

## **Memo on the Oslo Accords**

The Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations took a giant leap forward during Yitzhak Rabin's term as Israeli prime minister, with the commencement of the Oslo Peace Process. While no significant progress was being made in Washington in the bilateral talks agreed upon at the Madrid Conference in 1991, a secret unofficial channel began operating between Israelis and the PLO, under the auspices of Norway.<sup>1</sup> The unofficial talks continued throughout early 1993 and culminated in the signing of a joint Declaration of Principles (DOP) on August 19, 1993. Then, after having formally recognized each other in mutual letters, Israel, represented by Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and the PLO, represented by Yassir Arafat, signed an agreement in Washington on September 13, 1993.

The DOP created a framework for areas of negotiation and set outlines for a rapid hand-over of Gaza and Jericho to Palestinian self-rule. According to the agreement, major fundamental and controversial issues, such as Jerusalem, the future of Israeli settlements on in Judea & Samaria, and the Palestinian refugees (from '48 and '67), would be deferred to the permanent status negotiations. The following stages in the transition of power and land from Israel to the Palestinians were put forth.

1. Gaza and Jericho First: Self rule in the Gaza Strip and Jericho, including the withdrawal of Israeli forces. The details of the Gaza and Jericho First Agreement were negotiated and concluded in Cairo between Rabin and Arafat on May 4, 1994. The Cairo Agreement spelled out a step-by-step program for the extension of autonomy within a specified time-frame, without this being conditional on bilateral implementation or objectives.

2. Transfer of civil powers and responsibilities: Responsibilities in five specific spheres (education and culture, health, welfare, taxation and tourism) will be transferred to the Palestinians. The DOP proposed that this transfer take place immediately following the implementation of the Gaza-Jericho agreement.

3. The Interim Agreement and Elections: Elections will take place on the West Bank and Gaza Strip for a new Palestinian Authority. The Interim Agreement will detail the self-government arrangements in the West Bank and territories. In the rest of the West Bank, Israel will pull out its forces from Palestinian populated areas. The Palestinian Council will have a strong police force in order to guarantee public order and internal security. Central to the DOP were two economic annexes that outlined economic cooperation between Israel and the Palestinians, both bilaterally and in the multilateral context.

4. Permanent Status Talks: negotiations on the permanent status will commence no later than the beginning of the third year of the interim period (May 1996). These talks will determine the nature of the final settlement between the two sides. It is understood that these negotiations will cover remaining issues including Jerusalem, refugees, settlements, security arrangements, borders, relations and cooperation with other neighbors, and other issues of common interest. Under the DOP, the permanent status will take effect 5 years after the implementation of the Gaza-Jericho agreement, namely May 1999.

On September 28, 1995 the Oslo II Agreement (or the Interim Agreement), specifying the details of redeployment in Areas A, B, and C, was signed. In the following weeks and months, Israeli troops withdrew from 6 major West Bank cities (though not from Hebron) and from hundreds of Arab villages all of which were transferred to Arafat's control. The agreement also specified the issues to resolve in the Final Status Accords.

But there were elements in Israel vehemently opposed to the return of land to Arab hands. One of them, a right-wing zealot, Yigal Amir, shot and killed PM Yitzhak Rabin in a rally in Tel-Aviv on November 4, 1995. The murder shocked the nation to the core and increased tensions between right and left, religious and non-religious in the society.

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The Oslo Peace process has been generally unsuccessful by both Palestinian and Israeli standards. Hamas has continued terrorist activism within the Autonomy and spates of serious suicide bomb attacks have terrorized Israel. After the agreement, the Palestinian Authority still refused to extradite these terrorists to Israel. Israel still has concern over the viability of security provisions and the permeability of patrol points and routes. Major donor countries have found no infrastructure to channel their promised funds efficiently for the development of the Autonomy and have refused to honor them in full; others did not fulfill their pledges at all. Israel was left without confirmation by documentation of the repeal of anti-Israeli clauses in the Palestinian National Covenant, and subsequent closures of Autonomy areas has caused economic breakdown and only generated further hostility. The assassination of Yitzhak Rabin (April 4, 1995) and subsequent change of government in Israel the next month led to: delay in implementation of Hebron redeployment as it stood; incidents of social conflict, with casualties; new government positions on the final settlement negotiations.

As written, the Oslo Accords represented a good compromise and solid framework for future negotiations. However, it was de-railed by Israeli, Palestinian, and (as some contend<sup>2</sup>) American interests.

Ahron Bregman, A History of Israel, New York, N.Y.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003

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<sup>2</sup>Mirak-Weissbach, Muriel. "Who Murdered the Oslo Accords?" Executive Intelligence Review. 19 Apr 2002. <[http://www.larouchepub.com/other/2002/2915oslo\\_mrdrd.html](http://www.larouchepub.com/other/2002/2915oslo_mrdrd.html)>. Accessed 10 April 2008.