

PALESTINIAN-ISRAELI NEGOTIATIONS & THE ISSUES AT STAKE



Special Bulletin

INTRODUCTION

Over the past six decades, there have been numerous attempts to find a political formula to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Yet, the current 'peace process,' launched in the early 1990s, remains a complicated and unresolved issue. Although there is no doubt that peace is a political necessity, emphasis has perceptibly been on process and the achievement of a durable agreement seems increasingly out of reach. The impasse in the negotiations reveals how little, if at all, remains of the basic notion that both parties to the conflict have something to offer the other in exchange for what they themselves want. It appears that Israel has become accustomed to the way things are and sees no urge to change the status quo: it is in control of all the issues at stake, including land, natural resources, and people, while its own economy is flourishing. At the same time, nobody has emerged from the international community willing to take serious action against Israeli illegal acts or bring the occupation to an end.

So far, the process has failed, but it will inevitably continue. The intention of this bulletin is to examine past efforts and expose the apparent intractability of this conflict by looking at both the existing state of affairs and the differing views regarding the so-called permanent status issues, i.e., Jerusalem, borders, refugees, settlements, water, and security.

THE STORY SO FAR ... (TIMELINE)

Direct face-to-face talks between official Palestinian and Israeli representatives began in January 1993 under the mediation of Norway and led to the **Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements**, signed on 13 September 1993 in Washington, DC. It provided the guidelines for future negotiations, as well as for a five-year interim autonomy for Palestinians, followed by a permanent settlement based on UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338. It postponed the major issues (e.g., Jerusalem, refugees, settlements, water, security, and borders).

The subsequent **Agreement on the Gaza Strip and the Jericho Area** (Oslo I, Cairo, 4 May 1994) outlined the first stage of Palestinian autonomy - in 60% of Gaza and a 65 km² area in and around Jericho - including Israeli redeployment and the establishment of a Palestinian Authority (PA) as an administrative body. In addition, a Palestinian police force was set up and 'powers' in five civilian spheres were transferred to the Palestinians. However, Israel retained control of its settlements, military locations, and security matters. The following year, the **Palestinian-Israeli Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip** (Oslo II, Taba, 28 September 1995) expanded Palestinian self-rule in the West Bank, which was divided into **Area A** (full Palestinian civil jurisdiction and internal security), **Area B** (full Palestinian civil jurisdiction, joint Israeli-Palestinian internal security), and **Area C** (Israeli civil and overall security control). Elections for and powers of a Palestinian Legislative Council were determined and October 1999 was set as the date for reaching a final status agreement.



Arafat-Rabin handshake after signing the Declaration of Principles 1993

Events (the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin on 4 November 1995, 1996 election of a Likud-led coalition government) brought the Oslo process first to a halt, then set off a series of meetings to renegotiate the accords. The first outcome of these was the **Protocol Concerning the Redeployment in Hebron** (January 1997), followed by the **Wye River Memorandum** (Washington, DC, October 1998) for the implementation of the Oslo II Agreement and the resumption of final status talks. It divided the second redeployment provided by Oslo II (that had been due by April 1997) into three phases totaling 13% of the West Bank. Other main points were amendments in the PLO Charter, opening the airport in Gaza and the safe passage corridor, reducing the number of Palestinian police, and releasing Palestinian prisoners. The December 1998 Knesset vote for early elections in May 1999 suspended further implementation of the agreement. In September 1999, the **Sharm El-Sheikh Agreement** for the implementation of the Wye River Memorandum was signed, stipulating that Israeli military forces would withdraw in three stages from another 11% of West Bank land, release 350 Palestinian political prisoners, open the safe passages, and begin permanent status talks on 13 September 1999 to reach a framework for a settlement of the conflict by February 2000 and a final peace agreement by September 2000.

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