



THE OSLO ACCORDS AND HAMAS RESPONSE

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ABSTRACT

The signing of Oslo Accords between Israel and PLO was a historic event. There were several factors and events which played vital role but the intifada that started in December 1987 was the milestone event which led to the Oslo Accords. Hamas which was founded during intifada in a very short time became the face and voice of Palestinian liberation movement but it was the Oslo Accords which gave impetus to the movement. Throughout the entire Oslo Peace Period Hamas adopted a very calculative strategy. On the one hand it continued to criticize PLO and its leadership for selling out Palestinian cause in exchange of millions of dollars and on the other hand remain committed to Jihad including revenge killings against Israel. Thus, Hamas was able to preserve its identity and legitimacy as well as its revenge killings were widely accepted because it was presumed as the best means to redress Israeli assassinations. All these factors along with other gradually made Hamas what it is today.

KEY WORDS: Israel, Hamas, PLO, Intifada, Islam, Zionism, Palestine

BACKGROUND OF THE OSLO ACCORDS

The Oslo Accords and process need to be explained in thoroughly structural terms, with an eye to the long-term projects, strategies, policies, and powers of the Israeli state and the PLO.¹ The road to Oslo was a long one for both Israelis and Palestinians. For each it was a matter of gradual change in the thinking marked by bitter internal dispute, outside pressures, and the tragic experience of loss and bloodshed over many decades. For both, in many ways, the Palestinian Intifada that began in December 1987 was the decisive event that led to the Oslo Accords. Many other factors and events, both before and after, played significant roles, but the Intifada may have tipped the scales in favor of the direction that finally brought about the Oslo Accords.²

When Israel occupied the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in 1967, since then Israeli elites have been well aware of their looming ‘demographic problem’ – that of how to avoid absorbing too many Palestinians into the Jewish state and thereby undermining its definitively Jewish character.³ Besides this long-term demographic

¹ Selby, Jan, *Water, Power & politics in the Middle East: The other Israeli – Palestinian conflict*, (New York: I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd, 2003), p. 132.

² Galia Golan, *Israel and Palestine: Peace Plans and Proposals from Oslo to Disengagement*, (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2007), p. 9.

³ Presentation before the Peace and Security Council, May 23, 1998; quoted in Ze’ev Schiff, *Security for Peace: Israel’s Minimal Security Requirements in Negotiations with the Palestinians*, (Washington DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1989), pp. 15-16.

problem, Israeli business elites had also started to campaign for a peace agreement of some sort with the Palestinians.

In their opinion the Israeli economy needed to attract foreign capital and find new markets (especially Arab), and for this, the moves towards peace were an essential precondition. Many of the key Israeli architects of the initial Oslo peace process (Shimon Peres, Yossi Beilin and Yair Hirschfield, for instance) were also leading proponents of economic liberalization; the secret Oslo negotiations, were conducted entirely by civilians, and without the prior knowledge of the IDF. Due to these reasons, the agreement came to place such emphasis on economic cooperation.⁴

A third and more important cause for the Oslo Agreement was Israel's growing concern for security problems in the territories. The breakout of intifada in December 1987, which made the Gaza Strip and some of the West Bank cities practically ungovernable; moreover, during the early 1990s, guns had started replacing stones as the most prominent means of Palestinian resistance, and the security of Israeli settlers and civilians had come increasingly under threat.⁵

Yitzhak Rabin, a 'security hawk' started advocating that the indirect control, rather than direct occupation is the best for the Israel's security interests. Thus, he started negotiating a deal with PLO that met Israel's security requirements, but that did not contradict Israel territorial and economic ambitions.⁶ The Intifada had shown the Israeli public the depth of the Palestinian nationalism and had forced Israelis to think, for the first time, as well as increased strength of Hamas, with its collaboration with other Islamic opposition groups throughout the region, forced Israeli leaders to consider negotiations with the PLO as a means of defusing the discontent which Hamas drew its strength.⁷

While the economic liberalizers played influential role for negotiations but, it was the security logic of the Rabin and the IDF that ended up more influential. The 1992 Israeli elections – and the subsequent formation of an Israeli government that for the first time in the 15 years was not led by the Likud – were landmark to the negotiations of the Oslo Agreement.⁸

There was another reason which also has been responsible somewhat to pave the way to Oslo Agreement. In 1990, in the midst of Intifada and on the eve of the Gulf Crisis, Israel embarked on the most ambitious program of settlement construction in the occupied territories it had yet undertaken. According to the Bush administration, Israel's provocative actions in the occupied territories constituted the main hindrance to a successful outcome of the peace process. Israel's denial to heed United States appeal to freeze the settlements brought the two countries in a bitter dispute that finally resulted in abandoning a \$10 billion loan guaranteed to Israel by U.S.⁹

Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir was disobedient and asserted that his government would never back down in its determination to populate the occupied territories with Jewish settlers. All these controversies of the

⁴ Selby, Jan, *Water, Power & politics in the Middle East: The other Israeli – Palestinian conflict*, (New York: I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd, 2003), pp. 134-35. See also, Usher, Graham, *Dispatches from Palestine: The Rise and Fall of the Oslo Peace Process*, (London: Pluto Press Ltd, 1999), P. 43.

⁵ Schiff, Ze'ev, *Security for Peace: Israel's Minimal Security Requirements in Negotiations with the Palestinians*, (Washington DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1989), p. 53.

⁶ Selby, Jan, *Water, Power & politics in the Middle East: The other Israeli – Palestinian conflict*, (New York: I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd, 2003), p. 135.

⁷ Arthur Goldschmidt Jr. and Shibley Telhami, *The Contemporary Middle East*, 2nd ed., (USA: Westview Press, 2010), p. 90.

⁸ Charles, D. Smith, *Palestine and the Arab – Israeli Conflict*, 3rd ed., (New York: St Martin's Press, 1996), p. 314.

⁹ Arthur Goldschmidt Jr. and Shibley Telhami, *The Contemporary Middle East*, 2nd ed., (USA: Westview Press, 2010), p. 89.

Shamir's government greatly influenced the upcoming Israel's national elections of June 1992, in which the Israeli public rejected Shamir's ideological rigidity and facilitated Yitzhak Rabin's Labor party an unprecedented victory.¹⁰

Rabin's eagerness to restore good relations with the United States led him to announce a partial freeze on settlement construction. But it was sufficient to convince the Bush administration that it should promote Rabin's moderation. When Rabin made his first visit to the United States in 1992, President Bush declared the approval of the \$10 billion loan guarantee without securing a total freeze on Israeli settlements.¹¹

For the Palestinians the process to Oslo could be traced as far back as the early 1970s when the idea of creating a Palestinian state confined to the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, namely the two – state solution, was proposed by some (including PLO's backers in Moscow).¹² After the PLO's serious setback as a result of Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982, this became a heated and bloody debate within the organization, with some advocates for recognizing Israel and two – state solution.¹³

The tremendous pressure on PLO by U.S to accept UNSC Resolution 242 and explicit recognition of Israel's right to exist, along with renunciation of terror as condition for opening any U.S.– PLO dialogue. The outbreak of Intifada, the unsustainable situation of the Palestinians under occupation along with disillusionment from outside (Soviet and Arab) assistance, frustration and depression from inside the occupied territories, brought the PLO's long debate to its culmination and announcement in the form of the political resolution of the Palestinian National Council in November 1988 accepting Resolution 242 and condemning terrorism followed by a Yasser Arafat speech to a UNGA and press conference in Geneva and explicitly recognizing Israel right to exist in peace and security and renouncing all forms of violence.¹⁴ In doing this PLO adopted the two – state solution in what is called "historic compromise" to accept a state only on part (22 percent) of Mandate Palestine.¹⁵

Israel and the PLO exchanged letters of mutual recognition, yet while the PLO accepted 'the right of the state of Israel to exist in peace and security', Israel conversely only recognized the PLO as 'the sole representative of Palestinian people'. Israel was recognized as a nation-state, the PLO as an organization.¹⁶ The Declaration of Principles opened a process and an interim autonomy period, but involved no commitment on Israel's part to accepting Palestinian statehood.¹⁷

The reason which forced Arafat to accept Israel's rejectionist terms was the deterioration in its strength, with the final loss of the PLO's political backer, the Soviet Union and more importantly the loss of its main financial backers, such as, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the small Gulf states because Arafat openly lent his support to Saddam

¹⁰ Ibid.,

¹¹ Ibid.,

¹² Galia Golan, *Israel and Palestine: Peace Plans and Proposals from Oslo to Disengagement*, (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2007), pp. 9-10.

¹³ Ibid.,

¹⁴ Yezid Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and Search for State*, (Washington, D.C: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 624.

¹⁵ Galia Golan, *Israel and Palestine: Peace Plans and Proposals from Oslo to Disengagement*, (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2007), pp. 9-10.

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 257-8.

¹⁷ Savir, Uri, *The Process: 1,100 Days That Changed the Middle East*, (New York: Random House, 1998), pp. 67, 204.

Hussein in the 1990 – 91Gulf crises.¹⁸ The PLO has been dependent on the financial support provided by Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states but due to the Arafat's open support of Saddam Hussein, the greater part of this support was withdrawn.¹⁹ Furthermore, after the war approximately half million Palestinians who had been working in Kuwait prior to the Iraqi invasion were no longer welcomed; the PLO had long benefited from private remittances from Palestinians working in the Gulf, and these also started to dry up. The outcome was that the PLO found itself in financial crisis to the tune of \$100 million a year, and started closing several of its diplomatic offices, including some of those at its headquarters in Tunis.²⁰ Financially and politically isolated, Arafat sought American sponsorship and a deal that would rehabilitate the PLO.

Besides this, Arafat and the PLO also faced internal Palestinian challenges from political movements and leaders within the territories. The PLO had been based in Tunis ever since 1982, after Israel's invasion of Lebanon had forced it to leave West Beirut; housed in Tunis, the PLO was 1000 miles away from Palestine, and more ineffectual than ever. The Intifada opened a way to the Palestinians within the West Bank and the Gaza Strip to take the lead in resisting Israeli occupation – and thus constituted a challenge both to Israel and the PLO. This challenge came from emergent Palestinian Islamists movements, most notably Hamas, which as the Intifada progressed took an even more active role in resisting the occupation, and became a threat the PLO's prestige, credibility and status as '*sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people*'. Thus, began a series of conflicts between the PLO 'outsiders' in Tunis and Palestinians 'insiders' within the territories.²¹

Just after the Gulf Crisis, the (George H.W. Bush) administration embarked on an extensive effort to attain a resolution of the Arab – Israel conflict. Thus, an international peace conference mutually backed by United States and Soviet Union started in Madrid on 30th October, 1991 with the historic gathering. It brought altogether for the first time, delegates from Israel, the Palestinian community, and the neighboring Arab states that have not yet recognized Israel's right to exist – Lebanon, Jordan and Syria to discuss peace. The Madrid Conference also focused attention on the Palestinian representatives, which was composed of "insiders" – that was the Palestinians who inhabited and worked in the occupied territories and thus denied the PLO as official representative of Palestinian people in these negotiations.²² Shimon Peres judged that Arafat would be much more compliant than the inside negotiators, being '*convinced that if Arafat was allowed to return and rule in Gaza and Jericho...he would yield, for the time being, on virtually everything else. This included Palestinians core issues.*'²³ Shimon Peres thus started to establish secret contacts with Arafat. As for the PLO chairman, the Oslo negotiations and process enabled him to bypass and undermine the Madrid delegation, and to reestablish control of the Palestinian national movement.

¹⁸ Galia Golan, *Israel and Palestine: Peace Plans and Proposals from Oslo to Disengagement*, (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2007), pp. 10-11. See also, Selby, Jan, *Water, Power & politics in the Middle East: The other Israeli – Palestinian conflict*, (New York: I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd, 2003), p. 138.

¹⁹ Walid Khalidi, 'The Gulf crisis: origins and consequences', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (1991), pp. 5–28.

²⁰ Charles, D. Smith, *Palestine and the Arab – Israeli Conflict*, 3rd ed., (New York: St Martin's Press, 1996), p. 312.

²¹ Selby, Jan, *Water, Power & politics in the Middle East: The other Israeli – Palestinian conflict*, (New York: I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd, 2003), pp. 138-9.

²² Arthur Goldschmidt Jr. and Shibley Telhami, *The Contemporary Middle East*, 2nd ed., (USA: Westview Press, 2010), p. 88. See also, Shlaim, Avi, *The Rise and fall of Oslo Peace Process*, Louise Fawcett ed., International Relations of the Middle East, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005, pp. 242-243.

²³ Nick, Guyatt, *The Absence of Peace: Understanding the Israeli – Palestinian Conflict*, (London: Zed, 1998), p. 43.

Arafat was able to reestablish this control, and to push through the Oslo deal, testifies to how personalized his rule of the PLO had become.²⁴ Arafat was thus able to conduct secret talks without having consulted the PNC, an act that was evidently unconstitutional. It is due to this reason that Chomsky refers to this Declaration as the ‘Israel – Arafat Agreement’.²⁵

THE ACCORDS

Secret talks had begun in January 1993 between the Israelis and the PLO at the invitation of the Norwegian government. These meetings were conducted over an eight – month period and brought what became known as the “Oslo Accords”. On August 20, 1993, the accord was announced in Oslo. On Monday, 13 September 1993, the accord was signed on the South Lawn of the White House with President Clinton as overseer and sealed with historic hand-shake between Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and the PLO chairman Yasser Arafat.²⁶

Oslo Accord was not a peace treaty or a final settlement of any kind rather it was a series of agreement with “Interim Arrangements” for the West Bank and the Gaza Strip until the conclusion of an agreement on the final status of these territories.²⁷ The underlying concept was that the two sides were not yet ready for a full peace agreement, and therefore, an interim period was needed during which to build mutual trust.²⁸

The following are the agreements that made up what is known as the “Oslo Accords”:

The Letters of Mutual Recognition were in many ways the most important of all the documents because they represented the historic breakthrough and constituted the only irreversible move in the whole process.

Yasser Arafat letter to Rabin stated the PLO’s recognition of “the right of Israel to exist in peace and security”, to accept United Nations Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, to renounce the use of violence and other acts of terrorism and to change those parts of the Palestinian National Charter which were inconsistency with these commitments.²⁹

Yitzhak Rabin’s letter to Arafat came in response to these commitments. In fewer words and with fewer commitments, the Israeli Prime Minister presented the government decision to “recognize the PLO as the sole representative of Palestinian people”. Thus, Israel acknowledged the Palestinians as a nation. Israel could no longer claim that there was no such thing as a Palestinian people; they were a nation, with a national movement.³⁰

Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements (“Oslo I”) was far from a peace agreement but rather a framework or blueprint for temporary arrangements by which the territories were to be

²⁴ Allon, Groth, *The PLO’s Road to Peace: Processes of Decision – Making* (London: Royal United Services Institute for Defense Studies, 1995).

²⁵ Chomsky, Noam, ‘The Israel – Arafat agreement’, *Z Magazine* (October 1993); reproduced in *Fateful Triangle*, pp. 533–40.

²⁶ Gregory Harms with Todd M. Ferry, *The Palestine – Israel Conflict: A Basic Introduction*, 2nd ed., (London: Pluto Press, 2008), p. 153. See also, Shlaim, Avi, *The Rise and Fall of the Oslo Peace Process*, p. 246. Also, Abba Ebn, ‘Building Bridges, Not Walls,’ (The Guardian, September 10, 1993).

²⁷ Shehadeh, Raja, Law, Reality and the Oslo ‘Peace’ Process, *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 3, (Autumn, 2000), pp. 469–76.

²⁸ Galia Golan, *Israel and Palestine: Peace Plans and Proposals from Oslo to Disengagement*, (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2007). pp. 12-14. See also, Gregory Harms with Todd M. Ferry, *The Palestine – Israel Conflict: A Basic Introduction*, 2nd ed., (London: Pluto Press, 2008), p. 153.

²⁹ Ibid., See also, Shlaim, Avi, *The Rise and fall of Oslo Peace Process*, Louise Fawcett ed., International Relations of the Middle East, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 247.

³⁰ Ibid.,

administered. Factually, DOP was a guideline for autonomy, even relatively autonomy. However, the signing ceremony of DOP was a powerful symbol of historic reconciliation between the two sides and they agreed “to put an end to decades of confrontation and conflict, recognize their mutual rights, and strive to live in peaceful coexistence and mutual dignity and security and achieve a just, lasting and comprehensive peace settlement”.³¹

The time table was a gradual transfer of power from Israel to the Palestinians in four stages. The entire “Oslo Process” would start only with stage one, in which governing powers would be transferred in the Gaza Strip and Jericho. This was to be completed in a period not more than six months. Israel had preferred with Gaza Strip alone, but the PLO insisted upon Jericho as well as at this stage. Stage two, would be transfer of some civil authority (e.g., education, health, welfare, tourism, local taxes etc.) to the Palestinians throughout the entire West Bank.³² In the third stage a formal interim arrangement would be negotiated for implementation of the DOP, including delineation of the powers of a self-governing Palestinian authority and elected council, election procedures and similar measures. All of the above stages were to be completed in nine months which will begin with the withdrawal of Gaza Strip and Jericho. Fourth stage, the final status of negotiations will begin as soon as possible. These negotiations were to deal with the issues of refugees, settlements, security, borders, water and Jerusalem.

The Paris Protocol, negotiated when the withdrawal from Gaza Strip and Jericho started in April 1994, was a comprehensive document drafted to regulate economic relations between Israel and Palestinians.³³ It also provided a provision for monthly transfer of revenues by Israel to the PA from various direct and indirect taxes (such as VAT, petrol tax, and taxes for health and social scrutiny) collected by Israel which amounted to approximately sixty percent of Palestinian yearly budget. However, the Paris Protocol remained in effect, although not fully implemented.³⁴

Gaza Strip – Jericho Area Agreement of 4 May 1994 and the preparatory transfer of powers and responsibilities of 29 August was about the scheduled withdrawal from Jericho and the Gaza Strip, which was to signal the commencement of the time table, had not yet begun, and therefore the Gaza – Jericho Agreement called for an accelerated withdrawal within three weeks. Another element in the Gaza – Jericho Agreement was a clause regarding “prevention of hostile acts” conducted by Hamas and the Islamic Jihad which started immediately after the signing of DOP. This clause also stipulated protection of settlers and Palestinians from mutual attacks. Confidence building measures were taken in the Gaza – Jericho Agreement by promised prisoners’ releases. Israel agreed to release five thousand prisoners within a five-week period and to negotiate further prisoners release. An important innovation of this Agreement was the provision for the deployment of a Temporary International Presence

³¹ Ibid., p. 15. See also, Shlaim, Avi, *The Rise and fall of Oslo Peace Process*, Louise Fawcett ed., International Relations of the Middle East, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 247.

³² Dennis J. Deeb II, *The Collapse of Middle East Peace: The Rise and Fall of Oslo Peace Accords*, (Universe, Inc., 2003), p. 13. See also, Galia Golan, *Israel and Palestine: Peace Plans and Proposals from Oslo to Disengagement*, (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2007), p. 17.

³³ Galia Golan, *Israel and Palestine: Peace Plans and Proposals from Oslo to Disengagement*, (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2007), pp. 18-19.

³⁴ Clyde Mark and Kenneth Katzman, *The Palestinians: Current Issues and Historical Background*, (New York: Nova Science publishers, Inc., 2003), p.101.

(TIP) of 400 persons from five to six donor countries for a six-month period. TIP was to consist of “observers, institutions and other experts”; its role and authority were to be negotiated by Israel and Palestinian authority (PA).³⁵

On 24 September 1995, at the Egyptian Red Sea Resort of Taba, the **Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip** was negotiated and signed. Four days later, on 28 September 1995, a ceremony at the White House with Rabin, Peres, and Arafat made official what became known as **Oslo II**, or the **Taba Accord** (also known as the “Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip”).³⁶ It annexed the clauses in the DOP and measures governing the creation of the Palestinian Authority, elections to the Palestinian Council, safe passage between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, air and sea ports for Gaza Strip. The major innovation of the Interim Agreement was the redeployments of the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) from Jenin, Nablus, Tulkarm, Qalqilyah, Ramallah, and Bethlehem, and 450 towns and villages. Israel will redeploy in Hebron, except where necessary for Israelis security. Israel will be responsible for external security and the security of Israelis and settlements.³⁷ However, Jerusalem specifically East Jerusalem, had long been a problem. The Palestinians viewed Jerusalem as part of the West Bank, but Israel had annexed the eastern part of the Jerusalem (1967) and made it as the unified capital of Israel (1980), refused even to discuss the status of city. Keeping this view in mind, the PLO agreed that Jerusalem would be dealt with independently from the rest of the West Bank in the final status negotiations.³⁸ Israel for its part failed to provide safe passage promised for goods and the people between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip; it failed to release anywhere near the numbers of the prisoners to which it had agreed; it frequently postponed discussions, and most seriously, it continued to build and expand settlements, expropriating land for this purpose and for the paving of bypass roads for the settlers. Despite of all these, when redeployments did take place, Israeli “external security” led to the creation of roadblocks and checkpoints within the territories so that, coupled with a closing of access to East Jerusalem, Palestinians found themselves with less rather than more freedom of movement than prior to the Oslo. And more of the land of the West Bank and East Jerusalem had gone into Israeli hands. Settler violence was also a problem and the most serious of such incidents was the killing of 29 Muslim worshipers in the Hebron mosque by the settler Baruch Goldstein.³⁹ There were violations of agreements by Palestinians also.⁴⁰

On 4 November 1995 – just two months after the signing of the Interim Agreement, Yigal Amir, a Jewish law student assassinated Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, at the end of a massive peace rally in Tel Aviv in support of Oslo due to Rabin’s concession of land to the Palestinians. Shimon Peres assumed the position of Prime Minister and continued with the developments of Oslo II.⁴¹ The Oslo Process did not officially end with the election of

³⁵ Galia Golan, *Israel and Palestine: Peace Plans and Proposals from Oslo to Disengagement*, (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2007), pp. 19-20.

³⁶ Gregory Harms and Todd M. Ferry, *The Palestine – Israel Conflict: A Basic Introduction*, 2nd ed., (London: Pluto Press, 2008), p. 155.

³⁷ Clyde Mark and Kenneth Katzman, *The Palestinians: Current Issues and Historical Background*, (New York: Nova Science publishers, Inc., 2003), p.102.

³⁸ Galia Golan, *Israel and Palestine: Peace Plans and Proposals from Oslo to Disengagement*, (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2007), pp. 21-23.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 25.

⁴⁰ Caplan, Neil, *The Israel – Palestine Conflict: Contested Histories*, (United Kingdom: Wiley-Blackwell Publication, 2010), p. 205. See also, Khalidi, Rashid, *The Iron Cage: The Story of Palestinian Struggle for Statehood*, (Boston, MA: Beacon, 2006), pp. 146, 178.

⁴¹ Caplan, Neil, *The Israel – Palestine Conflict: Contested Histories*, (United Kingdom: Wiley-Blackwell Publication, 2010), p. 206. See also, Gregory Harms and Todd M. Ferry, *The Palestine – Israel Conflict: A Basic Introduction*, 2nd ed., (London: Pluto Press, 2008), pp. 156-8.

Netanyahu, but he was not willing to continue it and there was a declared intention of expanding settlements while explicitly ruling out the possibility of Palestinian state or negotiations on Jerusalem.

Tensions rose as the peace process stalled and settlement activity grew. They erupted in the fall of 1996 when Israel opened a tunnel under the Temple Mount theoretically to provide better access to Jewish archeological sites. A violence flares up throughout the West Bank and Gaza Strip and within three days of riots at least 60-80 Palestinians and 15 Israelis were killed.⁴² In response to the violence, President Clinton invited Arafat and Netanyahu to Washington for talks which eventually produced a resumption of Israel's redeployments in the form of the Hebron Protocol.⁴³

Hebron Protocol was intended by Netanyahu to revise the previously agreed upon the details of the Israeli withdrawal from eighty percent of the city. As a result of direct intervention by King Hussein of Jordan, the Protocol was signed on 17 January 1997. Politically, the Protocol was significant for the "Note for the Record"⁴⁴ that was attached to it due to the Arafat insistence. The Note was the link to the Oslo Accords, committing Netanyahu to continue the process. Once again Israel agreed to carry out the redeployments, prisoners release, provide the safe passage in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, permit of the creation of the Gaza airport and seaport, economic and other issues. The PLO reaffirmed their commitment to revise their Charter, to fight terror and confiscating illegal weapons and to keep the police force size in line with interim agreement.⁴⁵

The Wye River Memorandum (1998) – At the Wye River Plantation in Maryland, on October 15, 1998, the leaders met under U.S. mediation, with Albright and CIA Director George Tenet conducting the summit. On 23 October the Wye River Memorandum was signed in a ceremony at the White House; another footnote to the Oslo. Again, responsibilities were assigned to the two parties.⁴⁶ Defined steps were to be taken over a twelve-week period to complete implementation of the Interim Agreements. Israel will redeploy from territories in the West Bank in exchange for Palestinian security measures. The PA will have complete or shared responsibility for 40 percent of the West Bank, of which it will have complete control of 18.2 percent. Palestinians have ensured the systematic combat of terrorist organizations and their infrastructure. Their work plan will be shared with the United States. A U.S. – Palestinian committee will review steps to counter terrorism. The Palestinians will prohibit incitement to violence and terror and establish a mechanism to act against prosecutors.⁴⁷

A U.S. – Palestinian – Israeli committee will monitor incitement and recommend how to prevent it. Israeli-Palestinian security cooperation will be full, continuous, and comprehensive. A trilateral committee will meet not less than biweekly to assess threats and deal with impediments to cooperation. The Palestinians will provide a list

⁴² Charles, D. Smith, *Palestine and the Arab – Israeli Conflict*, 6th ed., (Boston: Bedford / St Martin's Press, 2007), p. 472. See also, Bickerton, Ian J., and Carla L. Klausner, *A History of Arab – Israel Conflict*, 5th ed., (NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2007), p. 290.

⁴³ Galia Golan, *Israel and Palestine: Peace Plans and Proposals from Oslo to Disengagement*, (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2007), pp. 27-8.

⁴⁴ The text of the "Note for the Record" is printed in Walter Liqueur and Barry Rubin, eds., *The Israel – Arab Reader*, 6th ed., (New York: Penguin Books, 2001), pp. 522-3.

⁴⁵ Clyde Mark and Kenneth Katzman, *The Palestinians: Current Issues and Historical Background*, (New York: Nova Science publishers, Inc., 2003), p. 103. See also, Gregory Harms and Todd M. Ferry, *The Palestine – Israel Conflict: A Basic Introduction*, 2nd ed., (London: Pluto Press, 2008), p. 162.

⁴⁶ Gregory Harms and Todd M. Ferry, *The Palestine – Israel Conflict: A Basic Introduction*, 2nd ed., (London: Pluto Press, 2008), p. 163.

⁴⁷ Galia Golan, *Israel and Palestine: Peace Plans and Proposals from Oslo to Disengagement*, (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2007), p. 29-30.

of their policemen to the Israelis. The PLO Executive and Central Committees will reaffirm the January 22, 1998, letter from Arafat to President Clinton that specified articles of the PLO Charter had been nullified in April 1996. The Palestinian National Council will reaffirm these decisions.⁴⁸

Israel, in return agreed to three redeployments, two, detailed in the accord and another to be later addressed by a committee. After delays and limited withdrawal from Zone C, Netanyahu's position was suffering; hardline politicians criticized his giving land away to the PA, and more moderate and left elements questioned his ability. Netanyahu suspended the Wye Agreements and voted with the Knesset to call early elections.⁴⁹

In September 1999, there was one more attempt to save the Oslo Accords. Ehud Barak, elected Prime Minister in May 1999, signed a new agreement called **Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum** updating the timeline and drafting for a framework for a final accord within five months and the conclusion of the final status agreement within a year. However, in his priority to conduct negotiations with Syria first, Barak delayed the new timelines of redeployments.

HAMAS RESPONSE TO THE OSLO ACCORDS

The announcement of the Oslo Accords shocked the entire Palestinians. Some cheered the advent of statehood. Others accused the PLO of legitimating a reconfiguration of the occupation in order to save itself from isolation and bankruptcy.⁵⁰ Critics charged that Oslo Agreements neither assured Palestinians statehood nor a settlement freeze. Arafat's supporters propagated that the Accord was the best available option. They asserted that this was the Palestinians best hope to convince Israel to relinquish land and accept Palestinian sovereignty in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.⁵¹

Hamas firmly rejected the Accords and mutual recognition of the PLO and Israel. In Hamas' outlook, these agreements constitute treason to Islam, as they implied the expulsion of Palestinians from their homeland and the legitimization of the existence of the Zionist entity.⁵² According to Hamas, the essence of the Oslo Accords was coercion on the weaker by the stronger, which was the inevitable outcome of the PLO's retreat both from Islam and from its National Charter in its willingness to accept limited self-rule. Hamas rejected PLO's claims that the adoption of a realistic approach to a settlement with Israel would better promote Palestinians interests than clinging to a position of 'absolute justice' that was unfeasible in the light of the new world order created by the end of the Cold War.

Accepting the reality, Hamas argued, it is merely a reflection of defeatism, in as much as the recognition of the reality does not necessarily imply surrender.⁵³ Israel and its intentions, as well as the PLO leadership and Arafat were being criticized in political, economic and religious terms. Religiously based arguments were rarer than on other occasions which was probably a reaction to the very concrete, political and economic threat the accords

⁴⁸ Clyde Mark and Kenneth Katzman, *The Palestinians: Current Issues and Historical Background*, (New York: Nova Science publishers, Inc., 2003), p. 103.

⁴⁹ Gregory Harms and Todd M. Ferry, *The Palestine – Israel Conflict: A Basic Introduction*, 2nd ed., (London: Pluto Press, 2008), p. 163.

⁵⁰ Pearlman, Wendy, *Violence, Non – Violence, and the Palestinian National Movement*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 125. See also, Said, Edward, *The End of the Peace Process: Oslo and After*, (London: Granta Books, 2000).

⁵¹ Pearlman, Wendy, *Violence, Non – Violence, and the Palestinian National Movement*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 126.

⁵² Hatima, Meir, Hamas and the Oslo Accords: Religious Dogma in a Changing Political Reality, *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol. 4, No. 3, (London: Frank Class, Autumn 1999), pp. 37-55.

⁵³ Ibid.,

represented for the Islamists. Thus, the accord was criticized because it procured a self-rule under Israeli control on two percent of the Palestinian territory, left Al-Quds and the settlements to Israel, and furthermore bridges, roads and checkpoints remained under Zionist security control.⁵⁴ The agreement was described as “only another face of occupation”. The head of the political bureau of Hamas, Musa Abu Marzuq stated that “*it legalizes the occupation because it did not call for its end or the end of the Zionist settlement policy*”.⁵⁵ It was nothing but a ‘new security belt’ for the Zionist enemy.⁵⁶

Indeed, the Israeli acceptance of the peace accords was ‘conspiracy’ to stop *Intifada* and to prevent any Jihad actions. For this purpose, the Zionist entity may temporarily freeze its expansionist policy of political and economic hegemony over the Arab region. Israel was trying to make concession in order to break Arab boycott and to establish economic links with the Arab countries. The final goal behind it was to reach the energy sources of the region.⁵⁷ The emphasis on the economic aspect of the treaty clearly manifested the Hamas sense of reality.⁵⁸

The head of Gaza’s Economic Development Group Abed al-Shafi stated that Israel wanted the Palestinians to act as a bridge for Israelis to enter Arab markets. Such integration is the precondition if Israel has become an economic as much as a military power in the region.⁵⁹

Hamas also criticized Oslo Accords on religious grounds and stated that Israel would never be ready for concessions. The movement talked at length about the Zionist position on Al-Quds. The whole town was considered to be the ‘Eternal Capital’ of Israel.⁶⁰ Thus the continuous fight between the Islamic *Umma* and the Jews was a historical law which taught everybody that the struggle would only end with the definite defeat of the Jews, since they did not accept God’s choice of the Muslims as his ultimate messengers on earth.⁶¹

The *Jihad* is justified not only in religious terms, as a result of the appropriation of Muslim land by Jews, but also in practical terms as Israel understands the language of violence. Since the Oslo Accords contradict the commands of Allah and do not reflect the will of the Palestinian people, they are bound to fail.⁶²

Despite the various tragedies which the Oslo Accords presented for Hamas, it did not despair. For Hamas the present ‘Jewish Supremacy’ was a dangerous period of time, but was ‘limited in time’.⁶³ Therefore, the Accords only delay the liberation of Palestine for years by giving Israel the chance to prolong its life for a while. Thus, Israel’s goal of “the Greater Israel” from the Nile to the Euphrates and the destruction of the Al-Aqsa Mosque and reconstruction of the Temple would not be achieved in long term. Therefore, Hamas announced the Jihad against the enemy would continue as long as one day follows the other. This was not a political choice, but a religious duty and therefore cannot be negotiated.⁶⁴

⁵⁴ Nusse, Andrea, *Muslim Palestine: The Ideology of Hamas*, (Abingdon: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1998), p. 109.

⁵⁵ Bayan Hamas no. 108, In *Filistin al-Muslima*, April 1994, p. 15.

⁵⁶ Press Conference Statement Hamas, 4/9/1993. In: *Filistin al-Muslima*, November 1993, pp. 11-12.

⁵⁷ Nusse, Andrea, *Muslim Palestine: The Ideology of Hamas*, (Abingdon: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1998), p. 110.

⁵⁸ Shimon, Peres, *Die Aussohnung*, (Berlin, 1993), p. 140.

⁵⁹ Interview, with Salah Abd al-Shafi, In: Middle East Report, January – February, 1994, p. 11ff.

⁶⁰ Nusse, Andrea, *Muslim Palestine: The Ideology of Hamas*, (Abingdon: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1998), p. 111. See also, *Filistin al-Muslima*, October 1993, p. 19.

⁶¹ Salah Abd al-Fatah al-Khalidi, *Euphrates and Nile are Islamic Rivers*, p. 55. In: *Filistin al-Muslima*, October 1993, pp. 55-56.

⁶² Hatima, Meir, Hamas and the Oslo Accords: Religious Dogma in a Changing Political Reality, *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol. 4, No. 3, (London: Frank Class, Autumn 1999), pp. 41-2.

⁶³ Nusse, Andrea, *Muslim Palestine: The Ideology of Hamas*, (Abingdon: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1998), p. 111.

⁶⁴ Bayan Hamas no. 102, In: *Filistin al-Muslima*, October 1993, p. 28.

Yasser Arafat and PLO were severely condemned not only for being alienated from the population in the territories, but also acting against the will of huge parts of the PLO itself. Hamas claimed that the PLO leadership sold our cause to the Zionists in exchange for millions of dollars. It was said that the Accords were signed only a few days after a PLO functionary had declared that his organization received several million dollars.⁶⁵ Hamas blamed Arafat of giving up ‘part after part of the Palestinian National Institutions in the hope of becoming ‘village chief of Gaza – Jericho’ which meant the right to rule in the service of enemy.⁶⁶

The submissive and profit-oriented leadership of the PLO sold the whole fatherland at low price because it was tired of fighting.⁶⁷ This treacherous project was seen to make clear to everybody that Arafat’s leadership did not represent the Palestinian people but only itself.⁶⁸

Hamas leadership repeatedly instructed its cadres to publicize that the Oslo Accords was illegitimate and inconsistent with UNSC Resolution 242, which stipulated Israel’s withdrawal to its pre-1967 borders. Hamas began to emphasize the PA’s failures and mismanagement, particularly of the humiliating Israeli demand that Arafat and PA act forcefully against the Islamists. Hamas interpreted Israel’s attempts to use the PA as a means to enhance its security. Thus, whereas Hamas had been accelerating its attacks against Israel’s forces withdrawing from Gaza Strip, it assumed a “wait and watch” position during the first few months of the PA, to test limits of its freedom of action under the new authority.⁶⁹

However, in the light of political changes resulting from the DOP, Hamas reassessed its strategy. Despite the debates about elections, political parties and democracy, Hamas remained committed to a continued *Jihad* against Israel, including revenge attacks. Hamas and Islamic Jihad were responsible for the deaths of approximately 120 Israelis in the first sixteenth months after signing of the Oslo Accords. The presence of Palestinian Authority backed by local police was unable to prevent Hamas from launching attacks on Israeli targets; the organization remained committed to its *Jihad* against Israel.⁷⁰

Hamas military strategy was modified, however, due to the Hebron Massacre. On 25 February 1994, an Israeli settler, Baruch Goldstein, killed 29 Muslim worshipers and wounded some 200 others. Hamas vowed to avenge the lives of the “innocents of the Ibrahimi Mosque”. In a leaflet entitled “the settlers will pay for the massacre with the blood of their hearts”, Hamas claimed to avenge the deaths by taking “a life for a life”. The violence, now directed – significantly – not at military but at civilian targets inside Israel’s Green Line. Five suicide attacks followed during the next eight months: Afula (7 April), Hadera (14 April), Ramlah (26 August), West Jerusalem (9 October), and the Dizengoff Centre in Tel Aviv (19 October). The Israeli toll was 35 people dead and more than 135 injured.⁷¹

⁶⁵ Ibid.,

⁶⁶ Bayan Hamas no. 103, In: *Filistin al-Muslima*, November 1993, p. 7.

⁶⁷ Press Conference Statement, Hamas, 4/9/1993, In: *Filistin al-Muslima*, October 1993, p. 29.

⁶⁸ Bayan Hamas no. 102, In: *Filistin al-Muslima*, October 1993, p. 28.

⁶⁹ Mishal, Shaul and Avraham, Sela, *The Palestinian Hamas: Vision, Violence and Co-existence*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), p. 69.

⁷⁰ Beverley Milton-Edwards, *Islamic Politics in Palestine*, (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 1996), p. 166.

⁷¹ Kristianasen, Wendy, Challenge and Counter Challenge: Hamas’s Response to Oslo, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 3, (Spring 1999), p. 23. See also, Beverley Milton-Edwards, *Islamic Politics in Palestine*, (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 1996), pp. 166-7.

By continuing armed struggle, Hamas was able to preserve its identity and its legitimacy. Hamas retaliatory violence was widely supported because it was perceived as the best means to redress Israeli assassinations.⁷²

With Hamas' attacks on Israeli targets and Arafat's arrival in Gaza in July 1994, the PA was under great pressure from Israel to crack down on the Hamas. Inside Gaza, tensions rose high when the Qassam Brigades, the military wing of Hamas kidnapped an Israeli soldier, Nahshon Wachsman, in the West Bank on 9 October 1994, demanding as ransom the release of Hamas prisoners, including Sheikh Ahmed Yassin. Israel demanded that Arafat must take immediate action. The PA arrested 400 Hamas activists in the Gaza Strip, including one of the co-founders, Ibrahim Yazuri.

From 1990 onwards, there had been sporadic clashes between the two factions i.e. the PA and Islamists, both in the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip. After a moratorium in April 1994 on collaborator killings, Hamas decided to flex its muscles at the PA by killing two more collaborators in June and July. This was followed by Islamic Jihad's killing of three Israeli soldiers on 11 November 1994 – significantly, within the Gaza Strip – to avenge the death of Islamic Jihad leader Hani Abed.⁷³ The grave crisis between the Islamists and the PA that followed erupted in a bloody clash at Gaza's Palestine Mosque on 18 November and seemed to presage the possibility of a civil war. The Palestinian police lost control, killing 14 people and wounding 270. Hamas emerged from confrontation with great credit on account of its ability to retain its followers.⁷⁴

Another climax came on 2 April 1995 when a large explosion demolished half a building in the Shaykh Radwan district of Gaza City, killing seven, including a leading activist of the Qassam Brigades, Kamal Kahil, wanted both by Israelis and PA. Hamas blamed "the Arafat authority and Zionist" responsible for killings and threatened that Qassam Units will respond quickly and painfully.

Consequently, exactly after one week of the explosion, suicide bombers of Hamas and Islamic Jihad struck within two hours of each other near two Israeli settlements in Gaza, killing eight people and injuring more than forty. Hamas issued a communiqué urging Israeli settlers to leave the Gaza Strip "before they were buried in its soil". The PA arrested 200 Islamists, ordered all factions to hand over their weapons, and activated its State Security Court for the first time, which held secret night time sittings to hand down harsh sentences on the Islamists. The members of Islamic Jihad received 15 to 25-year sentences. Hamas's Gaza leadership realized that the prevailing circumstances are leading towards a civil war which was unacceptable.⁷⁵

Growing public support for violent actions against Israel changed the Hamas's and PA's position. This could be witnessed from the PA's minister of planning, Nabil Sha'ath urged for freezing armed operations and giving diplomacy a chance. However, Hamas was willing to offer only to cease its military operations in and from the Gaza Strip for a period to be agreed on by the two parties.⁷⁶ Despite lengthy negotiations, Hamas refused to give up the armed struggle, and the Cairo talks of December 1995 ended without any agreement. However, the head of

⁷² Akbarzadeh, Shahram, *Routledge Handbook of Political Islam*, (London & New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2012), p. 67.

⁷³ Kristianesen, Wendy, Challenge and Counter Challenge: Hamas's Response to Oslo, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 3, (Spring 1999), pp. 23-5.

⁷⁴ Ibid.,

⁷⁵ Ibid.,

⁷⁶ Mishal Shaul and Avraham Sela, *The Palestinian Hamas: Vision, Violence and Co-existence*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), p. 70.

the two delegations were able to issue a communiqué, implying that Hamas would halt military operations against Israel from PA – controlled areas and refrain from publicly announcing or admitting responsibility for them.

Following a ceasefire, Hamas was reportedly willing to negotiate indirectly with Israel on a time limited truce conditional on a full Israeli withdrawal to its 1967 borders, including Jerusalem, and the dismantling of all the Israeli settlements in the occupied territories.⁷⁷

However, on 5 January 1996, Israeli Intelligence Agency (Mossad) assassinated Yahiya Ayyas, famously known as “the Engineer”. Ayyas was the chief bomb maker for Hamas and responsible for a number of suicide bombings. This followed the assassination of Islamic Jihad leader Fathi Shiqaqi in Melta on 26 October of the previous year. Thus, there were two deaths to avenge – deaths that had caused immense anger among Palestinians. Hamas unleashed four suicide bombings inside Israel which resulted in killing approximately 57 and injuring over 130 Israelis.⁷⁸

The attacks put Arafat under unprecedented pressure to destroy Hamas and Islamic Jihad, root and branches. Some 1,200 suspected Islamists were arrested, the Islamic University of Gaza and about thirty Hamas institutions were raided, and the Gaza Mosques were put under PA control. The notorious torture of detainee in Palestinian custody began. Meanwhile, Israel reinforced its long closer on the territories, with disastrous consequences for Palestinians.⁷⁹

Hamas justified its attacks as defensive and not as direct attempts to interrupt the Oslo peace process. Hamas was fully aware about the fact that it could not sabotage the peace process indefinitely. The circumstances favored Hamas’ competitors. International support, the popularity of peace process, and Israel’s position towards the PA weakened Hamas position inside the territories. Hamas tried to avoid a direct confrontation with the PA and negotiated with it. Ultimately, Hamas had to back down from violent confrontation with Israel because of the PA’s dominant positions and capacity to arrest and detain Hamas leaders and activists. Hamas agreed not to conduct any attacks from PA’s territory: at the same time, it was able to act from Israeli controlled territory. This allowed the movement to continue limited attacks against Israel.⁸⁰

On 28 September 2000, Likud Party candidate Ariel Sharon made a controversial and well-publicized visit to Haram al-Sharif on Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Palestinian considered this visit a deliberate provocation and began rioting, thus marking the end of the Oslo Peace Process.⁸¹

CONCLUSION: - The entire period of Oslo Peace Process revealed a pattern that: Hamas had calculated its strategy on a cost-benefit basis and recognized the limits of its power. Jihad turned out not to be an ultimate goal but a political instrument wielded by political considerations. Hamas capability to distinguish between an all-out struggle and practical considerations prevented the deviations from the movement’s basic doctrine. Thus, the temporary acceptance of and adaptation to, reality and maintenance of the organization was the main concern of

⁷⁷ Ibid., pp. 71-2.

⁷⁸ Akbarzadeh, Shahram, *Routledge Handbook of Political Islam*, (London & New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2012), p. 67. See also, Mishal, Shaul and Avraham Sela, *The Palestinian Hamas: Vision, Violence and Co-existence*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), p. 75. Also, Kristianesen, Wendy, Challenge and Counter Challenge: Hamas’s Response to Oslo, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 3, (Spring 1999), pp. 28-9.

⁷⁹ Ibid.,

⁸⁰ Ibid.,

⁸¹ Akbarzadeh, Shahram, *Routledge Handbook of Political Islam*, (London & New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2012), p. 68.

Hamas decision making and a necessary contribution to the protection of the movement's center of gravity. Hamas adapted to the circumstances in order to preserve its base and popularity within the broader Palestinian public. Violence was a political means to an end and its use did not exclude political compromise.

Overall Hamas' view has been that the Oslo Accords and any peace talks are worthless as long as their design is built around the fulfillment of Israeli agenda. Hamas repeatedly advocate that these are capitulation treaties, not peace agreements. For Hamas, the failure of the Oslo Accords was inevitable.

In other words, the Oslo Accords has not improved the conditions of Palestinians under occupation and does not seem to promise any better future. The claim that armed struggle was no longer needed has been refuted by reality, provided credence to the Hamas argument adopted before Oslo Accords that armed struggle is the only real means of liberation. Hamas claims that by refusing ill-designed peace process it upholds Palestinian rights and remains their sole defender. Finally, it can be said that although Hamas was founded in 1987 and its participation in *Intifada* which gave popularity among Palestinians but it was Oslo Accords and Hamas' strategic response to the Accords gave impetus to the 'Movement'.

