

Arab-Israeli Peace Agreements

Eli E. Hertz

Between 1993 and 2001, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Palestinian Authority (PA) signed six agreements with Israel and conducted countless meetings and summits to bring about a lasting peace between them.

Each Israeli concession was met with Palestinian non-compliance and escalating violence. Six times, Palestinians failed to honor their commitments and increased their anti-Israeli aggressions. Finally, they broke every promise they made and began an all-out guerrilla war against Israel and its citizens.

The failure of the Palestinian leadership to be earnest and trustworthy stands in stark contrast to the statesmanship exhibited by Israel's peace partners in the region: the late Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and the late Jordanian King Hussein, both of whom honored their agreements.

Although Israel succeeded in reaching historic peace agreements with Egypt and Jordan, when the time came to negotiate with the Palestinians in the territories, the Israelis discovered the Palestinian Arabs were unable or unwilling to choose peace or honor their given word.

Despite numerous agreements, the pattern has always been the same: The Palestinians violate the conditions and commitments of virtually every agreement they sign.

The Camp David Accords

The 1979 Camp David Accords brought peace between Israel and Egypt. Because of Egypt's key leadership role in the Arab world and the clauses in the peace treaty relating to Palestinian autonomy, the Camp David Accords were a breakthrough which offered a framework for a comprehensive settlement. The Palestinians, however, failed to respond positively to this window of opportunity.

On March 26, 1979, Israel and Egypt took the first step toward a peace agreement between the Arab world and Israel when they signed the historic Camp David Accords on the White House lawn. The name of the peace treaty reflected the fact that the breakthrough between Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin took place in September 1978 at the U.S. presidential retreat, Camp David. They were guests of U.S. President Jimmy Carter, who acted as the facilitator. The summit took place less than a year after Sadat made his historic trip to Israel and

addressed the Israeli parliament (the Knesset) in Jerusalem. That symbolic act made Sadat the first Arab leader to recognize the Jewish state's right to exist, 30 years after Israel declared its independence.

Peace with Egypt consisted of two accords. One was the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel, which finally ended the 1948 War with Egypt and normalized diplomatic relations. In exchange, Israel withdrew from the Sinai Peninsula captured during the Six-Day War, a war that begun when Egypt imposed a blockade of the Straits of Tiran, dismissed the UN forces serving as a buffer between Egypt and Israel, and moved its troops into Sinai, massing on the Israeli border.

The second accord – and the more complicated of the two – dealt with prospects for a comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East with other parties – including 'representatives of the Palestinian people.' It established a 'framework' designed to settle such issues as the future of the West Bank (Judea and Samaria) and Gaza, based on *limited autonomy for the Palestinian Arabs living in the Territories*. By agreeing to conclude a separate peace with Israel, Sadat exhibited tremendous courage and leadership by breaking with other Arab states, a step that ultimately cost him his life.

Despite the promise of self-rule proffered by the Camp David Accords – the first concrete offer in decades – the PLO denounced them because they failed to call for an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza. Other Arab nations blasted the treaty and branded Sadat a traitor to the Arab world. They imposed economic and political sanctions against Egypt, suspended it from the Arab League, and ousted Egypt from the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries.¹

The Madrid Conference

The 1991 Madrid Conference marked an important step forward: Israelis and Arabs met face-to-face. For decades, the Arabs had refused to meet with Israelis, their sworn enemies, in face-to-face negotiations. Little real progress was made, except that negotiations with Jordan, renewed at a later point, led to the 1994 peace treaty between Israel and Jordan.

The conference was sparked by the 1991 Gulf War. The U.S. Department of State reasoned that cooperation between the United States and Arab countries during that war signaled a change in the Middle East and sought to use it as leverage to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict. After the Gulf War, U.S. Secretary of State James Baker pressed Israel and its Arab neighbors to agree to an international conference to launch direct negotiations between Israel and each of its Arab neighbors.

Held at the royal palace in Madrid, Spain, between October 30 and November 1, 1991, all parties accepted the 1979 Camp David Accords and two UN resolutions: 242 – which set forth the principle of "land for peace," and 338 – which called for "direct negotiations" as the framework for talks.

Delegations from Israel, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan attended. The Jordanian delegation included Palestinian Arab representatives from the West Bank and Gaza who had not

been involved in terrorist activities (that is, they were *not* from the Tunis-based PLO). The talks were to follow three ‘tracks’ – Syrian, Lebanese, and Jordanian, culminating in peace treaties that would resolve the issues, including the future boundaries of Israel, the status of the Territories and the populations – Jewish and Arab – living in them.

The Madrid Conference put in motion the process that led to a peace treaty between Jordan and Israel, but it ultimately failed to produce results on the Lebanese, Syrian, or Palestinian tracks.² Talks with Syria led nowhere. Talks with Lebanon, which put an Israeli withdrawal from the security zone in southern Lebanon on the table in exchange for Lebanon’s assurance of peace along Israel’s northern border, also failed. Those peace efforts were undercut by Syria’s interference in Lebanese affairs and its support of Hezbollah extremists, who continued to attack Israeli forces in southern Lebanon. Although Israel was willing to discuss limited self-rule for the Palestinians in the Territories, Palestinian delegates demanded full sovereignty over the entire West Bank and Gaza. However, they lacked authorization to speak for all Palestinians and were given no latitude to deviate from the PLO’s hard-line positions.³

The Oslo Accords

The 1993 Oslo Accords marked a potential turning point, which dead-ended when the Palestinians refused to live up to their commitments and held to their zero-sum hard line, rejecting the very notion of compromise.

When attempts to reach a live-and-let-live solution with Palestinians in the Territories failed to produce results at Madrid, Israel decided to try the ‘PLO track’ as a default option. Most Palestinians at the time and others in the Arab world regarded the PLO as the sole representative of the Palestinian people. It remained unclear whether the PLO could transform itself from a terrorist organization into a responsible political body. Secret negotiations culminated in the 1993 Oslo Accords. *In retrospect, it is evident that the PLO was not earnestly seeking compromise; it was only seeking a better base from which to continue attacking Israel.*

The agreement signed by Israel and the PLO known as the Oslo Accords was named for the secret talks held between the PLO and the Israeli envoys in Oslo, Norway. The official agreement was titled the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements (the DoP is also called “Oslo I” and the second was dubbed ‘Oslo II,’ though those negotiations took place elsewhere).

At the time, the Oslo Accords were viewed as a historic breakthrough in the Arab-Israeli conflict, perhaps even more so than the agreement between Egypt and Israel, because of its potential it held for a comprehensive peace between Israel and the Arab world. Arab leaders had long maintained that peace hinged on accommodations between Israelis and Palestinians.⁴

The agreement was signed on the White House lawn on September 13, 1993 by Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres and PLO Executive Council Member Abu Abbas in front of almost 3,000 dignitaries and ended in the famous handshake between PLO Chairman Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

After three years of secret talks in Oslo, on August 31, 1993, the Israeli government approved, in principle, a plan for interim Palestinian self-rule in Palestinian Arab communities in the West Bank and Gaza. On September 9, Arafat sent a letter to Rabin stating for the first time that the PLO recognized Israel's right to exist in peace and security. In his letter, Arafat also renounced terrorism and other acts of violence, pledging to repeal clauses in the PLO National Charter that called for Israel's destruction. In return, Rabin signed a letter recognizing the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people, accepting the PLO as a negotiating partner.

The Oslo Accords called for a five-year interim period of Palestinian self-governance at the municipal level, with the scheduling of negotiations on the permanent status of the Territories to begin no later than the third year of the interim period. Permanent status arrangements were to take effect at the end of the five-year period. During that interim period, elections were to be held in a newly established Palestinian Council or legislative body. The Israeli military was to withdraw gradually from populated Palestinian areas, while continuing to protect Israeli settlements in the Territories. Israeli military control and civil administration in Palestinian areas was to be transferred to authorized Palestinian Arabs who would become responsible for a variety of functions, including municipal services and the machinery to combat Palestinian terrorism through a strong Palestinian police force and special counterterrorism units. In short, Palestinian Arabs would take control of all their own internal affairs. In the *New York Times*, the agreement was heralded as "a triumph of hope over history."⁵

Two more agreements intended to implement the Accords followed. The first – the May 4, 1994 Gaza Jericho Agreement signed in Cairo - allowed Arafat and the PLO to travel from Tunis to establish Palestinian autonomy in two limited areas. This was designed to test the Palestinians' and the PLO's intentions and set up a program for step-by-step extension of autonomy under a Palestinian Authority that the PLO would establish. The second – the August 29, 1994 Agreement on the Preparatory Transfer of Powers and Responsibilities signed at the checkpoint between Gaza and Israel - extended Palestinian self-rule over health, education, welfare and additional fiscal affairs for all Arabs in the West Bank and Gaza.

The first challenge Arafat faced was reining in Palestinians who refused to abide by the agreement.⁶ Despite his pledge to crack down on terrorists, Arafat failed the first test of leadership as a peace partner. In retrospect, we can see it is a role he never planned to play. Instead of confronting terrorists, he concluded a series of *hudnas*, or tactical truces, with rival Islamic elements to prevent a showdown. That led to a tacit division of labor where the PA covered the diplomatic front and radical Islamic groups continued to carry out terrorist attacks.

Israel faced a "Trojan Horse," an ancient metaphor borrowed by PLO leaders while still in Tunis. The Palestinians' real intention was to destroy Israel, stage-by-stage, using the Palestinian Authority to establish a platform from which they could attack Israel.⁷ The scope of Palestinian terrorism following Oslo escalated to unprecedented levels,⁸ including systematic targeting of civilians in wave after wave of suicide bombings. Incredibly, the number of Israelis killed by terrorists in the two years following the signing of "Oslo I" was equal to the number of casualties from terrorism in the preceding decade.

Israeli peace architects clung to the hope that these were only temporary setbacks, birth pangs in a breakthrough peace process. Jewish victims of suicide bombings, drive-by shootings and other terrorist acts were labeled 'victims of peace' (*korbanot hashalom* in Hebrew) by Israeli doves. Such Orwellian terminology could not mask or change realities. The window of opportunity opened at Camp David and Oslo, intended to demonstrate the Palestinians' political maturity and ability to self-govern, was slowly closing. The Palestinians' perversions and outright violations of commitments, in spirit and substance, grew steadily. Among the most blatant Palestinian violations during the first two years of self-rule under "Oslo I"⁹ were:

- *Failure to accept Israel's existence*: Constantly referring (in Arabic) to a "phase strategy" designed to use self-administered areas as a base of operations to destroy Israel; comparing Oslo to a historic treaty made and broken by the Prophet Mohammed once it was expedient; continuing to use maps, insignia, and terminology presenting Israel proper as "Occupied Palestine"; disseminating inflammatory and fallacious material that denied Jewish nationhood and Jewish historic roots in the Land of Israel.
- *Failure to take 'all measures necessary against terrorism'*: Refraining from disarming lawless militias or even closing their training camps; refusing to outlaw organizations that championed and carried out terrorist acts (including Hamas and Islamic Jihad); seeking reconciliation with such rivals who openly aided, abetted and carried out terrorist acts - in essence, adopting a *modus operandi* that allowed some Palestinians to attack Israel while others negotiated.
- *Failure to change the PLO Covenant*: Using a string of excuses and provisos to postpone the vote time and again so that the pledge to remove from the PLO Covenant clauses denying Israel's right to exist was never fulfilled; likewise, failing to annul clauses calling for an armed struggle to destroy Israel and the denial of Israel's right to exist.
- *Failure to repudiate terrorism and violence and refrain from anti-Israeli propaganda*: Constantly calling for a *jihād* (holy war), praising terrorists as heroes and Hamas leaders as brothers, while vilifying Israel in demonic, antisemitic terms on Palestinian media channels; under self-governance, transforming public schools into factories that inculcate hatred of Israel and Jews and nurture a 'cult of death' in children, instead of promoting peace education as they promised.
- *Failure to extradite or discipline terrorists*: Procrastinating in arrest of suspected terrorists who found asylum in Palestinian Authority areas; or apprehending them and then refusing to extradite them to Israel; abusing the terms of the agreement that allowed the Palestinian Authority to prosecute and sentence perpetrators by conducting bogus 'quickie trials' and establishing jails with revolving doors.
- *Failure to abide by limitations placed on the Palestinian Authority's police force*: Failing to provide Israel with a full list of police personnel and register all weapons as required; accepting former terrorists into the force who were specifically barred from serving under the terms of the agreement.
- *Failure to respect human rights and the rule of law*: Creating a police state where the number of security personnel per capita (police, preventive security personnel, etc.) was frightening in scope and where strong arm tactics, torture, and intimidation of citizenry

was rampant and where lack of due process and lack of freedom of the press for Palestinians was endemic.¹⁰

- *Failure to adopt transparent methods of funding and honest governmental procedures:* Ignoring the norms of honest governance they promised to uphold, misusing foreign aid, resulting in widespread corruption and graft among Palestinian Authority officials and governing institutions. Far from improving average Palestinians' standard of living, standards plummeted under self-rule as Arafat and his cronies grew rich: *Forbes* magazine's 17th annual survey (2003) of the richest people in the world shows Arafat has used his position to amass a personal fortune estimated at \$300 million, stashed away in Swiss banks. Ranked among heads of state, Arafat's personal fortune was reported to be one notch below that of the Queen of England.¹¹

The Jordanian-Israeli Peace Treaty

The 1994 Jordanian-Israeli Peace Treaty was made possible by the sense of optimism created by Oslo. But the momentum did not carry over into peace agreements with Syria, Lebanon ... or the Palestinians.

Just over a year after the historic Oslo Accords were signed, on October 26, 1994, Israel and Jordan signed a full peace treaty. As with the Oslo Accords, secret talks were held beforehand between the two heads of state, Israel's Prime Minister Rabin and Jordan's King Hussein, who met in Washington that summer and agreed to reopen bilateral negotiations which had been suspended since the 1991 Madrid Conference.¹²

The primary drive behind Jordan's overture was the hope for a peace dividend. Jordan's port on the Red Sea, Aqaba, had served as a primary port for Iraqi imports and exports, but the international embargo on trade with Iraq in the wake of the 1991 Gulf War dealt a crushing blow to the Jordanian economy. Jordan hoped peace with Israel would bolster its economy by increasing trade with Israel. It also anticipated that a peace agreement would bring additional American aid (which it did). The agreement meant peace along Israel's longest border. In some respects, it was the one agreement with an Arab state that could have been predicted. Jordan remained neutral during the 1973 Yom Kippur War and for most of its history had earnestly tried to prevent incursions into Israel from Jordanian soil.

King Hussein would no doubt have made peace earlier if not for Jordan's weak position in the Arab world and Jordan's problematic demographics. Palestinians, at various junctures, have constituted 60 percent to 80 percent¹³ of the Jordanian population, and many opposed peace with Israel. Indeed, a Palestinian extremist assassinated Hussein's grandfather King Abdullah in 1951, and two Jordanian prime ministers were assassinated for favoring peace with Israel. Hussein and Rabin had developed a warm relationship and a deep trust over the course of numerous unpublicized meetings. To a large extent, peace with Jordan was a question of timing.

Peace with Jordan has been the most normalized and the warmest peace, despite the fact that it was signed during an upsurge in Palestinian terrorism and met considerable opposition by Jordan's intelligentsia.¹⁴ Unlike Arafat, Hussein boldly stood up for peace

against the sentiments of many of his own Palestinian subjects, personally making a condolence call to the parents of children killed by a Jordanian soldier to ask forgiveness, while Arafat vacillated between remaining mum and praising the perpetrators of similar acts. Although dying of cancer, the king even left his sickbed in a last attempt to use his good auspices to save the fate of peace talks between Israelis and Palestinians.

The Taba Agreement (“Oslo II”)

Despite the Palestinian Authority’s failure to honor its commitments in “Oslo I,” Israel decided to give the Palestinians a second chance in 1995 in Taba, with an additional agreement (“Oslo II”)¹⁵ to concede territory and move the peace process forward. The Palestinians responded by escalating terrorism and adding new violations to a mounting list of unfulfilled promises.

The 1995 Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip is often referred to as “Oslo II” because it revised and reiterated a host of obligations set forth in “Oslo I” that had never been fulfilled. It took the concept of Palestinian autonomy forward by transferring more authority and land to Palestinian rule. Despite growing uneasiness with Palestinian non-compliance in honoring both the spirit and substance of the “Oslo I” terms, Israel made a leap of faith by offering self-rule to the overwhelming majority of Palestinians, assuming that once the PLO had more territorial control (and more to lose), their dedication to peace would improve.

Also known as the Taba Agreement, because it was signed in Taba, Egypt, on September 24, 1995, “Oslo II” established a detailed schedule for further redeployment of Israeli troops beyond the ‘Jericho and Gaza First’ enclaves – a process set in motion by the 1993 Declaration of Principles.¹⁶ The agreement divided the West Bank and Gaza into three zones, classified as Areas A, B and C:

- **Area A:** Gaza and Jericho, as well as seven major Palestinian cities on the West Bank, for which the Palestinian Authority took full responsibility, including internal security and public order.
- **Area B:** 450 Arab towns and villages in the West Bank where the Palestinian Authority took over civic functions, while Israel continued to control security.
- **Area C:** Rural and unpopulated areas of the West Bank that Israel considered strategically important to its own defense; Israeli settlements in the Territories also remained the exclusive responsibility of Israel, as set forth in previous agreements.

The Palestinian Authority, however, failed to comply with the terms of “Oslo I” listed above – violations compounded by its non-compliance with the terms of ‘Oslo II,’ including major new violations:

- *Failure to revise the Palestinian National Covenant:* Arafat made a travesty of his obligation in Gaza, when he pretended to annul the Covenant in the presence of President Bill Clinton, in a manner contrary to the process stipulated in the Covenant itself, by merely staging a spectacle without legal validity.

- *Failure to prevent terrorist attacks:* Non-compliance continued parallel to terrorist attacks. Failing to act, Palestinian forces began to express openly their support of terrorists at demonstrations by firing weapons in the air, then using those weapons to threaten and even kill members of joint patrols. The most memorable case was a two-day rampage in September 1996 when Palestinian police turned their weapons against Israeli soldiers, leaving 13 members of the Israel Defense Force dead.
- *Failure to guarantee religious freedom:* Despite pledging to respect their integrity and provide free access to Jewish holy sites in areas transferred to the Palestinian Authority, Palestinians burned down the ancient *Shalom al Yisrael* (“Peace Upon Israel”) synagogue in Jericho and smashed to rubble Joseph’s Tomb on the outskirts of Nablus, declaring that a mosque would be built on the site.
- *Failure to limit the size and firepower of the Palestinian Authority police force:* The Palestinian Authority equipped its police force with massive quantities of ammunition and contraband weaponry, the quantity and quality of which was prohibited under the agreement. Between 1995 and 2000, the PA violated the terms of the treaty by increasing the size of the force from 36,000 to 40,000, vastly more than the 12,000 originally envisioned as a ‘strong police force,’ and far above the 24,000 ultimately agreed upon in “Oslo I” or the 30,000 Israel acquiesced to retroactively in October 1995 in ‘Oslo II,’ hoping that a greater force would fight terrorism.¹⁷ In essence, the Palestinian Authority built an infantry force larger than that maintained by the IDF, a genuine military force (which the Accords clearly prohibited) rather than a police force.
- *Failure to halt terrorism:* The Palestinian Authority police force did not prevent terrorist acts launched by Hamas and others. In September 2000 when Arafat launched all-out guerrilla warfare against Israel, PA police turned into combatants and Palestinian preventive security forces became terror management operators, secretly directing and funding attacks on Israel with money funneled from senior Palestinian Authority leaders. Ultimately, the Palestinian police became perpetrators. In November 2000 an Israeli officer was murdered when Palestinian officials planted a bomb against a wall separating joint Palestinian and Israeli offices, used for synchronizing cooperative security details and transferring essential goods and commodities to Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip.

Five More Attempts to ‘Make Oslo Work’

From January 1997 through August 2000, five more attempts to make Oslo work. They included an Israeli withdrawal from 80 percent of Hebron, an unprecedented offer of statehood and a proposal to give the Palestinians about 95 percent of the West Bank in an attempt to hammer out a final status agreement at Camp David.

Attempt #1: The 1997 Hebron Agreement

Hebron was the last city in the West Bank to be turned over to Palestinian control. It required a special arrangement because a major Jewish holy site (the Tomb of the

Patriarchs) is in the heart of the city and because it is the only city on the West Bank where there is a modern Jewish community (all seven other West Bank cities are purely Palestinian). Hebron, along with Jerusalem, Safed and Tiberias, was one of the four holy cities where religious Jews have lived from time immemorial. That distinction changed in 1929 when Arab residents massacred the Jewish community, killing 70, including entire families. The British evacuated the 700 survivors to Jerusalem for safety and never allowed Jews to rebuild the Hebron Jewish community. Four decades later, after the 1967 Six-Day War, Jews resettled in Hebron. While most of the returnees (approximately 5,000) live in a separate Israeli community called Kiryat Arba just outside Hebron, 450 Jewish settlers live in the center of the city – the site of the ancient Jewish community near the Tomb of the Patriarchs – surrounded by some 150,000 Arab residents.

Hebron required special arrangements to mitigate tension caused by the city's history of violence and religious conflict. That included a massacre of 29 Muslim worshippers in Hebron by a lone Israeli terrorist in 1994. Protocols under the Hebron Agreement included temporarily stationing European observers in Hebron on the seam between Arab and Jewish neighborhoods. The provision for further negotiation and redeployment of Israeli troops, included in the 1995 "Oslo II" Accords, was spelled out in the Protocol Concerning Redeployment in Hebron signed on January 17, 1997. It called for three phases to be carried out over a year's time, including an Israeli withdrawal from 80 percent of Hebron - though the Palestinian Authority wanted a full withdrawal.

Despite a change of government in Israel as a result of the 1996 elections, Israel's commitment to withdraw from 80 percent of Hebron was honored by the newly elected Likud-led government, despite continued Palestinian violence and their continued non-compliance with previous obligations.¹⁸

Violence erupted again when Palestinians protested the groundbreaking of a Jewish housing project in Har Homa, overlooking East Jerusalem.¹⁹ Another Palestinian suicide bombing in Tel Aviv became the last straw, and the new Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, postponed further withdrawals beyond Hebron. Among the added Palestinian violations to earlier agreements was the PA's release of Hamas terrorists from PA prisons. Arafat had ordered Palestinian Authority police to stop cooperating with their Israeli counterparts.²⁰

Attempt #2: 1998 Wye River Memorandum

The Wye River Memorandum – so named because it was convened at the Wye River Plantation in Maryland – was an effort by U.S. President Bill Clinton to restart the peace process. Signed on October 23, 1998 by Netanyahu and Arafat, it was intended to resolve issues of size and timing of Israeli redeployment, which Israel had postponed due to the Palestinian Authority's failure to combat terrorism and comply with the terms of earlier agreements.²¹ Netanyahu introduced the concept of 'reciprocity' at Wye River, refusing to offer more concessions until the Palestinian Authority honored its commitments and stopped the violence.²² The reciprocity principle was reflected in a

'trade-off' – restriction of Jewish construction in West Bank settlements to accommodate only natural growth in exchange for a Palestinian Authority pledge to defer its threat to unilaterally declare statehood on May 4, 1999, the date set by "Oslo I" set for *concluding* the peace process. Wye called for a graduated 12-week exchange of 'territory for security.' The Palestinian Authority promised to comply with past commitments and rectify violations in exchange for a phased Israeli withdrawal from another 13 percent of the West Bank. Yet the conditions of Wye were never fully implemented.

Attempt #3: 1999 Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum

The Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum, signed in Egypt on September 4, 1999, was yet another effort to move the peace process forward by using pressure from leaders of Arab countries that had already made peace with Israel. Succeeding Netanyahu, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Arafat signed the Memorandum in the presence of the new monarch of Jordan, King Abdullah II²³ and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, in the presence of U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright.²⁴

The peace process launched with the Oslo Accords in September 1993 had ground to a halt, due largely to Palestinian non-compliance. That led to the Israeli refusal to continue scheduled redeployments as long as its Palestinian partners refused to abide by the agreements, particularly on security issues. Final-status talks, originally scheduled to be completed by May 4, 1999, were rescheduled under the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum. The new date for completion was September 13, 2000. Both sides agreed that a framework for a final status agreement would be established by March 13, 2000, but that date came and went with a series of working-level meetings and shuttle diplomacy that fell short of real expectations.

Attempt #4: August 2000 Camp David 'Final Status' Summit.

When Clinton summoned Barak and Arafat to Camp David in August 2000 for final status talks, Israel made dramatic, unprecedented concessions on virtually every point ever raised in the peace process, including all the major stumbling blocks that had repeatedly defied solutions because of Palestinian refusal to compromise.

According to media reports, Barak made the following offer:

- Establishment of a demilitarized Palestinian state on some 92 percent of the West Bank and 100 percent of the Gaza Strip.
- Dismantlement of most Jewish settlements; uprooting settlers from isolated communities to concentrate the bulk of the settlers inside 8 percent of the West Bank along the Green Line, and annexing this area to Israel in exchange for a transfer of 3 percent of land in Israel proper adjacent to Gaza.
- Establishment of a Palestinian capital in East Jerusalem and sovereignty over half the Old City of Jerusalem (the Muslim and Christian quarters) and 'religious custodianship'

over the Temple Mount; some Arab neighborhoods in Jerusalem would become sovereign Palestinian territory, while others would enjoy 'functional autonomy.'

- A return of Palestinian refugees to the prospective Palestinian state, although no Right of Return to Israel proper would be allowed; generous international assistance to help settle the refugees would be encouraged.

In return, all Israel asked for were two 'concessions':

- An end to violence, and
- A public declaration that the terms of the final settlement marked an 'end of the conflict' and that there would be no more Palestinian claims or additional demands on Israel in the future.

The offer went beyond long-standing Israeli 'red lines,' particularly with regard to Jerusalem and a solution to the Palestinian refugee problem. Barak made it clear this was a *one-time, now-or-never offer* that neither he nor any future Israeli leader would offer again. Yet Arafat walked out, effectively shutting the door on permanent status negotiations.

According to a post-mortem analysis of the Camp David summit conducted by the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs,²⁵ the negotiations were governed by three attributes: They were *hypothetical* (pending agreement in other areas), *oral*, and *conducted through a third party*. "Together, these attributes made Camp David more a 'brainstorming' session than formal negotiations in which the parties move from paragraph to paragraph until they reached complete agreement." Even Abu Mazen admitted the proposals were no more than 'test balloons.' As President Bill Clinton stated on July 25 (the day after the summit closed), negotiations under such conditions could not bind either party or be construed as a 'starting point' for future negotiations: "Under the operating rules that nothing is agreed until everything is agreed, they are, of course, not bound by any proposal discussed at the summit."²⁶ Arafat was aware of the rules of the game and the 'now-or-never' quality of the Israeli offer. Yet Arafat walked out, his actions underscoring Palestinians' refusal to seek compromise or reconciliation.

Shortly thereafter, in September 2000, the *al-Aqsa Intifada* erupted. Subsequently, it became evident that this guerrilla war, launched by the Palestinians, was in the planning stages *prior* to Camp David. It was accompanied by escalation of violence on all fronts, including waves of suicide bombers, ambushes of civilian traffic on the roads, shootings into Jewish neighborhoods in Jerusalem, and rocket attacks from Gaza into civilian settlements in the Negev.

Michael Oren, an Israeli scholar of the Six-Day War and other aspects of modern Israeli history, summed up Camp David and the Palestinian position in an article in the December 2001 issue of *Harper's* magazine: Why did the Palestinians constantly 'lose ground?' Oren asked.

The peace process collapsed not over land but because of the Palestinians' refusal to accept Israel's existence. Historically, it has been that refusal rather than Israel's resistance to compromise that has led to the Palestinians 'losing ground.' Cleaving to it will only cost them more.²⁷

Oren's assessment of responsibility is backed up by Palestinian pronouncements.

In January 1996, Nabil Sha'ath, a senior member of the PA leadership, considered a 'moderate' by Western observers, told a gathering in Nablus:

"We decided to liberate our homeland step-by-step. Should Israel continue [to make concessions] – no problem. If and when Israel says 'enough' we will return to violence. But this time it will be with 30,000 armed Palestinian soldiers..."²⁸

On November 28, 1996, in an official communiqué, Muhammad Dahlan, at that time the PA's security chief responsible for enforcing the 2003 *hudna*, reiterated:

"The Palestinian Authority does not exclude the return to the armed struggle, and it will use its weapons."

The term *hudna* in Arabic refers to a temporary breather for tactical reasons, not a peace pact. Should negotiations ever resume in earnest, the Arabs will no doubt claim that negotiations should begin 'from the point where negotiations broke off,' but there is absolutely no foundation for such a claim.

Attempt #5: 2001 Taba Conference

In 2001 – in the midst of Arafat's War, the *al-Aqsa Intifada*, a last-ditch attempt was made to end hostilities, renew security cooperation and at least theoretically, re-open negotiations. Yet the Palestinians balked again. Against the backdrop of continued Palestinian violence from the *Intifada* and with Israeli elections only a few weeks away, Israeli and Palestinian delegations met one last time at the Egyptian Red Sea resort at Taba between January 22 and January 28, 2001. The Clinton administration had tried unsuccessfully to end the Arab violence and bridge the gaps between the two sides with talks in Washington in December 2000.

With Clinton out of office and George W. Bush just days into his presidency, marathon talks were held at Taba. Israeli PM Barak hoped for a breakthrough peace agreement that would boost his election chances against Ariel Sharon. Four committees were created to discuss Jerusalem, refugees, territory, and security, the key aspects of the peace negotiations.²⁹ The Barak government offered *more* concessions to the Palestinian Arab delegation, but the Palestinians failed to budge from an 'all-or-nothing' stance. Negotiations centered on these issues:

- **Jerusalem:** Israel proposed creating an international regime in an area of Jerusalem that included the Old City, but the Palestinian Arabs rejected this, saying they wanted sovereignty over the entire city.
- **Territories:** Israel proposed giving the Palestinian Arabs 97 percent of the land area of the West Bank, yet no agreement was reached.
- **Refugees:** The two sides discussed the Arab refugees who left Israel in 1948 and the Jews who left Arab countries in the aftermath of the 1948 War of Independence. Palestinians insisted on the Right of Return of all Palestinian Arabs to Israel – a non-starter that would demographically liquidate the Jewish state.

• **Security:** In return, Israel asked for: 1) an end to violence, and 2) a public declaration that the final status agreement would mark an 'end of the conflict' and there would be no more claims on Israel in the future.

The Palestinians preferred armed struggle. A Palestinian state in the West Bank was viewed as a prelude to a Palestinian state from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea. Violence continued, despite American efforts to mediate a truce.³⁰ The Taba Conference ended without an accord – all but spelling an end to the peace process that began in Madrid in 1991.

What Can be Learned from a Post-Mortem of the Oslo Peace Process?

In the two decade that passed since the historic handshake between Arafat and Rabin in 1993, optimistic expectations turned out to be unfounded.

The idea that negotiations, gradual empowerment, and a transfer of territory - 'hope' and 'something to lose' - would prompt the Palestinians to opt for reconciliation and abandonment of such unbending principles as the Right of Return never translated into reality. Israeli concessions only hardened Palestinian positions.

In the wake of Israel's last-ditch effort to save the peace process, and 24 hours after Israel's Minister of Foreign Affairs Ben-Ami tried to mitigate the gap by optimistically announcing that peace was nevertheless within the parties' grasp, Arafat responded with a speech at the Davos World Economic Forum on January 28, 2001 that symbolically buried the Oslo Accords for good.

In a bellicose diatribe filled with lies and venom, he accused Israel of "fascist aggression" while the Palestinians continued their massive onslaught on Israeli civilians and service personnel.³¹ For Barak, this was the last straw: the Prime Minister announced he would not meet with Arafat again before elections (which he lost to Sharon, anyway).

Barak's political fate was reminiscent of Bill Clinton's response when Arafat called the outgoing president to thank him for his efforts on behalf of peace: "You are a great man," Arafat told Clinton, three days before the U.S. president left office, according to *Newsweek*.³² "The hell I am," Clinton replied. "I'm a colossal failure and you made me one." The exchange was reportedly described at a New York dinner party where Clinton went on to characterize Arafat as an aging leader who relishes his own sense of victimhood and his incapability to sign a final peace deal. "He could only get to step five, and he needed to get to step 10," Clinton said, laying the blame entirely at Arafat's door.

Refusal to Negotiate in Good Faith

The Palestinians' refusal to negotiate in good faith shows that they are more interested in perpetuating war with Israel than in finding a way to peacefully live with their Jewish neighbors.

The leaders of Egypt and Jordan took bold steps toward peace, transcending a history of refusal to recognize Israel. Their brethren living in the West Bank and Gaza, however, have refused to exhibit similar courage. Given repeated chances to return to the negotiating table, offered unprecedented tangible concessions by Israeli governments, both Right and Left, the Palestinians refuse to live in peace with Israel. Instead they create obstacle after obstacle and adopt terror as their means of communication with their Israeli neighbors.

Failing to make political gains through three years of guerrilla warfare and a decade of violence, Palestinians, under the short-lived premiership of Abu Mazen, seemed to have returned to a more subtle form of their phase-strategy. They demanded Israel release all Palestinians apprehended for terrorist activities - as if terror never happened. This behavior is reminiscent of Palestinian demands in 1948 - that Israel ignore the war of aggression launched by Palestinians. The change of tactics did not mean acceptance of Israel and abandonment of the Right of Return, only a reversal to that strategy by a different and longer route.

This moderate Munich-style view – to achieve an independent state and then continue to make further demands – was expressed by the late Faysal al-Husseini (considered by many Israeli doves to be a moderate), who, several months after the outbreak of the *Intifada*, told a forum of Arab lawyers in January 2001 in Beirut:³³

“There is a difference between the strategic goal of the Palestinian people, who are not willing to give up even one grain of Palestinian soil, and the political [tactical] effort that has to do with the [present] balance of power and with the nature of the present international system. The latter is a different effort from the former. We may lose or win [tactically], but our eyes will continue to aspire to the strategic goal, namely, to Palestine from the river to the sea. Whatever we get now cannot make us forget this supreme truth.”

Dr. Boaz Ganor, executive director of the International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism in Herzliya, stresses that Palestinian acceptance of the 2003 “road map” (proposed by the United States, the UN, the European Union and Russia) amounted to part of the ‘strategy of stages’ meant to lead to the eventual elimination of Israel, though not necessarily by violent means alone.³⁴ That strategy, according to Ganor, is built on a three-phase approach, starting with the establishment of an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip; followed by the overthrow of the Hashemite regime in Jordan whose population consists of a vast Palestinian majority; and ending with the unification of both banks of the Jordan River. The third stage would be “a change of rhetorical tacks” from claiming that Israel is a conquering colonialist state to branding Israel a racist ‘apartheid’ state that must become ‘a state of all its citizens,’ eliminating Israel as a Jewish state.

Others believe the last stage will be a wholesale military assault on Israel, once the Arabs have gained a strong enough foothold in western Palestine. In either case, the result is not peace, but rather a recipe for pocide or the death of the only free, democratic state in the Middle East.

Scrutiny of Palestinian behavior *prior* to the 1993 Oslo Accords indicates that this impasse is not a quirk or temporary stumbling block. Unfortunately, the Palestinians’

current behavior, the Palestinian Authority's failure to live up to its promises and its insistence on a winner-take-all solution using indiscriminate terrorism to achieve its objectives, rests on a long tradition of rejectionism that has stymied countless attempts to find a live-and-let-live solution. A philosophy of rejectionism has been played out through a combination of uncompromising diplomacy and repeated use of violence, time and again, *over a period of more than 90 years*.

The process set in motion by the Camp David Accords with Egypt, that ultimately led to the Oslo Accords with the Palestinians, never did bring an end to the Arab-Israeli conflict through face-to-face negotiations.

Palestinians' dogged pursuit of a winner-take-all solution designed to destroy Israel, using violence and rejecting any form of compromise, have stymied all attempts to solve substantive issues between the parties.

The Palestinians have consistently failed to 'walk the walk' – breaking commitment after commitment as well as promise after promise and draining agreement after agreement and memorandum after memorandum of meaning.

Only the late Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and the late Jordanian King Hussein had the courage and earnestness to pursue peace. Palestinian leaders lack the courage, the integrity and the political maturity required for statehood, employing the same rejectionism Palestinian Arabs have exhibited for over 90 year.

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- 3 Lamia Lahoud, "Remote Control," *Jerusalem Report*, 1991, at <http://www.jrep.com/Info/10thAnniversary/1991/Article-6.html>. (10704)
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- Bank Palestinian residents in 1988 only improved demographics temporarily – and today 70 percent of all Jordanians are Palestinians.
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