Amry. And we took a video. And then we coordinated through Vienna with Sartawi that we will make a simultaneous exchange. I brought the video and he brought the video, Sartawi.

BT: Do you remember where this videotape exchange took place? In Kreisky's office?

LE: In Kreisky's office or in Amry's office.

BT: But on the Ballhausplatz?

LE: On the Ballhausplatz. Kreisky's office was on the second floor and Amry's office was on the first floor. I think it was in Kreisky's office, which was very touching. We had a very clear videotape of the six prisoners.

BT: You looked at it already there, in Kreisky's office, at the videos, yes?

LE: Yes, either in the chancellors office or in Amry's office. But there was, there definitely was a video machine.

BT: I think in Kreisky's office.

LE: They had a video machine. And we looked at it. And here they were six Israeli young soldiers, on the video, in a tent, looking well, not ...

BT: Speaking English or Hebrew?

LE: Speaking Hebrew, each one to his family. And I took it. I gave him the video of Tamri and I took the video with me and I brought it to Israel. It was a big, big thing to the family ...

BT: But again, nothing to the press. Censor, totally, yes?!

LE: ... that these six prisoners, who were well and alive and in the hands of Fatah.

BT: They were kept in Lebanon?

LE: In Lebanon, yes. The other stage was, that an open channel be made to Salach Tamri through me, Sartawi, Salach Tamri and Dina, his wife, the queen.

BT: She is the first wife of King Hussein?

LE: Yes.

BT: Who is she exactly?

LE: She is the grand daughter of the Sharif of Mecca. A very, very fine family of princes and kings who were ruling in Mecca and Medina before the Saudis took it from them years ago. And then they were exiled to Egypt. So she is from one of the best-known and honoured families in the Arab world. And she was married as the first wife to young Hussein, the King Hussein of today and they divorced. And she lived in Egypt and then she met Salach Tamri and they married. They fell in love and married. He was much younger than she. And here she was. And I started to be with Sartawi an in-between between them. I was not the only one. I told you last time that there were two other channels to Dina and Tamri, because the Israeli army left Amry, „Take leave and be adopted side by side by Aharon Barnea and his wife Amalia in Tel Aviv.

BT: Why?

LE: Why? Because the Israeli army decided that he is very high up, very intelligent and they wanted him to see Israel from another angle, not only from an angle of a tourist. It was not the first time. I did it with Egyptian generals after the war. But I had the open channel and I met Dina, and I got a letter from her, and I got a letter from Sartawi to Salach Tamri telling him that he can rely on me, that I am his friend and that he can rely on Dr. Amry. And we went again to them and he gave me a big box of chocolate for them and the security people ...

BT: For Tamri?

LE: For Salach Tamri. And the security people here asked me, „Lowa, do you want us to open this ...?“ What is it called in Vienna?

BT: Mozartkugeln, a huge box.

LE: That big. And they were very suspicious, because our meeting was then We did not want to sit too much in Ballhausplatz, so we started sitting in the famous café - you tell me the name - near ...

BT: Near the Burgtheater, the „Landmann“. But weren't you afraid that people would see you there and recognise you and then the whole thing ...

LE: So we went to another café. So he said he wrote a letter. He said, „Now I want to give him chocolate.“ So we went somewhere. And Amry said, „I want Mozartkugeln.“ So they gave him a little box. „I want a bigger one, because ...“

BT: Sartawi said?

LE: Sartawi said. „I am sorry“, Sartawi said, „I want a bigger one. I want a bigger one.“ So they found one that was maybe 50 or 60 centimetres long, a very big one.

BT: So you calmed down your own security people?

LE: „We want to open and check each one.“ I said „Don't. Forget it. I was present when he bought it. He paid the money, I took the box.“ And we brought it to Salach Tamri. By then, Saturday, third time, we already had some kind of relations which were not that formal. And he remained with two tapes. More tapes. I said okay. We did not come yet to the stage of exchange, because that was later. I'll bring you letters from the families from the six and I'll go to Salach Tamri with Amry and we will ask for him two things: one, well, he wanted a tape, a special tape to his wife. And I promised that it would be personal, we would not touch it, the army people would take it and we will close it and bring it to ...

BT: To Dina.

LE: ... And the second one - that was my idea, was a political discussion between me and Salach Tamri what will happen, what happened with this conflict. Here we are in a prison.

BT: That was meant for whom?

LE: For anybody. I gave it to Sartawi. But I have it, too.

BT: So actually you were already on quite a easy-going contact with Salach Tamri?

LE: Of course, yes.

BT: You said before, with the Syrians the first thing was to find out whom they had, and the second one, to make it easier. Now you knew that the Palestinians had six boys. How did you know that their life became a little bit easier? Was the exchange of letters with their families possible?

LE: The exchange of letters made it easier, but their physical conditions were not bad from the beginning. They did not complain, we saw it from the videos, they sit in a tent, more or less in normal conditions. We did not ask, „Give them more food“, because we saw that they have enough food and they sit together. They are not ...

BT: ... separated. But now, of course, the balance was not very equal. I mean that was an imbalance: six boys for how many in Ansar?

LE: Wait, wait. I'm coming to it. So there were two tapes. I brought this one to Paris. Because Sartawi said, „Dina does not want to come to Vienna, she is in Paris. Bring it to her to Paris.“ I brought it to Paris. Sartawi waited for me at the airport and he brought me to Dina and I gave it to her, closed. I gave her also a present Tamri gave me. And the political, what they call the political tape, I gave to Issam. I said, „Do anything you want with it.“ And I think I have a copy, I have a copy. And it is very interesting.

BT: It is a video?

LE: It is a long video.

BT: I would love to see it one day, Lowa, I would love to see it!

LE: It is fantastic. But at that stage, we understood that we are short of two soldiers. The same group that was taken prisoners by the Fatah were eight, and they showed us only six. And I started pressing Issam, „Where are the other two?“ Because it is not like with the tank drivers who were in a battle. And in a battle you don't know, you have missing, you are dead, you are wounded. This group of eight was taken intact. Then there was a hue and cry later, years later. Why did they behave like this? They are cowards. But this is beside the point. This is a group of eight and we knew that

they were taken intact. Early morning they were sleeping, the Fatah group surrounded them, and zap.

BT: And gone.

LE: So we were short of two. And we knew the names and who the two are. And remember I brought to the families of the six, I brought tapes, and I brought videos, and I brought pictures, and I brought letters. And they were happy, these families of these six.

BT: And these six did not give any hint about where the two comrades are?

LE: Nothing. They knew they were six. They did not know who were the two others.

BT: Okay, we leave it in the moment, the names.

LE: Yes, because it's too complicated.

BT: The missing two were ...?

LE: Yossi Groff and Nissim Salem. The other six - I have their names here - they were in the hands of the Fatah. And I started pressing Issam, „Where are the two?“ He said, „We don't have any more.“ „Where are the two? Where are the two?“ And he started pressing his people.

BT: Now was at this time Arafat already out of Beirut or was he ...?

LE: I'll come to that.

BT: I would like to know at what stage of the negotiations ...?

LE: Very early, very early. After they had shown us the first pictures of the six, we said, „Where are Groff and Salem?“, because we knew the others by name. And he started pressing his people in Tunisia and through Lebanon. Why don't you show two more? They said, „We don't have two more.“ And after quite a long while he came to me, Issam - you have to remember that we were shuttling the whole time - he came, he said, „Lowa, the other two are in the hands of Jibril. We don't know what happened.“ The story he got from his people was, that a small group of Fatah soldiers took the eight. They had two jeeps. And they started. They put them on these vehicles and then they encountered a third vehicle of Jibril. And the Jibril people asked them, who are these. Israelis soldiers. And the people said, „You are so squeezed in the jeeps. Give us two and we will bring them with you to the camp.“ And they ran away with the two to Jibril. And at that stage we understood, that what we have are six and two are not in the hands of the Fatah. Still Jibril was also a Palestinian movement and somewhere under the umbrella of the PLO. And we started pressing Issam to include the two, to take them away from Jibril. It did not work, it did not work. We tried very hard through all kinds of channels and we pushed him very hard, because we said we

will not negotiate. „Tell your people that we will not negotiate. We have thousand. The condition of the six are more or less well ...“

BT: Now, of course you knew already at that time that the relationship between Yasir Arafat and Ahmed Jibril was not the most friendly?

LE: No, they were enemies a long time before.

BT: Therefore, Fatah could not do a lot to pressure. And you knew also that maybe the Syrians will have some influence, because they were stationed in Lebanon?

LE: We tried with the Syrians as well.

BT: So what happened?

LE: Nothing happened. But at that time, I am talking about ..., I think, by then Arafat went away from ...

BT: ...from Beirut.

LE: ... from Beirut and went to Tunisia. And at that time, talking at the end of '83, some time already in '84, there was a terrible split in Fatah. And Abu Musa, who was a high officer in Fatah, reneged and became an enemy of Arafat. And he took with him many, many hundreds of Fatah fighters in Syria, not in Lebanon. And with this Abu Musa rebellion, he became very close to the Syrians. And Jibril was already, but especially Abu Musa. Because Abu Musa was an inside rebel. And then Arafat's men went back to Lebanon and started a fight with Abu Musa and the Syrians. It is a long, horrible story. And Abu Musa and his people with the aid - direct, indirect - of the Syrian army started pushing the remains of the main Fatah group with them. And they took the six with them, the six Israeli soldiers they took with them. Wherever they went, in battle, always with them. And we lost touch. And everybody lost touch. There was a terrible battle. Ongoing battle, until the Abu Musa people, with the direct aid of the Syrians, pushed the Fatah into Tripoli. You remember that? And encircled them and besieged them and bombarded them. And our six were inside. And then we skipped the whole thing of negotiations, slow negotiations, with the Red Cross. It was a direct intervention of the Red Cross, but via the French government. Give us the six, who are besieged, they were besieged in Tripoli, and we will give you the four thousand.

BT: So there was a decision by the Israeli government to jump over the negotiations, the negotiation team Amry, Lowa Eliav and to approach Mitterrand.

LE: With Kreisky's full consent.

BT: ... but through the Red Cross and Mitterrand?

BT: That the world knew that there were six Israelis sitting there. Now you could not hide it anymore. It was in the open. What I do not understand is the Syrians, who had their hands on Abu Musa and who knew, of course, that Arafat was schlepping the six Israelis with him. Why was it impossible to influence Abu Musa through the Syrians?

LE: They were not so much interested in the six. They were interested to harass Arafat.

BT: If it was impossible to influence the Syrians, what did the French government think that they can do? Why should they influence Abu Musa and the Syrians?

LE: They intervened directly with Arafat and his people. And they said directly, not through Abu Musa, „Give us the six. We will send a warship.“

BT: And take you out?

LE: And take out the six, take out the six. And by the time they are on the warship, Israel will start releasing four thousand people from Lebanon to Ben-Gurion Airport. -And that was it. So the Arafat people agreed. And there was a French warship. There was a very strict timetable. And the six were put on a small motorboat from Tripoli, which was besieged, a Fatah motorboat, and they went into the open sea and they were met by small French motorboats.

BT: Did they stop the fighting in this period? Or they could not care less?

LE: They could not care less. They did not stop anything.

BT: There was no danger that the six would be ...?

LE: There was a very big danger that they would be killed. That is why the Israeli government said, „We will not negotiate slowly - four thousand, three thousand, two thousand.“

BT: Immediately.

LE: „Take the six, we will give you the four thousand.“ Of Ansar. And that happened. The six were rescued. They were taken by a small boat from Tripoli, met by a French motorboat, put in the open sea on a destroyer, or cruiser, or whatever. And at the same time, with radio contact, the convoys of the four thousand Ansar prisoners were moving to Ben-Gurion Airport and planes of the Red Cross were waiting for them and taking them out.

BT: What a story! Now I would very much like to know, why suddenly the French came into the picture. Because of their role in Lebanon, or their position in Lebanon?

LE: The Red Cross had decided that they needed to move very quickly and that they don't have the means and the French have the warships and all the material for that

and they brought it in. Mitterrand agreed immediately and it was through the Red Cross that it was done very quickly from Geneva to Paris and then ...

BT: But still, two boys were not there?

LE: That is why I am coming to the third story. So by now it was '84. And the six were in Israel, the four thousand were ...

BT: Somewhere.

LE: They spread all over, in Tunisia, wherever they went. And the Syrian thing was as I told you. And we were short of two boys, whom we knew, where in the hands of Jibril. And three or four maybe unknowns, missing. And there I came to Kreisky and said, „We haven't finished yet.“ And by then I was very close to Kreisky and to Amry and to his wife. I was very inside. He said, „Lowa, we will help you with that, to see if we can finish the thing with the two and maybe the others.“

BT: Now was there never a period of frictions between the Israeli side and Kreisky?

LE: No. The Israeli side, he never met ...

BT: I remember there was a lot of political misunderstanding or fights in this period. And the newspapers in Israel were very aggressive towards Kreisky. So was there never any danger that Kreisky would say „I'll not do it. I am fed up“?

LE: I told you from the beginning. He did it from a deep conviction of humanitarian effort. And in this thing, of the prisoners, he never, to my knowledge, never met in this field - other Israelis in other spheres -, he never met another Israeli but me. And with me he never had a friction.

LE: For example, at the beginning I thought it will be nice that Begin will write to him a letter. After already he started doing things. And he gave me his chef de cabinet. I don't know, if any other prime minister in the world would give his chef de cabinet and his office for a couple of foreign soldiers. Who would do it? So I said to Begin, „Write a letter of appreciation of what he is doing.“ It was in the beginning. And Begin said, „But look what he is talking about me! What he is writing about me.“ And I said, „But I think it's civil and we still have many people missing.“ It was at the beginning. And then Begin found a way. He said, „Look, I am going to the United States for a couple of days. So I have an acting prime minister Simcha Ehrlich. I'm not here. Let him write a letter.“ And we went to Simcha Ehrlich. And he wrote a very nice letter, which I composed, but he signed it. He signed it willingly. And I brought it to Kreisky and he saw through it. And he was not happy with what I did, because he understood that Begin did not want to write. He gets a letter from the acting prime minister. He was not very happy with it, with this gimmick of mine. At that period of '83, '84 - he was already sick. He had this artificial kidney, a nephrology and the dialysis and it was done at his home in Armbrustergasse. He had a special room for that and a professor, a nephrologist, and two nurses. And twice or three times a week, at least once a week, he had this dialysis. I want to show nevertheless, how deeply he was involved. And whenever I came, and I came many a time, we bring videos and letters and everything that I was telling you, and I did not tell you all. He had a list - Margit should know- he had a list of very few people, Austrian, that he would meet in his home, while his dialysis goes on. I was on this list. So quite a number of times, I went in. He was there in the bed, with his blood running in the machine. And I was important to him. I am telling you, when I came, what I am doing. So I think it's a sign.

BT: Go back to Jibril, Iowa. So two were missing. And you came back to Kreisky and you said, „Listen, two are still missing.“

LE: Actually five are missing, from the battle. But two are definitely alive. We know that they are alive, although Jibril is not ...

BT: ... an angel.

LE: No, no, no. Jibril does not admit that he has Israeli soldiers. So he said, „Okay. You have Amry again.“ By that time, I think Amry had changed position. It was 1984

BT: He was already ambassador.

LE: He became ambassador in Athens. But Kreisky told me, „You can continue with him, because I authorise him to tackle the whole thing of Israeli prisoners, Arab prisoners, to tackle it from there. And he can do it maybe even better from there than from Vienna.“ Which he did. Now Jibril.

BT: So you went to Athens to meet Amry?

LE: Many a time. By now, end of '84, I think, the base was shifted somewhat. It was Tel Aviv, Athens, Damascus, Damascus, Athens, Tel Aviv. Just to tell you how intensive we worked, I think that some time I made a list. I went about 40 times abroad and Amry went maybe more than 40 times, maybe 40, 50 times abroad from Vienna or from Athens. So just for these two prisoners we were in that kind of operation. So Amry went to Jibril. He said that he is going to Jibril.

BT: How did he meet Jibril?

LE: He met Jibril, because he knew him. He was an ambassador before in ...

BT: Beirut.

LE: He knew Jibril. Jibril by now, after the four thousand, knew very well that the Austrians are deep inside. And he gave some signals to the Austrian ambassador in Damascus that if Amry will come, he will see him. He had another reason. Israel had said to the PLO, to Fatah, that it will release everybody who is in Ansar, but we did not release everybody. We released everybody, but for 250 Jibril people.

BT: Who were still there?

LE: No, they were not there. They were somewhere else.

BT: But they were still kept prisoners in Israel?

LE: And Jibril knew that by now Israel does not have Fatah people. It sent them away. And others. I want my others! But they kept his people. They kept his people somewhere in Israel. It was no more Ansar. So he had another incentive to start something. They had his people. And so after a couple of coming and going ...

BT: So actually the first signal Jibril gave through the Austrian ambassador in Damascus, that he was willing to see Amry?

LE: ... to see Amry. And Amry saw him. And he complained. He said, „The Israelis are cheats and liars. They said that they will release all the prisoners they had. But they didn't. They have my people there in the camps somewhere. I don't know what is happening with them.“ Amry told him, „Okay, I'll try and help you with it, because I am working on a humanitarian basis, but I want to see the two prisoners, Groff and Salem.“ Which he agreed to.

BT: Immediately?

LE: No. He said, „No, I don't have them.“ Nothing happened immediately. Nothing happened immediately.

BT: This meeting took place in Damascus?

LE: Outside Damascus. They sort of blindfolded Amry. And they took him somewhere.

BT: It was really so dramatic, with blindfolding Amry and ...?

LE: Or in a black car. I do not know what they did. But he did not know, where he was going. But it was outside Damascus.

BT: Did he go alone or did Amry have any aid or someone?

LE: At the beginning alone. Later he went with an Austrian ambassador. And he saw Groff and Salem. You must remember that was after nearly two years, that nobody knew anything about them.

BT: But the Syrians, of course, must have known about it!

LE: But they would not release any information.

BT: They could not care less?

LE: They wouldn't do anything. They knew that Amry is coming and going now, not with their prisoners, because it was finished, but about the Jibril thing. They did not intervene at all. And he saw Groff and Salem. And he brought a sign of life after nearly two years.

BT: How was their reaction?

LE: Their reaction?

BT: Could he talk to them? Did they speak English or ...?

LE: It was a different reaction. Groff was cooperative and Salem was out, out. And they did not see each other. They were not together. So at his second or third visit they ...

BT: You mean Salem was psychologically so unstable? Maybe through torture, that he was not ...?

LE: No, they did not torture. No, it was psychological. He was alone. And Amry brought a sign of life after two years, which was a great thing.

BT: Was this still kept secret by the press?

LE: Yes. It was kept secret. And he brought a sign of life. And we gave full authority to Amry. I forgot something about Ansar that the third time that he went to Ansar going back, he said, „I'll go inside, inside Ansar to the four thousand people.“ And he

went in, and the four thousand people, all of them knew that an Austrian ambassador

BT: ...is exchanging.

LE: He went inside. We were outside with other carriers and he was brave enough to go inside, because the officer said, „They may kill you, or they may take you as a hostage.“

BT: Why did he do that?

LE: Out of bravado, bravery. He said, „I believe them. They know already who I am.“ He went inside. We gave him also full authority, to go and meet the 200 Jibril-fighters and to take a letter from them to Jibril. We did not look at the letter. It was in code. And we did not go in. We wanted that he trusted, to build trust, trust-building. And he brought it to Jibril. And Jibril knew by now that he can come and go. And the next thing was that he put them together, Groff and Salem. It was not a very happy meeting, but still they were together.

BT: Why wasn't it very happy? Because the other one was ...?

LE: Psychologically, but they were together. Then at that time, we started to get some information through various channels that he may have a third man, a third man!

BT: Security information or?

LE: Rumours here and there that he may have a third man. And he was ready by then with the two to start the second, third stage, negotiations: Signs of life, better conditions ...

BT: Eventual exchange.

LE: And we told Amry, Jibril may have a third man - and we showed him all kinds of material - and „Start asking for our third man.“ It took about nine months of Amry coming and going. At the beginning Jibril said, „Mr. Ambassador, you must be crazy, what are you talking about? Listen, you saw that ...“ And Amry kept going.

BT: How did they speak with each other, Amry and Jibril?

LE: Through an interpreter, a good English-speaking interpreter. By now he saw him maybe half a dozen times, and he said, „Mr. Jibril, you have a third man.“ „I don't have a third man.“ So he kept for about nine months coming and going and he said the Israelis will not negotiate.

BT: Wasn't there always the risk that with this insistence Jibril will stop all the things?

LE: Yes, we took the risk. And we got to know, more or less, who is the third man, Hezi Schein. We got to know, that he is a tank driver and Amry made it very well and each time telling him, „Mr. Jibril, you ...“

BT: It is impossible for you to say how you got the news, who it was?

LE: No. And we started pressing him and said, „You have a sergeant, a tank driver.“ He denied everything. And then we, together with Amry, we started thinking maybe we will influence him by showing him through the Austrian television the wife of Hezi, Iris. And she gave birth to a baby girl that he never had seen.

BT: The husband?

LE: The husband. And with Amry's help and with Fitzthum from ORF we brought her on Christmas '84. And she appeared on prime time on Austrian television. And she said, „I know that you have my husband. Here is the picture of my daughter, whom he hasn't seen. And we want peace and we want him back. Please!“

BT: So how did this ORF-tape come to Jibril's attention, because he was sitting in Damascus?

LE: Fitzthum brought it to him.

BT: Through the help of Amry, of course?

LE: Through the help of Amry, sure. Either Fitzthum or Fitzthum gave it to Amry. I don't know.

BT: Jibril was impressed by that?

LE: Look what he did. He made a tape. And there was a young Palestinian woman, more or less the same age of Iris. And she said, „I appeal to the Israeli army, army authorities. Here I am - gave her name - my husband was captured by the Israeli army. And I have a daughter, whom he hasn't seen.“ The whole thing opposite, like a mirror picture.

BT: Of Iris?

LE: Of Iris. And we had her name and we located her - she said the name of her husband - and we located. Yes, true enough, he was captured by the Christian militia near Juniyah.

BT: And alive?

LE: First we said to Amry, „Tell Jibril that this man was not captured by us, but by the Christians, by the Phalange.“ And then we inquired very deeply. He was killed by the Phalange. And we, through Amry we said to Jibril, „He was killed, he was killed.

You have a live Israeli sergeant, but this man we know. But we did not kill him, it was the Phalange." And we said exactly, where they ambushed and killed him. So he said, „I want a sign." That's where you came. And we looked and we found the radio, wireless, the radio of his jeep, which was used by Jibril people. It had the number. And we said, we will send it through the Austrian embassy. And it came to Barbara Taufar, we gave her the radio, covered in a parcel, to bring it over as quickly as possible to Vienna.

BT: So what happened?

LE: And Amry brought it to Jibril to show him. And he said, „Yes, true enough. This is our radio." He still didn't show the sergeant. He still didn't show.

BT: But you knew by his moves he was doing, that it was clear, that he had the third man?

LE: Yes.

BT: So?

LE: In Passover '84 we kept giving Amry parcels for three, because by now Amry was coming and going and bringing parcels. And we always gave him parcels for three. And I had an idea near Pessach we brought matzot and we brought hagadot for three. And I had an idea to tell Chesis family, „Have you got anything, which he will recognise and which is important to him?" „The bible, we gave him for Bar Mitzwa." „Then give it to me." And I told Amry, „That's his personal bible. Tell Jibril, what Pessach is for Jews and all that. Give him the bible."

BT: How did Amry react to that? I mean did he know what Pessach was?

LE: Very well. I explained it. Now Amry became ...

BT: an expert on Jewish affairs.

LE: No doubt. And he became very friendly by now. We are talking about two years. He became very friendly, not only with me, but with the army officers who were in the general headquarters, with our generals and others, then with Yaron. They all knew him very well. He knew Tamir. He knew the army officers. He knew Marinsky. I think by then he knew Arens, here in this place, where you are sitting. Arens was the minister of defence ...

BT: They probably liked each other, Arens and Amry?

LE: Everybody liked him. Everybody appreciated what he did. It was two years already.

BT: And he was a nice man.

LE: He was a very nice man, very nice man.

BT: So you told him what Pessach is and how important the bible is?

LE: And he came to Jibril. And he told him the whole story. And the man near Jibril took the two parcels, he did not touch the third one. And then Jibril took the bible, looked at it and he said to Amry, „And this bible, I will give to him.“ The minute he said „I will give to him“, we knew that we had a third man alive.

BT: Was Jibril a Christian?

LE: No.

BT: A Muslim?

LE: Habash is a Christian. The minute he said „I'll give to him“, Amry called me from Athens. I think he said, „We have Hezi Schein alive.“ „How do you know?“ He told me and I immediately told the family. Then the next month he went to Damascus. And sure enough they showed him Hezi.

BT: The third one?

LE: The third one, who was a sergeant.

BT: He was kept in Damascus?

LE: Somewhere around Damascus. Amry told me that Hezi was much braver. He was 28 years old. So he was in the reserve duty and much older than the other two. He was kept two and a half years alone. Alone, but he kept believing that something will be done for him. And now he saw Amry and Amry went back.

BT: He could communicate with him in English?

LE: Yes. Hezi knows English. And he brought the picture. And you can't imagine what happened here with the family.

BT: At that moment it went already into the press, or not yet?

LE: No.

BT: So we have three men alive.

LE: Three men alive. And then started the very difficult process of price, negotiations. And in this I and Amry ...

BT: Pardon, you said before that you knew that there were also three dead people, but you didn't know.

LE: No. We didn't know anything. We knew that ...

BT: Three were alive now. So now the negotiations ...

LE: It was five months of very hard negotiations. Amry told us from the beginning, Jibril - if you exchange six for four thousand - he will want the same ratio for the three. He will want two thousand. And a period of very difficult, very, very nerve-racking coming and going started.

BT: So the main load of the nerve was on Amry actually. Because he was the one who had to talk with Jibril and it depended on his skills, how Jibril would react. Did he say anything about Jibril's character or how did he describe him to you?

LE: It was an election period here in Israel and Jibril followed very closely the elections. And Jibril told him, „ If Sharon will be elected as prime minister, that will be very good for us, very good, because that will keep our revolution alive, the flames alive. If Peres will be elected, it won't be that good, because he speaks half way that and half way that and the flame will not be that fierce. But „if your men“ he told him, „like Eliav,“ - by then he knew me through ... - „if your men will be elected that will be horrible, because all the flame will get out from our revolution.“

BT: What I heard from Kreisky, who also met Jibril, he was not a very nice man to deal with?!

LE: What I am telling you, is not very nice.

BT: So what I wanted to know is: in this stage only Amry dealt with Jibril? Kreisky was in this period not personally, physically involved?

LE: It came later.

BT: It came later. Now how many months did Amry really struggle with Jibril to come to an agreement for an exchange?

LE: Maybe six months and before that nine months to find Hezi. So all in all about a year, more than a year and before that the whole of '82 and '83, where we did not know. So all in all, I think it took more than two and a half years.

BT: And how was the deal at the end?

LE: It was a nerve-racking thing, really a nerve-racking thing. And we negotiated, Amry and myself, coming and going. The number dropped from nearly 2000 or 1500. And he insisted that in this deal, there will be quite a number of PLO prisoners imprisoned in Israel. There was a precedence for an exchange, it was the famous

Weizman precedence in another war. In the Litani-war they had about 90 Palestinians for one Israeli and among them also prisoners, who were sentenced. And he wanted Oso Yakomoto] in these 1500 and others. And we kept coming and going. And then Yaron was chief of personnel. And Yaron and myself and Amry, we went to a Greek island, where Amry stayed and we took him out on vacation. We told him, „You must go to Damascus to start working more on Jibril.“

BT: You remember on what island he was?

LE: It was near the Turkish border. We went by helicopter, Yaron and myself. And we took Amry out from there to go to Damascus to end this bargaining.

BT: And he went back to Damascus?

LE: Yes. He went from his holiday to Damascus. It was a nerve-racking kind of thing. At long last, at long last the figure that was agreed by him was 1150 for the three prisoners.

BT: So when was the deal finally made?

LE: I have to look at the dates. I think it was the end of, summer of '85.

BT: Where was the exchange? In Geneva?

LE: Before Jibril, he had another crazy idea. He wanted a picture of a house near Yaffo.

BT: Lowa, we finished the last talk by you telling me that Peter Hohenfellner, the diplomat from the foreign ministry, took over from Herbert Army who had died. And there was a new government in Austria and Kreisky was already retired in Armbrustergasse. Now what happened next?

LE: Well, I went to Sinowatz. And I saw him and his foreign minister Lanc. And incidentally, it was a very strange thing, nothing to do with the exchange of prisoners: but Lanc, his wife was dying from a suicide. And he still didn't cancel a meeting with me. The whole of Vienna knew, that his wife is dying. And he kept the meeting with me over lunch. And I was very taken aback. I was shocked. But this is it.

BT: How was this meeting? What did you discuss with him?

LE: We discussed the continuation of the Austrian effort to tackle the prisoner exchange, the fate of prisoners and missing in action. By now, we had more prisoners. We still had things unfinished from the beginning, from '82, meaning we had three tank crew members that were not accounted for, Katz and Feldman and Baumel. We had a Druse, who was not accounted for. He was a soldier, and we did not know anything about him. And by now, and we had the question of three unidentified bodies in the Jewish cemetery in Damascus, which was a riddle. By now, we had three more missing. We had Fink and Alschach, two young Israeli soldiers who were kidnapped by Hizbollah, and we had Ron Arad, the pilot, co-pilot of a Phantom jet, who was taken by Lebanese. We did not know exactly by whom. So here was another bunch. So I talked with Sinowatz and with Lanc, and I think he brought me over to Sinowatz. And then Hohenfellner came. I met him. I did not know him before. And he agreed to tackle, to continue the whole effort. And Sinowatz agreed and the foreign minister agreed, but Hohenfellner told me that he wants to get the blessing of Dr. Kreisky.

LE: Hohenfellner was not too happy of the new regime and he talked very highly of Dr. Kreisky. He said he was his guide and mentor. And he said, he wants to get his blessing. So he got his blessing. Shortly after that, Dr. Kreisky was not well, undertook, to go to Damascus.

BT: He himself?

LE: He himself and to see what he can find. Not about the three who were in Jibril's hands, but about the whole new situation.

BT: Now Lowa, how did he get this idea? Did you have a meeting with him?

LE: I had a number of meetings with Kreisky.

BT: So maybe you can elaborate on that?

LE: When I told him that we have more prisoners, and we don't know where they are, but definitely the fate of the luck depends on ..., actually on Assad, because all of

them are either in Lebanon or in Syria, and whatever Assad decides happens. We stressed also that Assad will help us, will agree, he will be convinced to have a neutral, not Israeli, not Syrian investigation committee to look into two things, which were unclear. One was the three tank drivers which we thought, we think now, that they are dead. And the authorities in Israel, the military authorities, it was already three years after they were taken and ...

BT: Maybe they are in the three coffins in Damascus.

LE: No, no, no. You don't remember. The coffins were returned to Israel. We identified them. We said they are not Israelis. They were returned. So the investigations concentrate about the fate of the three tank drivers; to have a committee, to go near the villages where the battle took place. And our reckoning was that they were not in the hands of any organised group, either Syrian or Palestinian. Because an organised group like Jibril, like the Fatah, like definitely the Syrian army, would immediately, if they were alive, they would ..., if they were alive, they would give them, they would take them, they would treat them. Not because they are so merciful, but because they know, any organised Palestinian group knows, that a live or a dead Israeli soldier is worth gold. They can then start bargaining. They know it. And during the last war and even the war before that, even from Yom Kippur actually, they knew that the price that they can get for Israeli prisoners is very high, skyrocket. So we reckoned that these three tank drivers were killed by villagers, who were roaming around, and they saw or they killed, or they saw them dead and they buried them somewhere. Now we wanted them to be buried, to be buried in Israel. So this was one task. And the other task was to go and see what happens in the Jewish cemetery in Damascus. He will see ...

BT: He himself, not Hohenfellner?

LE: No. He himself. He had somebody to accompany him. But he was already not well. He was sick.

BT: He was in a wheelchair already.

LE: In a wheelchair. I don't remember who accompanied him, definitely not Hohenfellner. I forgot who accompanied him. And he agreed to make this trip to Assad and meanwhile to see Jibril also, and ask Jibril about, what he knows. And he went in a wheelchair to Damascus. I think, in a way he wanted action. He wanted to continue something which he started.

BT: It is interesting that suddenly he personally went into the picture.

LE: That is what I say. He wanted to feel that he is doing something worthwhile. This is my impression. He went to Damascus.

BT: Do you remember when?

LE: In '85 he was in a wheelchair. And he got a nice reception from Assad, but with Jibril he had a row. He had a row with Jibril. And I came to Vienna to hear from him what he achieved, which was not much.

BT: What did he tell you?

LE: He said that Assad received him well. But he said, he will think it over. He will think it over, the question of a committee, a neutral committee of experts, and with Jibril ... I think he had a row about the whole situation, because I think, it was one of the first times, that he saw him. And Kreisky told him, that some day the sides will have to meet in compromise. And Jibril told him no, no. No compromise ever, ever, ever, only the total destruction of Israel. And about that Kreisky had a row with him. And he came back to Vienna.

BT: Kreisky told me that Jibril had ..., he was very bitter with this meeting with Jibril. And he told me that Jibril even attacked him personally of representing those who he hates utmost, which means the Jews. He accused Kreisky of ..., because he was a Jew, of ...

LE: He didn't tell me that.

BT: He told me that. And he was furious about that. He was furious about that. And he told me that when Israelis attacked him and he said, „These stupid idiots there in Israel. They don't even know what horrible and ridiculous things I had to hear because of them, when I met Jibril. And you think that is very pleasant to meet such a fellow, who tells you that I represent exactly that what he will fight for ever, what he will fight against for ever. He was outraged by Jibril's behaviour.

LE: That he told me. That he told me.

BT: So what came out of this voyage to Damascus?

LE: Nothing. Nothing. Only he followed the Hohenfellner's mission. Kreisky followed Hohenfellner's mission.

BT: In that time, of course Issam, was already dead.

LE: ... was dead and Amry was dead.

BT: And Amry was dead. And was there any connection between Hohenfellner and the PLO headquarters in Tunis at that time? How did the PLO, was the PLO able to help?

LE: No.

BT: So who was left? Also for the Iranian connection, possible through Hizbollah?

LE: No. We by the time - that was already '86 - by the time Hohenfellner plunged into these efforts, recent efforts, we knew for sure that the two, [Jashech or Jatarshech] and [Fink, are in the hands of the Hizbollah and that the pilot, [Ron Arab], is in the hands of Amal, is in the hands of Amal. And we asked Hohenfellner ...

BT: The Amal leader Berri was once an Austrian Airlines representative in Beirut.

LE: Sure. And he knew him very well. Hohenfellner knew Berri. And Hohenfellner went twice to Damascus to meet Berri.

BT: Who had radicalised then very much already?

LE: Not yet. And he saw him and he received him well. He received him well. And he told him that he has the pilot. And the pilot is well. Only his arm was broken, but doctors took care of it. And ...

BT: In Beirut? Ron Arab was in that time in Beirut? Or in Damascus?

LE: Somewhere. But he saw Berri in Damascus. Because Berri, his family take him from Beirut to Damascus. He saw him there and he told him that next time when he comes he will bring Hohenfellner to see [Arab]. But that never happened, never happened.

BT: That was almost too beautiful to be true?

LE: Never happened. And another effort of Hohenfellner was: he did speak, Hohenfellner did speak with PLO people in Vienna. And they did bring him a report from PLO doctors, physicians who treated the two Israeli soldiers [Fink] and [Jashech] who were taken by Hizbollah deadly wounded. And they gave a report that Hizbollah brought these two soldiers to them, a medical report that they were very badly wounded and they started treating them. But two days later Hizbollah came and grabbed them from the doctors. And the doctors said, they will die. And he said „It does not matter.“ They grabbed them from ... So we had a report about that. And by now it is known that we are just waiting for their bodies which ... they are not giving them. But this is another story. So then ...

BT: So things did not move. But Hohenfellner still wanted to go and meet Berri in Damascus to meet Ron Arab?

LE: Somewhere at this stage, somewhere at this stage the Israeli government, those who dealt with the whole affair, switched gear.

BT: It was Shamir then in power or who was ...?

LE: Shamir sure. They switched gear. Shamir was in power even before. They want to tackle the Hizbollah and Amal and the whole affair not through Austrians. So ...

BT: You mean that was when [Ori Slonim] came into the picture?

LE: Before [Lubrani] came.

BT: Before [Lubrani] came?

LE: No.

BT: That was when [Lubrani] came?

LE: No, no. That was when [Lubrani] came. And [Lubrani] had different ideas of how to tackle the whole thing. So Hohenfellner was called. I brought him to the military authorities and to [Lubrani] and they thanked him. And that was finished with the Austrian efforts about the prisoners of war.

BT: Do we know what the deeper reason was, why Israel thought that they can continue without any other foreign help? I understand, that later on, enormous sources were called upon to help.

LE: But not Austrians. They thought they ...

BT: How does it come? Suddenly the Austrian help, when Hohenfellner was in, was dropped.

LE: Lubrani (Israel's Co-Ordinator for Lebanon) thought that he has quicker and better ways to tackle this problem.

BT: It had nothing to do, you think, with the Austrian change of politics and maybe the political climate in Austria, or that people didn't trust Hohenfellner out of any reasons?

LE: No. Lubrani thought that he had a better way to tackle the problem.

BT: But he failed, as we know, till now.

LE: Well, we know now. We are in '93. And they don't have anything, nothing about the pilot, who might be alive. But that is what they thought. If you ask me today, I think, they made a mistake. But there was in my mind - there was no hidden reason. Lubrani had a different way out. I had the Austrian way and Lubrani thought he has a quicker way. But I think, he proved wrong.

BT: So after all these many efforts how many Israelis - could you get back home with the help of Kreisky, Amry, unfortunately not Hohenfellner, - and of course with Issam's help. How many were the Israeli boys?

LE: There were the six in the hands of Fatah and three in the hands of Jibril and three in Syria and one body from Syria, and one body of a captain out of the four in the Jewish cemetery.

BT: And how many Arab and Palestinian fighters who were imprisoned here were released for all these ...?

LE: About four thousand in the first exchange and about 220 Syrian soldiers and 1100 in the Jibril exchange. So that is the ratio.

BT: When did you see Bruno Kreisky the last time?

LE: That is a good question. I have to recollect now ... Yes. I think it was a short time before he died. I was in touch with Margit. And I came to Vienna, I came to Vienna in '89 or ... He died in '90? I came in '89 to a meeting sponsored by Austrians, something to do with the Karl Renner Institut?

BT: Karl Renner Institut.

LE: Karl Renner Institut. There was a group of PLO and a group of Israelis - I was one of them - and Austrians and some others. This was during the period, when Israel had this crazy law of not meeting PLO, which is dropped now. But then it was in force. So to circumvent it, Israelis and PLO have devised, côte à côte devised a way to overcome it. And the way was, that universities, or institutes, or international groups will invite them and us, but under the auspices of an international gathering and then we could do it, sort of. And we could speak from the podium, not directly, but from the podium we could speak. It was phoney. But that's the way, we went for about two years. And that is what we did in Vienna, in the Karl Renner Institut.

BT: Kreisky participated?

LE: No, no. I went to see him.

BT: He was at home?

LE: He was at home. No, no, no. He did not participate. I went to see Karl Kahane at his home in Vienna. And I think he called and asked if I can see Kreisky. And I said „He wouldn't see me.“ He was ... I think it was a short time after his wife died. I send him condolences from Israel, even before that. He looked very old, he grew a beard, but I think he was with all his faculties. Some time before that, I think - he went with Margit to North Korea. At his age!

BT: He still travelled a lot. But then it really hit him. Suddenly he really could not move anymore and he became very sick.

LE: So, I did not see him as very sick. I saw him with all his faculties, looking old, but we made sort of a tour de horizon of what is happening in Israel, what will happen in

the coming elections. He was very interested, he was very interested. And I think he started to see, that his point of view is slowly being vindicated. Because I think that by then he understood that more Israelis are coming to think, that they have to speak, they have to see the Palestinians and to speak with them. And he reminisced and recollected how people disagreed with him vividly in the beginning and now ...

BT: And now actually where the peace process had started and where actually the PLO officially sits together with the Israelis, Kreisky's vision for a peace in the Middle East and his plan is actually adopted by the whole world. Something which would have been unthinkable even ten years ago.

LE: That's what I am saying. But I just want to say a few words about the funeral, if I may. The minute we knew that Dr. Kreisky died - Margit called me - I said to myself, to the people in the government, that I am going.

LE: So I told the government that I am going. Do they want, that I represent it? And you remember we had Waldheim still as president. And they said yes. So I went and Granot from Mapam went and Yissakhar Ben-Yaacov, who was a former ambassador, and the acting ambassador. So we were four Israelis. And we were sort of a group, four Israelis. And we asked to have a writ with flowers with Magen David (Star of David) and I put it to my other words in Latin and in Hebrew.

BT: You brought with you from Israel?

LE: No. They prepared it in Vienna according to what I told them to do. The rabbi of the Austrian Jewry was also there. But not with the Israelis.

LE: ...Here we were. And we saw that Arafat came with his kaffiyeh and the tie and the gun and the khaki dress. It was a very touching funeral procession. It was the coffin and then Waldheim, maybe the family, and then Waldheim. Waldheim alone, about twenty yards, twenty metres, alone - He is a tall man so everybody could see him walking. Twenty metres behind him the Austrian ministers and government and officials. But he went alone, alone. And then dignitaries and heads of states from many countries and then ... and Arafat was among them and we were as a delegation among them. So we went. The touching thing was that when we went to the head offices of the party, of the Socialist party, there were thousands of people really crying and weeping, I am not lying. And then we went to the burial, dressed to the ceremony. And then I got an invitation from Margit to come to Armbrustergasse in the evening. A group of about a hundred close friends. And I was among them. I was the only Israeli.

BT: Was Arafat there?

LE: Wait. I am coming to that. Because I think, it finishes this part. I told Margit I want to see ... At that time - it was about two days after the Iraqis invaded Kuwait - and we heard already that the PLO is backing Saddam Hussein. And I told Margit, if I can see Arafat at this place, I think it is worthwhile. So I came there in the evening on

the day of the funeral. And Kreisky's son, he knew me, and he brought a necktie, nice necktie. He said, „This was a necktie my father loved and he loved you. So take the necktie.“ So it was a present from him. He said, „My father loved you very much.“ It was very touching. And then I asked Margit, „Where is Arafat?“ She said, „He is not here.“ So I said „Who is here from the PLO?“ „Bassam Abu-Sharif“. He is close.“ „So I want to see him.“ „Okay.“ So in Kreisky's house in a corner in a small room, we sat - it was two, three days after the Kuwait invasion started - and he told me, Bassam Abu-Sharif, that Arafat is now in Baghdad. He went from Vienna to Baghdad. He said, „He and we are all for Saddam Hussein and Arafat will go and tell him, tell the world, that we are for Saddam Hussein.“ I told him, „Bassam, what are you doing? You are shooting yourself in the leg! What are you doing - to yourself? Because the Americans will go in and Saddam will be destroyed. And where will you hide yourself?“ He said, „No, no, no. That's a war against imperialism and colonialism and we are on the side of anti-colonials, anti-Americans.“ „What are you doing? What are you doing? Because even then,“ I said, „Russia is no more the Russia it used to be, the Soviet Union. And America is a superpower. Why are you rushing to this crazy man, to be with him? You have to be in some part close to the West. That is, where your fortune lies.“ And then I told him, „Look, we are sitting in the house of Dr. Kreisky, who was so much for talks. And he is a man of the West“, I told him. And he said, „No, no, no.“ I said, „Look, then we don't have anything to talk with each other, after the war.“ He said, „No, no, no, but we have to talk, we have to talk.“ „What shall we talk about? You are bringing yourself to square one with this crazy folly of yours.“ And we parted with this. Now we shouted at each other.

BT: Did Kreisky ever tell you in his last meetings what he thought will happen with the Palestinians? I mean, did he really believe that they will get their state, one day?

LE: He definitely believed that. But you know, he, like Mendès-France, they were all for a future state for the Palestinians, solving the problem through negotiations, but I think Kreisky, even later than Mendès-France, because Mendès-France did not want even to see them, before they say he recommends Israel to meet them. And Kreisky did. But I think at certain times they got on his nerves, the Palestinians. They got on his nerves. And he understood that he has got the Israelis, who are difficult and to his mind wrong in their whole approach, but he - I think he saw after a good many years, that the other side, the Palestinians, had illogical, a lot of crazy elements among them. So he didn't think that it will come about easy. No, he didn't have that illusion.

BT: Okay, thank you, Lowa.