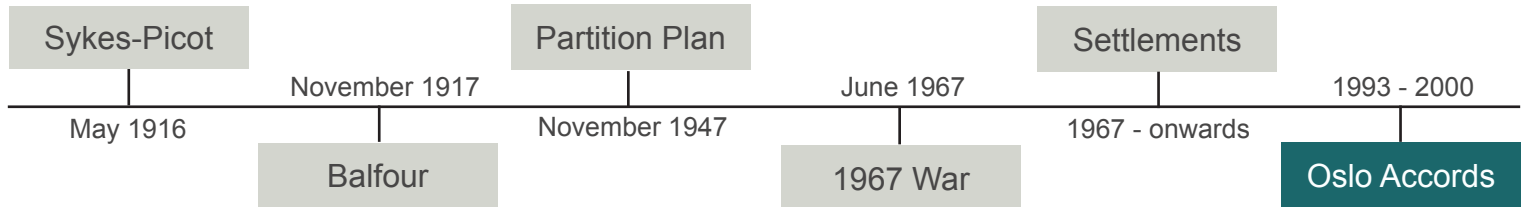


Arab-Israeli Relations



Oslo Accords

Prepared by Anna Siodlak, Research Associate

The Oslo Accords (1993-1999) were a series of agreements forged in an attempt to negotiate an Israel-Palestine peace agreement. Although the Accords were ultimately ineffective, they represented a breakthrough in Israel-Palestine relations and have shaped the administration of the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

Who, What, Where, When and Why?

The Oslo Accords were preceded by the first Palestinian Intifada (1987-1991).¹ Israeli concerns for security and Palestinian demands for freedom were played out through riots, strikes, Palestinian suicide attacks and Israeli Defense Force (IDF) acts of aggression. The 1991 Madrid peace conference signalled the end of hostilities, but a lack of political commitment prevented progress. Two years later, the Chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), Yasser Arafat, and Israeli Prime Minister, Yitzhak Rabin, expressed their willingness to enter direct talks in a series of letters. In return for Arafat's recognition of the State of Israel, acceptance of UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, and renouncement of "terrorism and other acts of violence", Rabin recognised the PLO "as the representative of the Palestinian people" and opened negotiations that became known as the Oslo Accords². Seven central agreements were signed between 1993 and 1999:

1. Oslo I: The Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangement (Washington, September 1993), provided a timetable for the establishment

of a Palestinian Interim Self-Government Authority, general elections in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the implementation of Security Council Resolutions 242 and 388, the Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and Jericho area and the establishment of various Palestinian Authorities including a development bank and police force. Permanent status negotiations over a five-year interim period would cover the issues of Jerusalem, refugees, settlements and borders. In 1994, Rabin, Arafat and Israeli President, Shimon Peres were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

2. The Agreement on the Gaza Strip and the Jericho Area (Cairo, May 1994) outlined a timeframe for the Israeli military withdrawal, the transfer of military and civil administration to the Palestinian Authority (PA), a Protocol on Economic Relations and a Palestinian prisoner release agreement.
3. The Agreement on Preparatory Transfer of Powers and Responsibilities (Erez, August 1994) proposed an initial transference of authority from the Israeli government to the PA in the departments of education, culture, health, social welfare, tourism and tax.
4. Oslo II: The Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (Washington, September 1995) divided the West Bank into Area A (Palestinian control), Area B (Palestinian civilian control, but Israeli security control) and Area C (Israeli control). The agreement also confirmed that the security perimeter around the Gaza Strip would only remain for the duration of the Agreement. Angered by apparent concessions made by the Israeli government, in October 1995 Rabin was assassinated by a religious-nationalist. The attack interrupted the peace process. Subsequent elections brought Benjamin Netanyahu to office, a member of the right-wing Likud party.
5. The Protocol Concerning the Redeployment in Hebron (January 1997) divided Hebron into H1 (exclusive Palestinian control) and H2 (Palestinian civilian

¹ The Madrid Conference in 1991 generally marks the end of the Intifada, but violence continued until the launch of the Oslo Accords in 1993.

² UN Security Council Resolution 242 (22 November 1967) condemned the Israeli acquisition of territory and made several provisions for peace. Resolution 338 (22 October 1973) called for a ceasefire of the Yom Kippur War (October 1973) and calls for the implementation of Resolution 242. e numbering wne tmneral elections when the PA would gain official authority.

control and Israeli military control).

6. The Wye River Memorandum (Washington, October 1998) reaffirmed the goal of a permanent status agreement by May 1999, but implementation was suspended by Netanyahu due to pressure from extreme right and religious parties. The Netanyahu government was ousted after a vote of no confidence; Netanyahu lost the 1999 election to Ehud Barak.
7. The Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum (Sharm el-Sheikh, September 1999) called for the withdrawal of Israeli forces from urban zones in the West Bank, the release of Palestinian prisoners, and the re-opening of Shuhada Road and Hasbahe market in Hebron, which had been closed after the 1994 Ibrahimi Mosque massacre when an American-Israeli settler killed 29 Palestinian worshippers. On 28 September 2000, Likud party leader Ariel Sharon accompanied by riot police, visited the Temple Mount, one of the most sacred Islamic and Jewish sites. This provocative move acted as a catalyst for the Second Intifada.

The impact today

Although a comprehensive peace agreement was not reached, the Oslo Accords remain relevant. The PA is the governing body of the West Bank, which remains divided into Areas A, B and C (18%, 22% and 60% of West Bank territory respectively). Area C includes all 125 Israeli settlements and associated land. The Israeli government limits Palestinian settlement, construction and development in this area; Palestinian residents live in basic conditions, often without safe access to water or electricity. They are not permitted to develop their communities, and live under the threat of home demolition.

Israeli forces withdrew from the Gaza Strip in 2005. Following the election of Hamas in 2006, however, the security perimeter transformed into a land, air and sea blockade enforced by Egypt and Israel. This severely

limits the movement of goods, capital, services and people. The Israeli government also reduced the fishing zone from 20 nautical miles (as agreed in Oslo II) to 6 nautical miles in response to perceived threats by Hamas. Entry into, or exit from, Gaza requires a permit from the Israeli government, the process for which is long and based on limited quotas and strict conditions.



Route of the Israeli barrier, 2013. Map courtesy of www.antiwar.com.

Palestinians in the West Bank are required to hold a permit to enter Jerusalem through the Separation Barrier. The Barrier, which was judged illegal by the International Court of Justice, was constructed along the 1949 Armistice line, purportedly as a security measure

against Palestinian terror threats. 85% of the 708-kilometre route lies within occupied territory. Upon completion, the Barrier will annex East Jerusalem and 8% of the West Bank. Movement inside the West Bank is restricted by hundreds of checkpoints and roadblocks. In Hebron, Palestinians are still unable to use Shuhada Road and Hasbahe Market remains closed. In the H-2 area, movement is severely restricted by checkpoints and IDF soldiers, so much so that Palestinians and Jewish settlers use different roads and shops. Harassment and arbitrary detention of Palestinians by IDF soldiers is a regular occurrence.



Anna Siodlak

Anna is a Research Associate with the West Asia – North Africa Institute, where she focuses on mechanisms for achieving Arab integration and the Arab-Israeli conflict. Before joining the WANA Institute, Anna was based at a development organisation in the region where she launched a number of initiatives including discussion groups on current affairs and career mentoring sessions for students. She holds a Bachelor of International Relations and is completing a Master's degree in Global Politics at the London School of Economics, specialising in international relations of the Middle East and human security.