

The Peace Process

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Introduction

While the term “peace process” in relation to the Arab-Israeli conflict was first coined with the [Oslo Declaration of Principles](#) in 1993, there had been many earlier attempts at peace-making, beginning almost immediately after the 1948 war. Both the initialed but then aborted non-belligerency agreement negotiated by [Golda Meir](#) and [King Abdullah of Jordan](#) and the short-lived proposals by Syrian President Husni Za’im led nowhere. (Morris, 1999) More promising were the Armistice Agreements, negotiated bilaterally with the mediation of UN representative Ralph Bunche between Israel and Egypt, Transjordan, and Syria. These agreements clearly stipulated that they were to be non-binding with regard to borders or future arrangements. They did, however, adjust cease-fire lines and provide for land swaps [\[1\]](#), which suggested an element of permanence. Jordan annexed the West Bank (part of the area that had been designated by the [Partition Plan](#) for an Arab State), along with East Jerusalem, while Israel declared West Jerusalem its capital and incorporated all of the land conquered beyond the Partition Plan lines.

The first official post-war attempt at resolving the conflict, the UN sponsored Lausanne Conference [\[2\]](#) that convened in 1949 included a call for a return to the 1947 Partition Plan lines. (UN, A/1367) Israel maintained that the Partition Plan had been nullified by the invasion of the Arab states and therefore irrelevant to the border issue. The Lausanne meeting also called for the return of Arab refugees, based on the 1948 UN Resolution 194 that those “...wishing to return to their homes and live in peace with their neighbors be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date.” [\[3\]](#) (UN, A/810) Despite Israel’s decision in June 1948 not to permit the return of any refugees, it initially proposed at Lausanne to annex the [Gaza Strip](#) with its 200,000 refugees. When this was rejected by Egypt, Israel made the suggestion, which it subsequently withdrew, to take in 65,000 to 100,000 refugees with an additional 600,000 to be absorbed by the Arab states. (Morris, 1999) This too was rejected by the Arab states. At a 1950 reconvening of the conference the Israeli position became, and has since remained, that the refugee issue could be resolved only within the context of a peace agreement. [\[4\]](#) Moreover, with its entry into the UN in May 1949, Israel presented a number of reservations to resolution 194, arguing in time that the resolution did not in fact establish a “right of return” for the refugees.

The Lausanne Conference was actually a series of bilateral meetings between the conveners and each party in the conflict. This formula accommodated Israel’s opposition to dealing with a front of all the Arab states together as well as the Arabs’ opposition to direct talks

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with Israel - which might be interpreted as recognition. It is not surprising therefore that no settlement, much less a peace agreement, resulted from these meetings. Other public and secret efforts were made in the 1950s, including indirect probes with the new revolutionary regime in Egypt. On the whole, however, none of the protagonists, including Israel, was anxious to reach agreement. [Prime Minister Ben Gurion](#) believed that time was working in Israel's favor, i.e., toward acceptance of the status quo. (Shlaim, 2000) Nor did the Arab states actively seek peace. Rather, their rhetoric if not their actual policies favored "another round." Thus, border skirmishes, armed incursions, and reprisal raids became the norm both before and after the 1956 war, often altering one border area or another. In this manner the "June 4, 1967" lines evolved, including the appropriation by Israel and Syria, respectively, of most of the demilitarized lands left undetermined by the 1949 Armistice Accord.

The 1967 war was a water shed event in shaping future peace efforts. The war led to a burgeoning of nationalist and, more specifically, religious nationalist sentiment within Israel. The occupation not only of the Sinai and the [Golan Heights](#) but also of the West Bank and Gaza with their one and half million Palestinians shifted the focus of the Palestinian issue to one of land rather than the refugees. The situation did, however, create the possibility for a compromise that had generally been missing prior to these acquisitions, namely the possibility of exchanging land for recognition and peace for Israel within its 1949-1967 de facto borders. UNSC Resolution 242 reflected this in its call for "secure and recognized borders" and "withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict." [\[5\]](#) Some in Israel had never been satisfied with the 1949-1947 borders, whether for security or ideological reasons, and opposed the return of all or even any of the newly acquired lands. Similarly, the Arab League resolved in its conference in Khartoum in October 1967 "to recover all occupied Arab territory" within their commitment to no recognition, no negotiation and no peace with Israel. (Moore, 1977) Yet one month later both Egypt and Jordan accepted UNSC Resolution 242 (Syrian and Palestinian acceptance were to come only many years later), as did Israel, albeit each party had its own interpretation of the resolution.

Land for Peace

The principle of territory for peace was officially adopted by the Israeli Labor government on June 19, 1967 when it voted to return the Sinai and the Golan in exchange for peace. This decision included the occupation of the Gaza Strip to be followed by annexation once the some 200,000 refugees there could be resettled. A June 26, 1967 decision annexed a greatly expanded East Jerusalem, creating a major stumbling bloc in subsequent secret discussions with Jordan over the return of the [West Bank](#). A short-lived Israeli proposal for the creation of a Palestinian enclave in the West Bank was offered but rejected by Palestinian notables contacted in East Jerusalem. (Pedatzur, *Ha'aretz*, July 25, 2007) The subsequent [Allon Plan](#), which called for retention not only of East Jerusalem but also a significant portion of the West Bank, became the unofficial Israeli plan for peace. This "Jordanian option" and the more general "land for peace" approach, remained Israeli policy until the Labor Party fell from power in 1977. Labor also initiated Jewish settlement in the occupied territories, presumably to stake a claim in the areas Israel intended to keep – a policy that would be greatly expanded after the 1977 ascension of the right-wing Likud Party, with serious ramifications for future prospects for peace. (Gorenberg, 2006; Eldar, 2007)

While there were secret contacts and informal approaches over the years, particularly but not only between Israel and Jordan, the international community was the agent that once again sought resolution of the conflict in the 1967-1973 period. Viewing the conflict as primarily one between states, and the Palestinian issue only as one of refugees, these efforts revolved around the 1967 lands. Beginning with UNSC Resolution 242, the U.S. and the USSR,

occasionally joined by France and Britain, put forth their own plans. The Rogers Plan of 1969 and also a Soviet Plan of 1970 called for an Israeli return to the June 4, 1967 [\[6\]](#) lines (including Jerusalem), with the U.S. suggesting “insubstantial alterations,” and the Soviets adding “legitimate Palestinian rights.” [\[7\]](#) The Rogers Plan was soundly rejected by then Prime Minister Golda Meir on the grounds that the borders would endanger Israel’s security; the Soviet Plan, presented to the Americans, was also rejected by Israel in a Knesset speech by Foreign Minister [Abba Eban](#) on July 23, 1970. (Whetten, 1974) Aside from the Soviets’ addition of the Palestinian issue, which nonetheless fell short of demanding statehood, the major difference between the American and Soviet approaches in this period lay primarily in the process rather than the substance. Moscow supported the Arab interest in a comprehensive settlement between Israel and its neighbor states, to be negotiated in an international forum. This would ensure Soviet involvement in any agreement, thereby preserving Moscow’s interest which at the time was primarily a military presence, i.e., bases, in the region. The U.S., particularly in the [Henry Kissinger](#) era, supported Israel’s preference for bi-lateral talks in what Kissinger called a “step by step” approach. Washington believed this would serve its major interest of reducing Soviet involvement.

Resolution 242 had also called for a UN special representative, Gunnar Jarring, who in time found stiff resistance in the positions of both Egypt and Israel as he sought to mediate. [\[8\]](#) Ultimately, on February 8, 1971, Jarring offered his own plan that called for (1) Israeli withdrawal from Sinai with demilitarized zones and security arrangements regarding Sharm el-Sheikh, plus freedom of navigation in the Suez Canal and the Straits of Tiran, (2) negotiations for a peace agreement that would include termination of all claims of belligerency and respect for each other’s independence and right to live in peace within secure and recognized borders, (3) assurances that no acts of belligerency against the other originate on its territory, as well as non-interference in each other’s domestic affairs. (UN, A/8541-S/10403) Egyptian President [Anwar Sadat](#), who succeeded Gamal Abdel Nasser in August 1970, accepted Jarring’s proposal, with the addition of UN peace-keepers (including the super-powers) at Sharm el-Sheikh, equi-distant demilitarization on both sides of the border, and resolution of the refugee problem. A few days earlier, Sadat had publicly suggested an interim proposal, similar to an earlier suggestion by Moshe Dayan that had been rejected by the Israeli government. Sadat’s initiative called for an Israeli pullback of approximately 10-15 kilometers from the Suez Canal, allowing it to reopen, with a contingent of Egyptian police to be permitted on the east side and the creation of a UN buffer zone, plus self-determination for Gaza and a time-table for implementation of Resolution 242. (Whetten, 1974),

Objecting to Jarring’s right to make an independent proposal, Israel rejected both his proposal and Sadat’s initiative. Israeli officials spoke of the need to hold on to Sharm el-Sheikh as crucial for the protection of shipping to and from Israel’s southern port of Eilat. In a note to Jarring, Jerusalem reiterated its refusal to withdraw to the June 4, 1967 lines. The Egyptian-Israeli dissonance reflected the differing interpretations of Resolution 242’s requirement of an Israeli “withdrawal from territories occupied” in the 1967 war. For the Arabs, the meaning was “all” the territories, as supported by the Resolution’s preamble noting the “inadmissibility of acquisition of territory by war.” Israel held to its interpretation that partial withdrawal, determined in negotiations, could also constitute implementation. The most salient point, however, was that Egypt offered an interim accord explicitly stated as a step toward a peace agreement with Israel. Golda Meir, however, saw the initiative as an attempt ultimately to impose the Rogers Plan, predetermining borders considered harmful to Israel’s security. [\[9\]](#) She once again rejected the offer when Sadat raised it a second time, via the Americans, in March 1973 – seven months before launching the Yom Kippur War.

While the U.S. had traditionally sought a positive relationship with Egypt, and Kissinger in

particular hoped to oust the Soviets from the region, Sadat himself was increasingly at odds with Moscow, ultimately expelling Soviet forces and advisors in July 1972. The main reason for the expulsion was Soviet opposition to Sadat's plans to attack Israel. Moscow was in the midst of a needed détente with the U.S. and also concerned that another Arab-Israeli war might lead to Soviet-U.S. confrontation. This opposition, maintained even after some Soviet advisors returned to Egypt in early 1973, combined with Soviet pressure for an early cease-fire and demands for aid-payments during the war, paved the way for the fruition of American efforts to advance its ties with Egypt and the pursuit of an American-mediated Egyptian-Israeli agreement. (Golan, 1977) The latter began to take form in the aftermath of the 1973 war.

Egypt's initial military success in the war restored to Egypt the honor lost in the previous wars. Kissinger helped to maintain this new confidence by restraining Israel from destroying the Egyptian force left on the east bank of the Suez Canal after the cease-fire. UNSC Resolution 338 ending the war also called for full implementation of Resolution 242 and negotiations for peace "in the Middle East." Thus the Geneva Conference, the first Arab-Israeli peace conference since Lausanne, opened in December 1973 under UN auspices, co-chaired by the U.S. and the Soviet Union. It was, however, only ostensibly a meeting for a comprehensive agreement. Syria refused to attend, having only implicitly accepted Resolution 242 when it agreed to the cease-fire Resolution 338. Moreover, following the opening, the conference immediately broke up into bilateral talks for the disengagement of forces – i.e., the bilateral approach favored by Israel, and the partial, step by step approach preferred by Kissinger.

United States Diplomacy

The disengagement with Egypt was the result of direct talks; a similar agreement with Syria was mediated in shuttle diplomacy by Kissinger, although both were officially signed with Soviet participation to maintain the appearance of an international umbrella. The agreement with Egypt called for Israeli withdrawal from the west side of the Suez Canal to a line roughly 25 kilometers east of the Canal; Egypt was allowed to leave a small contingent on the east bank, separated from the Israelis by UN peacekeepers, with U.S. air surveillance as a guarantee. Following this precedent of the return of some land taken by Israel in 1967, the agreement with Syria included the return of Kuneitra to Syria, in addition to mutual troop pullbacks, demilitarization, and UN peacekeepers. Although Jordan had not joined this war, Kissinger sought a similar disengagement that would return Jericho to Jordan. However, Israel's insistence on maintaining a security presence in the Jordan Rift Valley, i.e., the boundary between Jordan and the West Bank, with only a corridor for Jordan to Jericho, prevented agreement. (Stein, 1999)

Kissinger was continuing to pursue his step by step diplomacy when Yitzhak Rabin came to power in 1974, encouraged by Rabin's earlier criticism of Golda Meir's rejection of Sadat's 1971 proposal. Although by now the [Palestine Liberation Organization](#) (PLO) had gained strength – thanks to Soviet backing and news-making terror attacks, Rabin believed that the neighboring states, rather than the Palestinians, constituted the real threat to Israel's existence. The Kissinger mediated Egyptian-Israeli talks, therefore, led to the 1975 agreement for a further pull-back in Sinai but also Israeli use of the Canal. Described as an interim accord on the way to a final peace agreement, it was, however, achieved only after the U.S. pressured Israel and provided some incentives. When Jerusalem became recalcitrant about the size and security arrangements for the pull-back, Kissinger declared an American period of "reassessment" of relations with Israel, suspending some military deliveries. (Kissinger, 1982; Quandt, 1986; Spiegel, 1985; Miller, 2008) The reassessment ended after six months, with Israel accepting most of Egypt's conditions, but with the addition of U.S. involvement in the security arrangements. Kissinger sweetened the deal with a promise not

to speak with the PLO unless it recognized Israel's right to exist and accepted Resolution 242.

In 1977, a new administration in Washington abandoned the step by step approach and opted for a reconvening of the Geneva Conference to pursue a comprehensive deal. Preparations met with innumerable obstacles, some procedural as once again Israel opposed multilateral negotiations, and some substantive, such as the matter of Palestinian rights. By this time, Moscow had come out in favor of a Palestinian state, and U.S. President, Jimmy Carter had spoken of the Palestinians' right to a "homeland." (*Boston Globe*, March 17, 1977) There was also the question of PLO participation provided it accepted Resolution 242 which was the basis for the Conference. In November 1977, apparently out of frustration with these obstacles, disdain for the Soviets, and possibly concern over American concessions to Israel during the preparations, ^[10] Sadat abandoned the conference idea. Responding to earlier efforts by Israel's new Prime Minister, [Menachem Begin](#), to arrange a bilateral summit, Sadat surprised the world by making an official visit to Jerusalem, even addressing the Knesset in the city that all but two small countries refuse to acknowledge as the capital of Israel. He maintained that he did not intend to sign a separate peace with Israel, and indeed in his speech to the Knesset he called for a comprehensive peace, Israeli withdrawal to the 1967 lines including "Arab Jerusalem," and the creation of a Palestinian state. (<http://www.ibiblio.org/sullivan/docs/Knesset-speech.html>) The only deviation from the usual Arab demands was Sadat's repeated assurances that Israel was a welcome part of the region. But these assurances, and even more so, the act of coming to Jerusalem, enabled a major psychological breakthrough towards peace.

In subsequent talks, however, the parties remained far apart on substantive matters, prompting the Americans to become actively involved. In November 1978, Carter mediated the break-through talks in Camp David where the major stumbling blocks were the Israeli settlements in the Sinai and linkage between the agreement with Egypt and the fate of the West Bank. Begin acquiesced on the settlements after consulting with [Ariel Sharon](#). He also agreed to linkage based on a complicated five-year autonomy plan for the West Bank and Gaza ^[11] and the inclusion of Palestinians as well as Jordanians in talks on the final status of these territories. This was an exceptional step – Begin even remarked that the agreement would give the Palestinians the possibility of determining their own fate for the first time (though he continued to refer to them in Hebrew as "Arabs of the Land of Israel"). Given the historical, religious and ideological importance of the West Bank – as distinct from the Sinai, for Begin and his government, it was hard to believe that Israel would in fact implement the autonomy, and indeed that plan never got beyond sporadic, futile discussions with Egypt over the next few years. Nor did the Palestinians respond favorably to the autonomy plan.

The ensuing Israeli-Egyptian peace agreement was signed March 26, 1979. It called for a two-stage Israeli withdrawal over three years from all Egyptian land (the final few meters of which were decided by arbitration a few years later), during which time normal relations would be established between the two countries. Ultimately, a non-UN multinational force, with U.S. participation, was authorized by Egypt and Israel to monitor the demilitarization and border arrangements. Sadat's historic visit had paved the way for over-whelming public support for the peace treaty, although many in Begin's own political party, including Sharon, voted against it, and the settler movement sought vigorously to prevent implementation. There was, and remains, far less support in Egypt for the treaty, but nonetheless, the Israeli-Egyptian peace has held – even through the assassination of Sadat, and subsequent Israeli wars in Lebanon and the occupied territories.

The Success of Peace Agreements

While there were secret contacts and informal meetings over the following years of the Likud dominated governments, the only partially successful attempt to reach a peace agreement came in 1988 when the Labor Party was in a power-sharing government. [\[12\]](#) This attempt was preceded by the Israeli move to destroy the PLO in the [1982 Lebanon War](#), a subsequent but temporary split in the PLO, and a failed Arafat-King Hussein bid for peace through the Americans. [\[13\]](#) Seizing upon that failure as an opportunity for the Labor-cherished “Jordanian option,” Shimon Peres, then Finance Minister, negotiated an agreement with King Hussein which was signed in London on April 11, 1987. The agreement was similar to earlier, Israeli rejected proposals by both the Americans and Egypt for an international conference, with a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation, to reach a comprehensive agreement, including the legitimate rights of the Palestinians. Nonetheless, Israel’s traditional demand that decisions be made only in bilateral sessions was included. Prime Minister Shamir rejected the Plan, and the “Jordanian option” disappeared from the scene. Eight months later the first *intifada* (uprising) broke out in the occupied territories, and King Hussein, fearful of possible adverse effects on Jordan, with its predominately Palestinian population, renounced all claims to the West Bank at the end of July 1988. Henceforth Israel would have to deal with the Palestinians.

The Intifada

The *Intifada* as well as international developments contributed to the opening of what was to become known as the “peace process.” The frustration of the continued occupation coupled with the failure of the Arab states to aid in the Lebanon War led to the denouement of an internal PLO dispute of some 16 years regarding a compromise with Israel. The weakening of Soviet support under Gorbachev was also a factor. The result was the 1988 PLO decision to accept Resolutions 242 and 338 (both of which included recognition of Israel), renounce terrorism and open negotiations. What it called an “historic compromise” was a decision to seek a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza rather than all of Palestine. Ignored by Israel, presumably because it was not believed, this decision did open the way for talks between the U.S. and the PLO. Still another development, however, led to the beginning of the peace process. In the wake of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, the U.S. President George H.W. Bush promised the Arab states and also Gorbachev that, in exchange for their support of the U.S. coalition against Iraq, Washington would convene an international conference on the Arab-Israeli conflict immediately following the war. The result was the Madrid Conference held in October 1991, including Syria, along with a reluctant Israeli Prime Minister Shamir and a Jordanian-Palestinian delegation. The Palestinian delegates were drawn only from the occupied territories per an Israeli demand, but they were clearly acting under orders from the PLO.

The Madrid Conference

[Madrid](#) opened with a plenary show and then broke into bilateral and multi-lateral talks. The latter included countries besides the protagonists and dealt with such issues as arms control, water, refugees and economic development. While Shamir later said that he had intended only to drag out the process indefinitely, (*Ma’ariv*, June 26, 1992), Israel itself was undergoing a change. The Intifada was having its effect on the Israeli public. The deteriorating security situation led many Israelis (who were beginning to enjoy the fruits of their new link with globalization) to begin to view the occupation, pragmatically, as a drawback rather than an asset. Combined, perhaps, with some war weariness, the public increasingly favored a compromise. (Shamir and Shamir, 2000) Capitalizing on this trend, and emphasizing the negative economic and political impact of the Likud’s aggressive settlement policy, particularly as reflected by deteriorating relations with the U.S., the Labor

Party won the 1992 elections.

Prime Minister for the second time, [Rabin](#) believed that the moment was ripe for a final agreement. Both Syria and the Palestinians had been deprived of their super-power patron with the collapse of the Soviet Union; the PLO had been weakened by its loss of Saudi financial aid due to its support for Saddam Hussein in the Gulf War; the new world order of U.S. dominance, as well as the rise of radical Islamism, was altering Arab interests and needs, creating certain opportunities. Moreover, as early as 1989, Israel had become aware of Iranian efforts to develop a nuclear capability, and Rabin believed there was only a relatively short window of opportunity before the region would be nuclearized. All of these developments apparently persuaded Rabin that it was possible, but also imperative to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Rabin authorized continuation of the Madrid initiated bilateral and multilateral talks, but he added two other channels, an ostensibly unofficial channel, actually under Foreign Minister Peres and his deputy Yossi Beilin, with the PLO in Oslo, and a U.S. mediated Israeli-Syrian channel. With regard to Syria, it was clear from the outset that Israel would have to return the Golan Heights, but the question was just how much territory would be returned and in exchange for what measures? For Rabin the depth of the withdrawal was to depend upon the depth of the peace, namely the nature of the future relationship between the two countries. Syrian President Hafiz al-Assad's position was full peace for full withdrawal – just as Egypt had received. Within these positions lurked the two most difficult issues: The June 4, 1967 lines demanded by Syria and the security arrangements demanded by Israel. The first issue revolved around land in the demilitarized unallocated areas after 1949 which were subsequently occupied in part by Israel and in part by Syria. By June 4, 1967, Syria was sitting on the northeast corner of the Kinneret, as distinct from the 1923 international boundary recognized by Israel. Reluctant to give Syria this access to the Kinneret, Rabin nonetheless sent a tentative proposal to Assad via the Americans in August 1993 offering this concession, i.e., full withdrawal over five years in exchange for adequate security arrangements and normal bi-lateral relations. (Rabinovich, 1998) Assad's response disputing certain details of these provisions (for example, the time-frame) was apparently interpreted by Rabin as a lack of genuine Syrian interest in peace. While talks continued, particularly on security aspects of a peace accord, even a subsequent meeting between President Bill Clinton and Assad in January of 1994 in Geneva failed to produce anything that Rabin believed he could present to the Israeli public. There are varying reports as to why the Geneva meeting failed, what Rabin told Clinton that Israel was prepared to give regarding the June 4, 1967 line, and just what Assad's intentions were, although most analysts including the Americans concluded that Assad was serious about making peace with Israel. (Clinton, 2004) Well before the Geneva meeting, however, a major settler/right-wing campaign had begun in Israel against return of any of the Golan, and polls indicated majority popular support for this position.

The Oslo Accords

Skeptical that agreement could be reached with Syria, Rabin had already turned his attention to the successful achievement in Oslo of a Declaration of Principles (DOP) with the PLO. The DOP, signed on the White House lawn September 13, 1993, was actually the basis for a number of agreements subsumed under the title of the Oslo Accords. (Savir, 1999; Abbas, 1995; Golan, 2007) Perhaps the most important and irreversible of these was the mutual recognition contained in the accompanying letters between Rabin and [Arafat](#). Rabin recognized the PLO as the sole, legitimate representative of the Palestinian people – constituting the first time Israel acknowledged the Palestinians as a people and thereby implying accepting their right to self-determination. Arafat accepted Resolution 242 in all its parts, explicitly recognizing Israel's right to exist in peace and security, renounced the use of

terrorism and agreed to resolve differences through negotiations. Arafat also declared invalid and inoperative those provisions of the PLO Covenant denying Israel's right to exist and contradicting these commitments, with a promise to bring the necessary changes in the Covenant for approval to the Palestine National Council (PNC). The changes were in fact approved by the PNC April 24, 1996 and acknowledged by the Israeli government. (CNN, April 30, 1996) In response to right-wing claims that the Covenant had not been altered, the PNC met again in 1999, in the presence of President Clinton in Gaza, and unanimously abrogated the provisions. Since no new Covenant was ever published, some right-wing Israelis continued to claim that the Covenant was not changed.

The Covenant dispute typified the mistrust that characterized the Oslo Accords. The six agreements signed often merely repeated provisions called for in the previous agreement, but the two decisive documents were the Protocol for Economic Relations (1994) and the Interim Agreement (1995) known as Oslo II that formalized the measures connected with Israeli redeployments and transfer of power to Palestinian self-governing bodies in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Broadly resembling the autonomy plan outlined at the 1978 Camp David talks with Egypt, the Oslo Accords called for the gradual transfer of power over a five year period, during which, but no later than beginning within three years, talks would be held on the permanent status of these territories, including the issues of Jerusalem, settlements, refugees, security, and borders, leading to a final settlement based on UNSC Resolution 242. Three critical principles were stated from the outset, and often repeated: Nothing done or agreed upon in the interim would prejudice or pre-empt the outcome of the final status negotiations; the West Bank and the Gaza Strip would be considered "a single territorial unity;" and any disputes regarding implementation would be resolved by peaceful means. Specific matters were dealt with such as prisoner releases, safe passage between the West Bank and Gaza, size and strength of a Palestinian police force, and the jurisdiction and powers of the elected Palestinian bodies. The final line to which Israeli forces would withdraw was not delineated but rather was described as "specified military locations." Oslo II did divide jurisdiction, without specifying locations, into three categories: Area A would be under sole Palestinian control (in effect, the seven major West Bank towns), area B under Palestinian civil control and Israeli security control, and area C under exclusive Israeli control. Israel maintained the right to determine the size and location of its redeployments but timetables and even percentages of land were eventually stipulated, as implementation faltered. The lack of implementation led to the two concluding accords, under the government of Benjamin Netanyahu, designating not only further withdrawals but also the transfer of most of the city of Hebron to the Palestinians.

The lack of implementation is often cited as the reason for the failure of the Oslo Accords, but the implementation issue was itself tied to some of the critical flaws in the Accords. One such flaw may have been the very interim nature of the Accords, which was designed to allow for a gradual period of testing intentions and building trust. Creating a relatively long period of time (five years) without assurances as to the final outcome – for either side, provided an opportunity for opponents of the Accords to make every effort either to prejudice or prevent the final agreement. This was done by non-PLO Islamist groups which, from the first days of the DOP, perpetrated terrorist attacks with an increasing ferocity. These caused delays in implementation and destroyed most chances for trust of Arafat. Israel continued to build settlements and increasingly restricted the movement of Palestinians as it maintained security for the settlers and "external security" around each area evacuated. This destroyed Palestinian trust that Israel really planned to leave the territories. Problems were further aggravated by the absence of a monitoring body beyond the provision for a very small, ill-defined observer group ultimately placed only in Hebron.

Peace Talks After Yitzhak Rabin

The assassination of Rabin in November 1995 and a spate of devastating terror attacks by the Islamists during Peres' brief term as his successor, led to the election of the Netanyahu government in May 1996. Subsequent unrest and bloodshed led to U.S. diplomatic intervention that produced the agreement on Hebron and the Wye River Accord on further redeployments, but implementation remained minimal. The Oslo process was virtually at an end by the time Netanyahu was voted out of office in 1999. Final status talks that were to have begun no later than May 1997 and completed by 1999, had long since been forgotten. The only real accomplishment of Oslo, aside from mutual recognition, was the creation of the Palestine Authority with an elected President and Legislative Council, and the withdrawal of most Israeli forces – for the time being – from the Gaza Strip and from six and a half (Hebron) towns in the West Bank.

Gone almost unnoticed, however, was another extraordinary accomplishment: A peace treaty with Jordan. There had been covert agreements and relations with Jordan over the years, but the collapse of such attempts as the Jericho disengagement or the London Agreement had left peace with Jordan hostage to Israeli-Palestinian relations. When these relations finally began moving in a positive direction, King Hussein apparently felt sufficiently secure to proceed with an agreement with Israel. Negotiated directly and with little difficulty, containing minor border adjustments, water sharing arrangements, and agreements on virtually every subject from health to tourism, the Peace Accord was signed on October 26, 1994. No observation force was deemed necessary, and the flow of goods and people between the two countries has proceeded almost without incident.

Shimon Peres, in the brief time that he replaced the assassinated Rabin, sought a swift agreement with Syria. Peres was, apparently, more flexible on the time table and favored economic over military arrangements, but, nonetheless, negotiations apparently broke down over security arrangements. As in the past, Syria demanded symmetry (for example, equal demilitarization on both sides of the border). According to some accounts, the two sides were not far from agreement when Peres gave up the talks in favor of early elections. Both Israel and the Syrians claimed that the other side was not ready for an agreement, and the U.S. believed that an opportunity had been missed. When Netanyahu became prime minister, he secretly sent American businessman Ron Lauder to speak with Assad and reportedly was willing to agree to a return of the Golan. According to numerous reports, both Peres and Netanyahu made the same proposal as Rabin regarding the June 4, 1967 line, although Netanyahu has denied this. (Pipes, 2004; Ross 2005; Netanyahu, *Galei Zahal*, June 23, 2006; *Ha'aretz*, May 23 and June 1, 2008)

Upon his election in May 1999, Ehud Barak too sought an agreement with Syria, primarily in order to facilitate his promised withdrawal of Israel from Lebanon "within a year." President Clinton announced in December that talks between Israel and Syria were to begin where they had left off, and the Americans have claimed that during the preliminary talks in Washington between Barak and Syrian Foreign Minister al-Shara, there was Israeli agreement to withdraw to the June 4 line. (Clinton, 2004; Indyk, 2009) Expectations were raised in Israel for a quick agreement, but there was also strong opposition and pressure on Barak to agree to a referendum on any deal with Syria. When he arrived for further talks at Shephardstown in January 2000, Barak rejected the June 4, 1967 line and spoke only of a border reflecting Israel's security interests. Combined with the disputes over symmetry of security arrangements, an Israeli demand for a presence on the Hermon, plus water issues and the future of the Golan settlements, Barak's retreat on the border issue precluded the achievement of an accord, irrespective of Syria's positions.

Thwarted on the Syrian front, Barak returned to the Palestinian issue, suspending further redeployments and other Oslo commitments in favor of discussions for a final status agreement. He had promised agreement within eighteen months of his election, but the

Palestinians, dismayed over the hiatus while Barak pursued Syria, were skeptical of such a time-frame. Nonetheless, President Clinton, who had a stake in the achievement of an agreement ever since his attempts to rescue the Oslo Accords, was determined to broker an agreement before the end of his term at the end of the year. Therefore, without sufficient agreement between the parties to actually warrant a summit, and against the wishes of the Palestinians, the U.S. president called for a meeting at Camp David in July 2000.

Camp David 2000

There was no explicit statement at [Camp David](#) about the creation of a Palestinian state, but the talks were clearly designed to delineate the parameters of such a state, along with the resolution of all outstanding issues. There are numerous accounts of the talks, which took place in various groups that considered various, often changing, proposals. (Clinton, 2004; Ross, 2005; Ben Ami, 2004; Sher, 2006; Beilin, 2004; Agha and Malley, 2001; Enderlin, 2002; Golan, 2007) Barak and Arafat almost never met face to face and Clinton, like Carter at Camp David I, mediated and offered his own proposals. On July 18 Barak's territorial offer to the Palestinians, via Clinton, consisted of Gaza plus some 91% of the West Bank and an area south of Gaza, constituting a 9 to 1 land swap in Israel's favor. This would permit retention of settlement blocs in the West Bank consisting of roughly 80% of the total number of settlers. By the end of the talks, however, Barak was talking about retaining as much as 10-12% of the West Bank, but the Palestinians rejected anything less than all of the West Bank or equal land swaps. They considered their 1988 decision to limit their demands to the June 4, 1967 lines, namely 22% of mandated Palestine, the only compromise they could make. There were also Israeli demands for access to and retention of part of (or at least positions on) the eastern border in the Jordan Rift Valley for a limited number of years. Israel also wanted use of West Bank air space and the deployment of early warning systems. With regard to the refugee issue, Barak said only that there should be a satisfactory solution, adding at one point that Israel would be willing to participate in compensation and to permit limited numbers to return under family reunification (as it had been doing for some time). The Palestinians had apparently offered informal assurances that agreement regarding refugees would meet Israel's demographic and security concerns, but once talks appeared to falter, they Palestinians raised the explicit demand that the refugees be permitted to return to their homes.

While there was little if any agreement on the above issues, the problem that led to the final collapse of the talks was the issue of Jerusalem, with all its religious, historical and spiritual significance for both Israel and the Palestinians. Israel had expanded and extended Israeli law to East Jerusalem in June 1967. In 1980 it passed a law declaring "united Jerusalem" Israel's capital. Hesitant to discuss Jerusalem at Camp David, Barak, nevertheless, agreed to a number of Clinton's suggestions regarding Palestinian sovereignty at least for some of the outlying areas of East Jerusalem as well as for the Muslim and Christian quarters of the Old City. There was even a proposal for Palestinian administration of some of the more central areas of East Jerusalem and further expansion of the borders to include Abu Dis so that this suburb could become the capital of a Palestinian state. The ultimate sticking point, however, was control of the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif, with Israel demanding sovereignty and the right for Jews to pray there.

The meeting ended with the Palestinian claim that Israel offered no more than fractured sovereignty over a truncated West Bank cantonized by access roads and Israeli "rights," while the Israelis claimed that the Palestinians were unwilling to make any compromises. Each portrayed the other as having had no intention of making peace, while Clinton, clearly frustrated with both sides, placed the blame for the failure publicly and solely on Arafat. In so doing, Clinton hoped to aid Barak and his weak government coalition, but in fact this had the effect of convincing the Israeli public that further negotiations would be futile. Such

sentiment was strengthened by the outbreak of the second *intifada* a few months later, despite the fact that lower level negotiations had quietly resumed, and neither Barak nor Arafat, contrary to some accounts, wanted the escalation of violence that began in the last months of 2000. [\[14\]](#)

There were two last attempts to save the peace process: The “Parameters” of a settlement presented by Clinton his last month in office, and a high-level Israeli-Palestinian meeting held at Taba in the Sinai just weeks before Israeli elections. Clinton’s Parameters expanded the territory that would be allotted to the Palestinian state, to 95-97% with equal land swaps to compensate the Palestinians. (Ross, 2005; Golan, 2007) On the eastern border, Israel would retain some warning posts and emergency access for a limited period, but an international force (which had been agreed to in principle at Camp David) would ultimately be placed there. The Palestinian state would be “non-militarized,” apparently a more acceptable term for the Palestinians regarding the demilitarization that had already been more or less agreed upon. Abandoning the complex Camp David proposals for Jerusalem, Clinton now proposed that the Arab neighborhoods be under Palestinian sovereignty and the Jewish neighborhoods under Israeli sovereignty, with the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif issue resolved by the Palestinians holding the area on top and Israel the western wall below, with suggested arrangements regarding controversial excavations under the mount. These and other details tended in the direction of Palestinian interests, but Clinton’s proposal for the refugee issue was more favorable to Israel. While the Jerusalem question was sensitive for Arafat due to the interests of the broader Muslim world regarding the Haram al-Sharif, the refugee issue was particularly problematic for him because he had virtually ignored it in the Oslo agreements, despite the fact that he negotiated as the head of the PLO which represents the Palestinians outside as well as within the occupied territories. Clinton’s suggestion was that the refugee issue be resolved within the Palestinian state under the rubric of “return to their homeland” or “to historic Palestine.” He also proffered a more complex alternative: Relocation to the new state, or to third countries, remaining where they were, or admission to Israel. The last three options would be subject to immigration limits placed by the receiving country. Thus, Resolution 194 would be deemed implemented and, with a threeyear deadline, the conflict declared ended.

Clinton did not intend to negotiate his proposals. Setting a four day deadline, he sought acceptance or refusal of the principles, with details to be worked out later. Barak accepted the Parameters, despite some of their drawbacks particularly regarding security. Locked in a difficult electoral struggle, Barak may have seen this as a last chance to have Clinton’s backing, although cynics might say that he accepted knowing that Arafat would not. Indeed Arafat, while not rejecting the Parameters, posed a number of objections that virtually negated most of the proposals. In the end he let the deadline pass without a final answer. His colleagues reportedly were more positive toward the Parameters, and they may have expressed this in the Taba talks two weeks later. (Clinton, 2004)

Barak sent to Taba what he called his “dream team,” namely, leading doves such as [Yossi Beilin](#), [Shlomo Ben Ami](#), and Yossi Sarid, but little if anything was accomplished there. Discussions of the border issue revolved around 94% and 95% of the land, with the continued dispute over equal or unequal land swaps. (Beilin, 2004) Proposals for Jerusalem were more detailed but remained along the lines of the [Clinton Parameters](#), with continued disagreement over arrangements for the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif, although an informal suggestion was made for “international sovereignty” there. There was, nonetheless, some progress made on the refugee issue on the basis of the Parameters, with Israel reportedly willing to accept 40,000, (Moratinos, 2001) but any progress that was made was denied publicly at the time. It was clearly too late to save Barak’s reelection bid, and there was little reason for the Palestinians to make any concessions knowing that Ariel Sharon was about to be elected and a new U.S. president set to enter the White House.

Taba had taken place in the midst of some of the worst-ever violence between Israelis and Palestinians and this violence would continue for the next few years, apparently precluding any efforts at peace making. Yet despite, or perhaps because of this, two extraordinary breakthroughs were to occur. The first was the declaration in 2001 by the President of the United States, George W. Bush expressing support for the first time for the creation of a Palestinian state, on the basis of the two-state solution. (The White House, www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases) Even more startling, was a similar declaration on the part of Sharon as Prime Minister of a Likud-led government. (The White House, www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases) The UN also formally adopted the idea of UNSC Resolution 1397. Bush, and Sharon had many demands for this state, including the creation first of a transitional “provisional state,” along with and many internal reforms and regime change, but the goal of an independent Palestinian state had now been set.

The Arab Peace Initiative

At roughly the same time, the Arab League, responding to a proposal made by the Saudi Crown Prince, unanimously approved the [Arab Peace Initiative](#). The Initiative contained the usual demand for Israeli withdrawal to the June 4, 1967 lines (including the Golan) and the creation of a Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital – with the designation of “East” Jerusalem meant to clarify the limits of the demand. The significant additions were, first, a new formulation on the refugee issue whereby, without any direct call for return, the problem was to be resolved through an “agreed upon” solution based on Resolution 194. Thus, despite the reference to 194, Israel was to have a say in the matter. The second, and even more significant addition, was the promise of peace, an end of the Arab-Israeli conflict, normal relations with Israel, and security for all the states in the region. (Golan, 2007) Arab motivation presumably came from an interest in ending the conflict that served as a rallying point for radical forces in the region considered anathema to their own regimes and continued power. For the Saudis there was most likely an added interest to diffuse criticism of possible association with 9/11. Whatever the motivation, the Arab League, at its March 2002 summit in Beirut, had at last decided to accept Israel in the region.

Coming as it did on the eve of one of the worst terror attacks in Israel, followed by a major Israeli military offensive into Palestinian areas of the West Bank, the Arab Peace Initiative went virtually unnoticed in Israel. Yet it was to be reaffirmed a number of times and acknowledged in the various plans that followed. Most of these plans sought to recommence a peace process, the most notable being the [Road Map](#), proposed by the Quartet (U.S., UN, Russia and the EU) in April 2003 and adopted as his own by Bush. (Golan, 2007) The Road Map called for a series of measures to be carried out in three phases over a three year period. Progress from phase to phase was to be “performance based.” In the second phase, a Palestinian state within provisional borders would be created, followed by a third phase in which an international conference would launch discussions on the final status issues (Jerusalem, refugees, and so forth) and also peace agreements with Syria and Lebanon. Like the Oslo Accords, this was another interim plan, although it added the previously missing monitoring function, albeit in a relatively vague formulation. The major problem with the plan, however, was the matter of moving from phase to phase because progress was dependent upon implementation of the tasks allotted to each phase. Rather than parallel implementation of the tasks of each phase, Israel assumed an interpretation whereby the tasks were to be carried out sequentially as listed in each phase. This resulted in conditionality: First the Palestinians had to democratize and, more importantly, eliminate “the infrastructure of terrorism” and unite their security forces, and only then would Israel undertake its tasks, such as freezing settlement building or removing illegal outposts. In addition, Israel submitted fourteen reservations to the plan. But, given the sequential interpretation or conditionality set by Israel, phase one remained a major stumbling bloc rather than a mutual

step toward phases two and three and peace.

Disengagement From Gaza

In addition to the blaming of Arafat for the Camp David failure, the almost daily terrorist attacks had persuaded most Israelis that there was “no partner” for a peace process. Yet this very violence led to domestic pressure on the Sharon government, for critics that included former security officials argued that Israel was not totally blameless for the situation, and reservists protested measures that they were expected to undertake in suppression of the Palestinians. Pressure of another kind came from the 2003 publication of the Geneva Initiative, a detailed sample “peace agreement” based mainly on the Clinton Parameters and negotiated by teams of Israeli and Palestinian security experts, politicians and intellectuals many of whom were close to the decision-makers, at least on the Palestinian side. Still maintaining that there was “no partner” for negotiations, Sharon decided upon a unilateral action: Total disengagement from Gaza including the dismantling of the twentyone settlements there (and four isolated settlements in the West Bank) designed, presumably, to ease the tension and, as he explained, to preempt the imposition of agreements that would be harmful to Israel (i.e., the Geneva Initiative). It is difficult to know Sharon’s strategic motivation, aside from these tactical considerations, but this was also a period in which there had been increasing attention to the demographic issue, namely that holding on to the occupied territories would lead in the not too distant future to Jews becoming a minority in the area between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River. Thus, unilateral disengagement from Gaza would reduce the number of Palestinians under Israeli rule by 1.3 million persons as well as relieve the IDF of the need to protect settlers inside the Gaza Strip. Israel deemed this the end of its occupation of Gaza, but the fact that it maintained control over land, air, and sea access – forbidding the building of a seaport [\[15\]](#) or airport, prevented any recognition of this from the international community. One important precedent, however, was Israeli agreement to international (EU) and Egyptian participation in the control of the Gaza border with Egypt.

To the Americans, Sharon maintained that the [disengagement](#) did not alter the Road Map, but rather it was an Israeli concession that deserved some U.S. commitment in return. Bush provided this in an exchange of letters that contained two significant changes in traditional U.S. positions. In an April 14, 2004 letter (*Ha’aretz*, August 15, 2005), Bush explicitly accepted the Israeli position that solution to the refugee problem would be found only within the Palestinian state “rather than Israel.” Further, reversing the decades old American opposition to the settlements, Bush asserted that it would be “unrealistic” to expect Israel to return to the 1949 Armistice lines (i.e. the pre-1967 borders) because of the “*new* realities on the ground including existing population centers.” (*Ha’aretz*, August 15, 2005) While subject to interpretation, the Bush position offered an opening for the retention of settlements. Nonetheless, the earlier U.S. demand for a freeze on settlement building and the dismantling of outposts remained, and they were reiterated in Israel’s commitments expressed in an April 19 letter from Sharon’s bureau chief, Dov Weissglas, to U.S. National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice. (*Ha’aretz*, August 15, 2005) The exchange of letters also referred to a new issue that had arisen: The security barrier being built by Israel in response to the increasing terrorist attacks. The Palestinians protested to the fact that this barrier was being constructed in part within the West Bank rather than on the 1967 line. While not contesting the construction of a barrier, the Bush letter specified that the fence/wall was to be a “temporary rather than permanent” security structure and “therefore not prejudice any final status issues including final borders.”

Peace Talks For The New Millenium

None of the exchanges or negotiations from 2001 onward took place with the Palestinians as both Jerusalem and Washington refused to deal with Arafat. Even after Arafat's death in 2004 and the election of [Mahmoud Abbas](#) (Abu Mazen), Israel persisted in the view that there was no Palestinian partner. Ehud [Olmert](#), who replaced Sharon in 2006, sought still more unilateral moves for withdrawing from the bulk of the West Bank. This policy, however, was discredited as a result of the second Lebanon War, for the war demonstrated that withdrawal without an agreement, as had been the case of the 2001 withdrawal from Lebanon, had meant that there were no agreed upon security guarantees. Indeed the unilateral disengagement from Gaza had also proved this since, by eschewing withdrawal based on negotiations with the elected Palestinian authorities, Israel's evacuation of Gaza was interpreted by Palestinians not as the fruit of negotiation but rather as Israeli surrender in the face of the "armed struggle" conducted, and continued, by Hamas. With unilateralism discredited and the demographic problem still threatening in the West Bank, Olmert abandoned unilateralism and initiated a new peace process.

Meanwhile, however, a major change had taken place among the Palestinians. As a result of disillusionment with the failure of the PLO's negotiation policy and disgust with Fatah corruption, the Palestinian Authority elections in January 2006 had brought the Islamist Hamas to power as the largest political party. Ismail Haniyeh became Prime Minister, although Abu Mazen remained President as well as head of the PLO. Israel, along with the U.S. and Europe, refused to deal with the new government unless Hamas agreed to recognize Israel, renounce violence, and accept all previous agreements. Thus, a partial, sometimes total siege of Gaza (the seat of Haniyeh's government) was begun, along with a boycott of the Palestinian Authority. The situation deteriorated, with Hamas rocket fire and terrorist attempts against Israel and Israeli military incursions and assassinations inside Gaza. These increased following the capture of an Israeli soldier, leading to an Israeli ground and air attack on Gaza which continued during the Lebanon War. Israel indirectly negotiated with Hamas, via Egypt, to free the captured soldier, but it maintained the boycott and siege even after a Saudi brokered agreement led to a Fatah-Hamas Unity Government. (Jacob and Carmon, 2007) This government authorized Abu Mazen to conduct talks with Israel on the condition that any agreement reached ultimately be subjected to a referendum. Israel, the U.S. and the EU, however, would not deal with a government that included Hamas. In June 2007 Hamas took control of the government in a violent coup in Gaza. The Palestinians were now split, with a Hamas Prime Minister Haniyeh in Gaza and a Fatah President Abu Mazen in the West Bank, each claiming sole authority over the Palestinians. Israel eventually related to Abu Mazen as head of a Palestinian Authority void of Hamas, lifting the political boycott of the Authority on the West Bank, but also tightening the siege on Hamas-controlled Gaza. Hamas, ideologically opposed to recognition of Israel, continued its periodic rocket attacks on southern Israel.

Circumstances for the renewed peace process were not particularly auspicious, not only because the Palestinians were split and Abu Mazen's leadership weak, but also because public dissatisfaction in Israel with the conduct of the second Lebanon War had left Olmert politically weakened, while police investigations of Olmert for alleged corruption threatened the fall of his government. Indeed, Olmert may have hoped that success in talks with Abu Mazen might save his political career. He was also under pressure from the Americans in part to mollify Washington's Arab allies (Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia) who feared that the Lebanon War had strengthened Iran, Shi'a and even Sunni radical groups throughout the region. The concern was that the Palestinian issue would continue to serve as a mobilizing factor for these groups that threatened many of the Arab regimes.

Talks began between Olmert and Abu Mazen with the intention of producing a set of principles to guide final status talks. Failing to reach this goal, in November 2007 the two met in an international conference sponsored by the United States, at Annapolis, Maryland,

also in the presence of representatives of a number of Arab nations, including Syria. The Annapolis meeting was a purely ceremonial event opening the way for bilateral Israeli-Palestinian talks dealing with all the core issues of the conflict with the goal of achieving a final status agreement within one year. Bush's speech and the joint opening statement focused on the Road Map, but both Olmert and Abu Mazen referred also to the Arab Peace Initiative, reflecting the broader regional concerns at the time and the hopes for agreements with Syria and Lebanon, both of which sent representatives to the conference.

Syria had in fact been sending signals to Israel since 2004 in an attempt to open peace talks. In some economic difficulty, isolated in the Arab world, and not entirely comfortable with its growing dependence upon Iran, Syria was apparently looking for a way to improve relations with the United States. These relations had deteriorated over Iraq-related issues and over Syrian involvement in the 2005 assassination in Lebanon of Rafiq Hariri, a former Prime Minister in the U.S. backed regime there. In fact it was American opposition that had led to Israeli refusal to enter talks, but a number of secret informal contacts paved the way, finally, to indirect but official talks via the Turkish government in 2007. Little is known about the content of these talks, although before leaving office Olmert made it clear that no peace could be reached with Syria without the return of the Golan Heights. (*Yediot Aharonot*, September 29, 2008) Nothing was said publicly about the specific point of contention, the June 4, 1967 line, but it was often mentioned that receding Kinneret waters might now place that line further inland, eliminating Israeli concerns over Syrian access to the Kinneret. This issue was no more than a few hundred square meters of beach, but it still had the potential of a deal-breaker. More recently, however, Israel had added new demands, such as cessation of Syrian assistance to Hezbollah and Hamas and a distancing of Damascus from Iran. In any case, the Syrians were not willing to open direct talks unless the Americans were involved, and awaiting the new government in Washington that might make this possible, they suspended talks once Israeli elections were announced.

Israeli-Palestinian talks, both between Olmert and Abu Mazen and between negotiating teams led by Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni and veteran PLO negotiator Saeb Erakat were held regularly throughout 2008. Israel maintained that the final agreement reached would be a "shelf agreement," to be implemented only once the Road Map demands were met -- namely phase one's elimination of the infrastructure of terrorism and strengthening of Palestinian security forces). The Palestinians accepted the Road Map demand, arguing that they had already moved quite far along in implementing their part while Israel had failed to freeze settlement construction and to remove outposts. Among both populations, little was expected from these talks in view of the failures of the past and the present weakness of the two leaderships. Indeed throughout the past years of violence and disappointments, the majority of both populations had become persuaded that the other side was not interested in peace. This was the major reason that both Israelis and Palestinians had shifted once again to the right, with majority support for the use of force or violence. Yet, according to on-going opinion polls, majorities on both sides continued to favor negotiations and the two-state solution. (Steinmetz Center Polls, Y-Net, 2008-9)

Olmert's strategy presumably was based on strengthening Abu Mazen by improving life for the Palestinians in the West Bank and offering confidence-building measures. It was believed that would weaken Hamas since the boycott and siege on Gaza would prevent Haniyeh from providing the basic necessities to the population there. Whether such a strategy would have succeeded is a moot point, for the Olmert government barely provided any confidence-building measures (such as easing of checkpoints, release of more than a small number of prisoners). Instead it continued settlement building and constructed further impediments to Palestinian movement. With the assistance of Egypt, Jordan and the U.S., Israel did support the rebuilding of the Palestinian security forces which managed to restore order within the West Bank. Whatever popularity this may have garnered Abu Mazen,

however, was destroyed by the Israeli invasion of Gaza December 2008-January 2009. A Palestinian survey in February indicated a rise in support for Hamas, at the expense of Fatah, in the West Bank. (PSR Poll No.31)

Before the Israeli invasion, a six-month cease-fire had existed between Israel and Hamas, arranged by the Egyptians. Days before it was due to end in December 2008, there was an Israeli incursion to close a tunnel a quarter of a mile from the Israeli border, killing six Hamas operatives, followed by massive rocket attacks by Hamas, leading to the major Israeli assault on Gaza that had been threatened for nearly a year. Coming just weeks before the Israel elections, and days before the inauguration of President Obama, the attack created a new reality with regard to any peace process. Since Hamas was actually strengthened politically by Israel's action and Abu Mazen further weakened, it was difficult to see how Obama's newly named envoy to the conflict, [George Mitchell](#), might proceed.

It was Mitchell's arrival in the region that occasioned Olmert's finally revealing the main commitments he had made to Abu Mazen in the course of the negotiations. (*Yediot Aharonot*, January 29, 2009) Similar to the Clinton Parameters, Israel had committed to: 1) return to the 1967 lines with equal land swaps, although only 60,000 rather than 80,000 settlers would be evacuated (presumably because of larger settlement blocks), 2) the Arab neighborhoods of East Jerusalem would be under Palestinian sovereignty and the holy places under an international administration that would ensure free access for all religions; and 3) refugees from 1948 would not return to Israel. In addition, the Palestinian state would be contiguous with tunnels or roads connecting the West Bank to Gaza. Olmert said that all these points had been agreed with Abu Mazen but nothing was signed. He later said that there had been no response from the Palestinians to these proposals, and that they lacked the courage to make peace. (Y-Net, March 15 and April 1, 2009) Palestinian negotiator Erekat confirmed the territorial part of what was a verbal offer made on September 17, 2008 to Abu Mazen, while later accounts, both Palestinian and Israeli, including a June 22, 2009 *Newsweek* interview with Olmert, indicated that the Israeli offer was in the area of 93.5%-93.7% of the territory with 4.5% of the remainder would be received in swaps, leaving the roughly 1.5% to be to be accorded allocated for West Bank passages to a Mediterranean port and Gaza (Olmert in *Newsweek* said all of the remaining 5.8%). (*Ha'aretz*, March 30 and April 10, 2009) Regarding Jerusalem, Olmert reportedly proposed a form of international (Arab states plus Israel and Palestine) control of the Holy Basin (the Old City) and a joint committee to administer East Jerusalem until permanent arrangements were settled. (AFP, March 28, 2009; *Washington Post*, May 31, 2009; *Newsweek*, June 22, 2009; Saul Arieli unpublished paper, nd, 2009) Olmert later denied an assertion by Abu Mazen in the *Washington Post* that as Prime Minister he had agreed to the refugees' right of return but he implicitly confirmed reports that he had agreed to the return of some (reportedly 30,000) for humanitarian reasons. (*Ha'aretz*, March 30 and April 10, 2009) As with earlier negotiations, the exact – final – Israeli offer is not clear, but Saeb Erekat told *Newsweek* that they were still formulating their response, “in consultation with the Americans,” up until the time Olmert left office.

In any case, Netanyahu who was about to take office after the February elections immediately responded to Olmert's January interview that his government would not be bound by these commitments. In coalition negotiations for his government that took office on March 31, Netanyahu explicitly rejected to the two-state solution, and upon taking office he spoke only generally of political, security and, primarily, economic steps to reach peace and a final status arrangement that, apparently, would give the Palestinians autonomy.

It was difficult to see how progress could be made with a [Netanyahu](#) government, particularly in view of his Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman's comments upon taking office. Lieberman said that Israel was bound only by the Road Map which, unlike the

Annapolis agreements, had been approved by the Israeli Knesset. (Israel Foreign Ministry website) Both the U.S. and its Quartet partners quickly responded that the Annapolis declarations and the two-state solution remained the only way possible to peace. (Obama, AP, April 5, 2009; Blair, *Daily Telegraph* April 2, 2009). Obama made this still more emphatic in what might be considered his first major policy pronouncement on the conflict, namely, his speech at Cairo University on June 4, 2009. Apparently in response to this, and Washington's demands for a total freeze on settlement construction, Netanyahu abandoned his opposition to a Palestinian state. In a speech at Bar Ilan University ten days later, he accepted the goal of the creation of a Palestinian state, but added a number of "principles," i.e., conditions. The first of these was Palestinian recognition of Israel as "the state of the Jewish people." This was a controversial addition to Israel's previously demanded recognition of Israel's "right to exist," which had been accorded by the PLO in its 1988 decisions and in Oslo (as well as by Egypt and Jordan). For the Palestinians the addition would mean ignoring the Palestinian citizens of Israel; it might also carry implications for the principles upon which the refugee issue might be resolved. The second condition was demilitarization of the Palestinian state. This was not a new demand but it was amplified by "iron-clad security provisions for Israel," including Israeli control of air space, monitoring of imports, and a ban on military alliances. If, Netanyahu explained, these conditions were accepted, then negotiations could determine the other issues. With regard to these, he stated his positions: defensible borders for Israel, Jerusalem as the united capital of Israel, and resolution of the refugee problem "outside the borders of Israel."

Obama welcomed the change in Netanyahu's stated position on the idea of a Palestinian state but matters remained focused on Washington (and Palestinian) demands for a freeze on settlement building. While this issue continued to be debated (mainly the matter of building at least for what Jerusalem termed "natural growth"), there were reports that Obama planned a dual process of bi-lateral Israeli-Palestinian talks and multi-lateral talks involving the Arab states in what might be a series of mutual confidence building measures designed to move the Arab Peace Initiative toward implementation. (*Ha'aretz*, June 28, 2009). Indeed, Obama's stated conviction that resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was an American interest appeared to be a critical part of Washington's new policy for the whole region, including overtures to Syria (as well as to Iran). This policy, combined with the interests of the Arab states in the region, held the prospect of sufficient pressure to edge things forward between Israel and the Palestinians despite the strength of opponents on each side.

If one were to take the long view, an extraordinary distance has in fact been covered from the early post-1948 peace attempts. Israel has peace agreements with two Arab neighbors, Egypt and Jordan; and Syria has been actively seeking an agreement as well. Once rejecting the very notion of a Palestinian people, the majority of Israelis support the creation of a Palestinian state alongside Israel, an outcome that is supported by the majority of the Palestinians as well. Even a right-wing, as well as a centrist, government of Israel has adopted the two-state solution, prior to the coalition installed in 2009. Israel had also come to accept the 1967 lines as the basis for the two-state solution with the Palestinians, along with the principle of land swaps. The removal of the settlements from Sinai and especially from the Gaza Strip established a precedent for the far larger evacuations needed from the West Bank. The parties have also developed proposals that could resolve the seemingly intractable issues of Jerusalem and the refugees. In Gaza, and in Lebanon, Israel has accepted the idea of international involvement on borders deemed critical to Israel's security. Arab participation is now considered a desirable and even necessary component to the peace process. Perhaps most promising of all, the entire Arab world, in the form of the Arab League Peace Initiative, has offered Israel peace, an end to the conflict, normal relations and security.

If the deeply rooted skepticism surrounding all of these developments and the accompanying

extremism could be overcome, the peace process might actually reach fruition. Perhaps, as in the past, the final effort will require third party involvement. This was the case for most of the agreements reached over the years, and even the two most significant agreements, the peace with Egypt and the Oslo Accords, required direct American involvement for ultimate agreement. King Hussein also intervened for the achievement of the two final agreements of the Oslo period. Two other Middle Eastern actors, Egypt and Turkey, have acted as mediators for negotiations between Israel and its adversaries. The only accord reached without any third party involvement was the peace between Israel and Jordan, because the two parties had been conducting secret bilateral relations of one kind or another since pre-state times. American involvement, however, always went beyond mediation, for most agreements have required some promise of outside assistance – whether of a security or economic nature. European and Arab involvement may be expected to continue, even if only to aid an emergent Palestinian state, for international assistance will clearly be necessary to deal with the compensation crucial to resolution of the refugee issue. Despite the global economic crisis, all concerned appear willing to accept such challenges. Common concern over the future of the region as a whole may be the key to the culmination, finally, of the Arab-Israeli peace process, over-coming local reticence and obstacles from whatever source.

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[1] For example, the allotment to Jordan of an area south of Hebron in exchange for an area to Israel that has become known as the "little triangle."

[2] Organized by the UN appointed Palestine Conciliation Commission, consisting of Turkey, the United States, and France.

[3] The Arab states voted against Resolution 194 because it dealt, mainly, with the internationalization of Jerusalem and, also, implied recognition of Israel.

[4] E.g., this was the Israeli response as well to a plan for refugee repatriation proposed by President Kennedy in 1963.

[5] The vagueness was a compromise inserted by a British suggestion given Israel's objection to reference to "all" the territories. Text may be found in John Norton Moore (ed.), *The Arab-Israeli Conflict*, Princeton University Press, 1977, p.1084.

[6] This was a departure for Moscow. Until this plan, the Soviets had spoken only of the 1947 Partition Plan lines. Another innovation was the Plan's acceptance of the US-Israeli view that a peace agreement precede Israeli withdrawal. (See, Golan, Galia, *Soviet Policies in the Middle East from World War II to Gorbachev*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1990.

[7] The Soviets were just beginning to go beyond the view of the Palestinian issue as merely a refugee issue, as they began gradually to support the PLO, though they were not officially to support the call for a state until 1974.

[8] There were even different interpretations of his role, with Israel refusing to treat him as a mediator.

[9] Rabin, according to his memoirs, was not in agreement with what he (and Kissinger) viewed as inflexibility on the part of Golda Meir. (Rabin, 1979)

[10] Israel had objected to an October 1 Soviet-American joint statement that included a call for "Palestinian legitimate rights;" in response the U.S. announced that the statement would not be binding.

[11] Rejected was an Egyptian request for maintaining police in Gaza Strip.

[12] Near tie-election results led to leadership rotation between the Likud and Labor coalition government.

[13] The Arafat-Hussein Agreement of 1985 came in response to a peace proposal by Reagan in the wake of the Lebanon War. Implicitly accepting 242, the agreement collapsed apparently because of U.S. insistence and PLO failure to make this explicit.

[14] "A Million Bullets," (Hebrew) documentary by Moshe Greenberg, 2008.

[15] A 2005 agreement with the U.S. allowed for the building of a seaport, but Israel never permitted implementation. After the election of a Hamas-led government in 2006, Israeli controls of access became still more stringent.

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