

The Oslo Process, 1993

Framework & Implementation

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. The unofficial talks continued throughout early 1993 and culminated in the initialling 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 which 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.

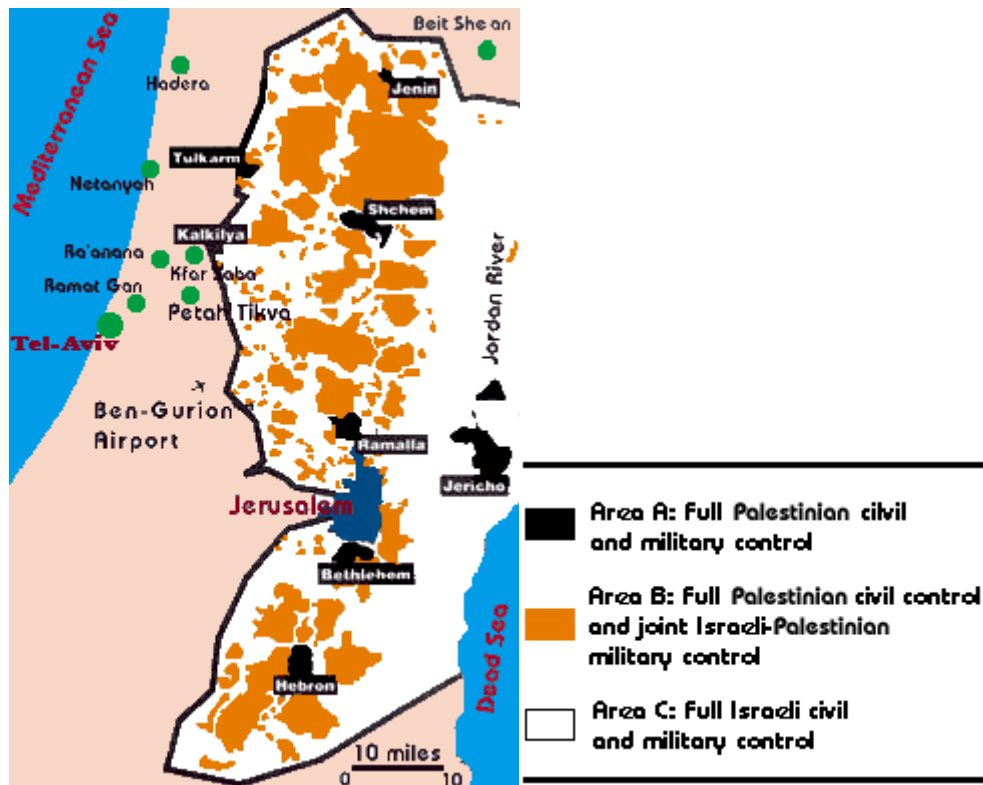
Shimon Peres was now the Prime Minister and was determined to proceed with the implementation of Oslo II.

In January 1996 Palestinian elections were held and Yasser Arafat was elected Chairman of the Palestinian Authority.

May 1996 – Token opening of Permanent Status talks - substantial negotiations delayed because of Israeli elections.

The Main Problems with the Oslo Process:

- Continued Hamas, Islamic Jihad and PFLP terrorist activism within the Autonomy and delay in crackdown on them.
- Spates of serious suicide bomb attacks on Israel by the above groups and public concern in Israel over personal security.
- Non-extradition by the PA of terrorists to Israel.
- Israeli concern over the viability of security provisions, permeability of patrol points and routes.
- Major donor countries find no infrastructure to channel their promised funds efficiently for the development of the Autonomy and refuse to honor them in full; others do not fulfil their pledge.
- Non-confirmation by documentation of the repeal of anti-Israel clauses in the Palestinian National Covenant.
- Security closures of Autonomy areas cause economic breakdown, generate further hostility.
- Assassination of Yitzhak Rabin(4 Nov. 1995) and subsequent change of government in Israel, May 1996, lead to: delay in implementation of Hebron redeployment as it stood; incidents of social conflict, with casualties; new government positions on the final settlement negotiations.
- Non-implementation of free passage routes between Gaza & Jericho for cases of abuse of privilege and because of closure regulations.



Sources:

Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs website
 Ahron Bregman, *A History of Israel*, New York, N.Y.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003