

Oslo

Dream and Death



High Hopes

Holy Grail

Prelude

- Madrid
 - From 30 October to 1 November 1991 hosted by Spain and co-sponsored by the United States and the Soviet Union.
 - It was an attempt to revive the Israeli-Palestinian peace process through negotiations, as well as Arab countries, including Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.

Decisions-Misjudgments

- Rabin knew of Pere's efforts.
- Labor-led government faced scandal.
- Concluded negotiations perhaps sooner than planned.
- U.S. did not believe process because did not believe Peres.
 - Rabin ONLY conduct F.P. of Israel
- PLO's repeated promise to subdue and control Hamas and Islamic Jihad = terrorism.



Decisions-Neoclassical

- PLO, Israeli recognition paramount for Arafat = domestic support amongst Arabs
- Rabin outmaneuver Peres
- Fit the agreed “Gaza First” (interim) policy of Israeli negotiation
 - Self-interest



Crisis Sought Solution

- PLO, largely ignored by Arab states seeking 'legitimacy' especially Arafat who is fighting internal (Abbas) and (Hamas) attacks on leadership.
- Rabin facing scandal (soon after election victory of 1992), fighting Labor rival Peres for influence.
- Israeli public "tired" of status quo and hopeful since Madrid.

Mediation

- U.S. late actor (September 1993/January 1)
 - Madrid 1991
- Norway change agent
 - neutral and private
- Pursuit of “holy grail”
 - Clinton = Don Quixote

Hope

- In late August 1992, Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres briefed American Secretary of State Warren Christopher about a 'breakthrough' in Oslo.
- Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), through Norwegian mediation, were on the brink of signing an agreement 'on principles'.
- Since early 1992, the new Labour government in Israel looked for alternatives after Madrid stagnated. It found a willing partner in the once again diplomatically marginalized PLO leadership in Tunis.
- In accompanying letters, the PLO recognized 'the right of the State of Israel to exist in peace and security', while Israel recognized the PLO as 'the representative of the Palestinian people'. The Declaration of Principles was followed by a series of agreements, referred to as the Oslo Accords.

Historic Moment

- On September 13, 1993, on the White House lawn, the two former enemies, flanked by President Bill Clinton, signed a historic "declaration of principles" (DOP) pledging to pursue a peaceful resolution to the nearly century-old conflict between their two peoples.
- "All Too Human" by George Stephanopoulos
- "Making Peace with the PLO: The Rabin Government's Road to the Oslo Accord" by David Makovsky

The Accords

- The [Paris Protocol](#) of 29 April 1994 (detailed economic arrangements)
- The [Gaza-Jericho Agreement](#) of 4 May 1994 (establishment of an interim Palestinian government: the Palestinian National Authority, PNA)
- The [Interim Agreement](#) of 28 September 1995 (including a timetable for a phased Israeli withdrawal, creation of three types of administrative zones, A, B, and C, with exclusive or shared Israeli/Palestinian military and administrative powers, elections for a Palestinian Legislative Council, the Parliament of the PNA, and for a PNA President)
 - Source: <http://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/foreignpolicy/peace/guide/pages/the%20israeli-palestinian%20interim%20agreement.aspx>

Public Opinon

- Israel has a multitude of opinions and views of the peace process that vary across time as well as across society.
- Right-wing opinions (both secular and religious) which believe Israel should not concede to Palestinian demands and instead should maintain the original Zionist vision of Israel.
- Then there are those that hold left-wing viewpoints that believe Palestinians should have a sovereign state and Israel needs to go further in compromising to create peace;
- and there is a spread of people in between with varied views
- “Scars of War, Wounds of Peace: The Israeli-Arab Tragedy” by Shlomo Ben-Ami

- The issue of settlements throws up the particular and fairly extreme view of the religious-right in Israel at the time that believed negotiating over territory and the possibility of Palestinian self-rule in the religiously symbolic territories undermined what it meant to be Israeli.
- Settlers also viewed the peace process at this point as a threat due to the possibility that their homes and livelihoods would be at risk.
- Citizens outside the nationalist right the period around the Oslo Accords represented a time when negotiation over territory became acceptable on the understanding that the alternative was the probability that Israel would have to lose either its liberal democracy or Zionist identity.

- When the agreement was first publicized in September, 1993, it won increasing support for eight months, until April, 1994.
- With the publication of the accords, support reached 53%, with 45% opposed.
 - That support rose to 61% (31 % opposed) after the actual signing of the agreement.
 - Two months later (19-11-93), with an increase in terrorist activities, support was down to 48% and it fell even lower, on 25-6-94, to 35% in support, 63% against, after Yasser Arafat's "Jihad" speech in Johannesburg and the killing of two Israeli soldiers in Gaza.
- Source: Palestine-Israel Journal 'Israeli Public Opinion Polls on the Peace Process'

Criticism

- Edward Said: “Palestinian capitulation”
 - <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v15/n20/edward-said/the-morning-after>
- Avi Shlaim: “redrawn the geopolitical map”
 - <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v15/n20/avi-shlaim/arafats-camel>
- “Is the Peace Process a Process for Peace? A Retrospective Analysis of Oslo” By Elaine Hagopian, Elaine *Arab Studies Quarterly* (ASQ), Vol. 19, No. 3, Summer 1997

Israel's disjointed approach towards the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip, continued even after the election of Yitzhak Rabin as prime minister and the return to power of the Labour Party in 1992. The following year, Rabin, alongside Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, signed a series of agreements with the Palestine Liberation Authority (PLO) known as the Oslo Accords. The accords paved the way for the creation of a Palestinian Authority in parts of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and were seen as precursors to ending of the Arab-Israeli conflict; on the back of the accords Israel and Jordan signed a peace agreement in 1995 and Jordan relinquished its claim to the West Bank to the PLO. Despite the optimism these accords generated, they did not deal with any of the main issues: Jerusalem, refugees, borders, settlements and sovereignty. The hope was that these would be resolved at some point in the future. It was, therefore, not surprising that the accords failed to produce the desired peace, and instead ushered in a new and more violent stage in the conflict. Israel has mostly placed the onus for the failure of the accords on the Palestinians, and in particular on Hamas and its use of terrorism, which included suicide bombing and the indiscriminate firing of rockets. Nevertheless, it is clear that the accords were deeply flawed. They provided Palestinians with administrative autonomy over, depending on the period, between 3 per cent and 18 per cent of the West Bank, and limited Palestinian administrative control over a further 20 per cent, resulting in islands of Palestinian limited autonomy within an overall Israeli-controlled West Bank. Additionally, Israel's own actions directly sabotaged the accords: several large new settlements were created and settler numbers doubled during the Oslo period; for most Palestinians, Oslo came to signify more rather than less occupation.

The entire international community saw it the UN's way. Western democracies rejected the idea of Palestinian nationhood; so did the great Arab-supporting Soviets, and even the Arab world recoiled at the idea of giving Palestinians a state.

Professor Karsh relates how the Hashemite rulers of Jordan viewed this as a mortal threat to their own kingdom, while the Saudis saw it as a potential source of extremism and instability. Pan-Arab nationalists were as adamantly opposed, having their own designs on the region. In 1974, Syrian President Hafez al Assad openly referred to Palestine as *"not only a part of the Arab homeland but a basic part of southern Syria."*

But what of the Palestinians themselves? If no one wanted them to have a state perhaps the Palestinians yearned for sovereignty? Not a bit of it. For a really fine lesson attend the history class of Zahir Muhsein, one-time head of the PLO Military Department and member of the PLO Executive.

"In reality, today there is no difference between Jordanians, Palestinians, Syrians and Lebanese. Only for political and tactical reasons do we speak about the existence of a Palestinian people, since Arab national interests demand that we posit the existence of a distinct Palestinian people to oppose Zionism. However, the moment we reclaim our right to all of Palestine, we will not wait even a minute to unite Palestine and Jordan."

We've no reason to gape – unless we'd bunked the class of 48-50, attended by ever diligent Professor Karsh.

“The collapse and dispersion of Palestinian society following the 1948 defeat shattered an always fragile communal fabric, and ...prevented the crystallization of a national identity. Host Arab regimes actively colluded in discouraging it. Upon occupying the West Bank ... King Abdallah moved quickly to erase all traces of Palestinian identity...”

As for the Arab inhabitants of Gaza, no one gave them a second thought. We don't rightly know if Gazans wanted to be citizens of Egypt, but for the occupying power that option would have been the furthest thing on its mind.

But the Oslo Accords changed everything – did they not? By paving the way for a Palestinian Authority (PA) did the Accords not anticipate a state in the making? It would seem not.

“Since we cannot defeat Israel in war, we do this in stages. We take any and every territory that we can of Palestine, and establish a sovereignty there, and we use it as a springboard to take more. When the time comes we can get the Arab nations to join us for the final blow against Israel.”

Thus spoke Yasser Arafat on Jordanian TV on September 13, 1993 - the very day he signed the Oslo Accords on the White House Lawn and shook hands.

Conclusions

- The Oslo Accords, along with the many successive initiatives derived from it, has defined virtually all aspects of Israeli-Palestinian relations ever since.
- Oslo also came to define America's approach to the conflict. Yet, its remarkable longevity stands as a testament not to Oslo's utility, but to its failure.

- Palestinian territory was further fragmented by the elaborate network of Israeli checkpoints and internal closures that proliferated throughout the West Bank in the wake of the Palestinian uprising that began in 2000.
- The 2001 intifada, marked a new phase in the Oslo process.
- The violence associated with the intifada — including numerous suicide bombings that both hardened Israelis and isolated the Palestinian leadership diplomatically — along with Israel's violent response to it, helped to accelerate the PA's demise.
- In addition to the heavy human toll on both sides, the second intifada witnessed the physical destruction and dismantling of the PA's infrastructure and governing institutions.