

Corso di Laurea magistrale (*ordinamento ex
D.M. 270/2004*) in Relazioni Internazionali
Comparate - International Relations

Tesi di Laurea

The Oslo Peace Process

Relatore

Ch. Prof. Matteo Legrenzi

Laureando

Francesco Delmonte

Matricola 808313

Anno Accademico

2011 / 2012

Contents

INTRODUCTION	3
1) Four key events	5
2) A historical perspective	10
3) The PLO metamorphosis	13
4) The Labor victory in 1992	17
4.1) Yitzhak Rabin for a road to peace	23
5) Shamir and the Madrid stalemate	31
6) The Oslo Peace Process	38
6.1) Track to diplomacy	45
6.2) Early contacts	47
6.3) The process	51
7) Declaration of Principles	145
8) Conclusions	154
BIBLIOGRAPHY	158

Introduction

The signing of the Oslo I agreement, by Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO leader Yasser Arafat on September 13, 1993, was a major turning point in the Middle East.¹

The long and tortuous history of the Arab-Israeli and Palestinian-Israeli conflict has witnessed numerous tragic episodes, but rarely a moment as hopeful as the handshake between the leaders of the State of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization. Sadly, in November 4, 1995, came the assassination of Rabin. He was assassinated by Yigal Amir, a radical right-wing Orthodox Jew, who opposed the signing of the Oslo Accords.

Rabin had been attending a mass rally at the Kings of Israel Square (Rabin Square) in Tel Aviv, held in support of the Oslo Accords. When the rally ended, Rabin walked down the city hall steps towards the open door of his car, at which point Amir fired three shots at Rabin with a semi-automatic pistol.²

Rabin's successor, Shimon Peres, sought to expedite the peace process by accelerating the withdrawal of Israeli troops from major Palestinian cities on the West Bank (except Hebron) – a development that enabled the Palestinians to hold an election for their legislative council on January 20, 1996 – and by beginning intensive peace talks with Syria.

The accord signed between Israel and PLO that day, along with the letters of mutual recognition that accompanied it, reshaped and redefined the conflict in fundamental ways.³

The peace process, however, received a major blow in late February 1996, and early March, when a series of terrorist attacks by Palestinian Islamic militants undermined the Israeli-PLO dialogue and also put an end to the peace talks between Israel and Syria, which, in any case, had made little progress.

¹ Robert Freedman, *The Middle East and the Peace Process*.

² www.wikipedia.com

³ David Makovsky, *Making peace with the PLO*.

The terrorist attacks were also the primary reason behind the election of a right-wing coalition government headed by Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu on May 29, 1996, who made it quickly clear that – despite his campaign pledges of peace with security – he was far less interested in the Middle East peace process than his predecessor had been.

*The major shift in the balance of international power, which came with the disintegration of the Soviet Union, significantly altered the regional balance of power in the Middle East.*⁴ The aftermath of the Gulf war, which further consolidated U.S. hegemony and eroded the political and economic viability of the PLO, coupled with the growing challenge of militant Islamic movements, constituted the necessary conditions that made possible the historic shift in Israeli foreign policy.

However, the political composition of the government formed as a result of the 1992 election, in the context of a changing political culture, constituted the “sufficient” condition for a rapprochement between Israel and the PLO. That, in turn, facilitated the peace with Jordan and the increasing normalization of relations with much of the Arab world.

*As Theodore Friedgut⁵ has noted, “the signing of the Declaration of Principles for peace negotiations between the Palestine Liberation Organization and the government of Israel in September 1993 was one of those rare moments in world politics when all the necessary and sufficient conditions fell into place and a historic turning point was reached”.*⁶

⁴ www.foreignaffairs.com

⁵ A professor at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

⁶ Robert Freedman, *The Middle East and the Peace Process*.

Four key events

The conflict between Jews and Arabs in the Middle East, predates the birth of the modern state of Israel. *The two peoples, who had co-existed for years under a series of external powers, found themselves increasingly at odds as Jewish and Arab nationalism gained popularity and the ruling empires gradually declined and lost local control.*⁷

Four key events in the precedent years set the scene for the evolution of both Palestinian and Israeli policy, which started to accept the way of peace:

1. Israel's war against the PLO in Lebanon (1982-1985), that broke the military back of the PLO, drove it farther into exile, and diminished its control over day-to-day affairs in the occupied territories. This contributed to the eventual outbreak of the Intifada. *Shimon Peres argues that it also created the impression that the war was between equals. He claims, thereby, "the seeds of the Intifada and of Israeli recognition of the need for bilateral talks were planted."*⁸
2. The failure of the 1987 London accord. Rejection of this framework for negotiation between Israel and a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation, worked out between Foreign Minister Peres and King Hussein, aborted a process that might have prevented the Intifada. The official document, created on that occasion, stated what follows:

The London Agreement

April 11, 1987

Accord between the Government of Jordan, which was confirmed it to the Government of the United States, and the Foreign minister of Israel, pending

⁷ David Makovsky, *Making peace with the PLO*.

⁸ Robert Freedman, *The Middle East and the Peace Process*.

the approval of the Government of Israel. Parts "A" and "B", which will be made public upon agreement of the parties, will be treated as proposals of the United States to which Jordan and Israel have agreed. Part "C" is to be treated with great confidentiality, as commitments to the United States from the Government of Jordan to be transmitted to the Government of Israel.

A THREE-PART UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN JORDAN AND ISRAEL

- A) Invitation by the UN secretary general: the UN secretary general will send invitations to the five permanent members of the Security Council and to the parties involved in the Israeli-Arab conflict to negotiate an agreement by peaceful means based on UN Resolutions 242 and 338 with the purpose of attaining comprehensive peace in the region and security for the countries in the area, and granting the Palestinian people their legitimate rights.*
- B) Decisions of the international conference: the participants in the conference agree that the purpose of the negotiations is to attain by peaceful means an agreement about all the aspects of the Palestinian problem. The conference invites the sides to set up regional bilateral committees to negotiate bilateral issues.*
- C) Nature of the agreement between Jordan and Israel; Israel and Jordan agree that: 1) the international conference will not impose a solution and will not veto any agreement reached by the sides; 2) the negotiations will be conducted in bilateral committees in a direct manner; 3) the Palestinian issue will be discussed in a meeting of the Jordanian, Palestinian and Israeli delegations; 4) the representatives of the Palestinians will be included in the Jordanian-Palestinian delegation; 5) participation in the conference will be based on acceptance of UN Resolutions 242 and 338 by the sides and the renunciation of violence and terror; 6) each committee will conduct negotiations independently; 7) other issues will be resolved through mutual agreement between Jordan and Israel.*

*This document of understanding is pending approval of the incumbent governments of Israel and Jordan. The content of this document will be presented and proposed to the United States.*⁹

*Peres argues, "We could have avoided the need to negotiate with Palestinian-only delegation controlled by PLO headquarters if only Likud leaders had not been blindsighted by pipe dreams and an impossible political ideal in whose name they were prepared to wreak havoc with the most significant breakthrough since Sadat's visit to Jerusalem."*¹⁰

However, Prime Minister Shamir was not the only key actor who had reservations about this framework. It is unclear whether Yasser Arafat would have given his blessings to talks without direct PLO representation at the time. Without his sanction it is doubtful that credible Palestinian leaders from the West Bank and Gaza would have participated in the talks.

3. The Intifada, the Palestinian popular uprising that began in December 1987 and continued, at varying rates of intensity, through the initial stages of the peace process. Among other things, it convinced most Israelis that the status quo of occupation was untenable.

*Although the Intifada did not threaten Israel's existence or even its overall control of the territories, it did undermine individual Israelis' sense of personal security and draw international attention to the plight of the Palestinians.*¹¹

It also further polarized the Israeli public regarding which policy initiatives needed to be made: the Intifada, which began without PLO initiative or direction, has proven that Israel cannot achieve a political resolution of the conflict without negotiating with the PLO and meeting the legitimate demands of the Palestinians.

The Intifada set off a chain events that eventually led to the breakup of the National Unity government in March 1990, and the historic

⁹ David Makovsky, *Making peace with the PLO*.

¹⁰ Robert Freedman, *The Middle East and the Peace Process*.

¹¹ David Makovsky, *Making peace with the PLO*.

*preliminary peace conference in Madrid during late October and early November 1991.*¹²

Paradoxically, the Intifada brought to the Palestinians the feeling that they were capable of forging their own fate and future. Yet five years of struggle led only to intensified Israeli military presence and Israeli settlement in the territories.

The growth of Hamas, which turned the Intifada into an armed struggle and challenged PLO dominance, further contributed to perception that the Palestinian rejection of autonomy under the Camp David agreements had been a missed opportunity, and another missed opportunity could be fatal to the Palestinian national moment.

The root cause of the Intifada was really deep: the Palestinians citizens, from the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, were living under occupation since 1948, spreading a state of anger, and violence. *What happened is that the Israeli government continued to take land, which was officially property of the Palestinians, and this was not a good reason to convince the Israelis that the building of new settlements had to be halted.*¹³ Being just totally ignored, what remained to those Palestinians, after their human rights were completely violated, was to live in poverty, watching the Israelis closing all borders to their areas, making it thus impossible for them to get a job and feed their own family.

The real cause of this human rights violation, and consequently of the Palestinian resentment, was the Balfour Declaration of 1917: product of the English administration, it basically proposed that land as a homeland for Jews, a decision that will concretely shattered the future of the Palestinian people. So from one day to another, what was known as Palestine became Israel, starting officially from the aftermath of WW2, more precisely in 1948. As much as any other factor, this growing sentiment among Palestinians convinced Israelis that the they were now ripe for substantive discussions toward a modus vivendi.

¹² Robert Freedman, *The Middle East and the Peace Process*.

¹³ Libby Hughes, *Yitzhak Rabin*.

4. The political stalemate that led to the breakup of the Israeli government, formed after the 1988 election, set the scene for the return of Labor to power and a concrete advance in the peace talks. In March 1990, Peres withdrew Labor from the unity government, ending its six-year partnership with Likud and forcing a no-confidence vote; this episode was due to the fact that Shamir totally refused the idea of starting a dialogue with the PLO, which was now seen as necessary in order to put an end to violence and tensions. The pressure from the United States led to the Madrid conference, where the Likud government entered into indirect negotiations with the PLO.

*The deterioration of U.S.-Israel relations was one of several issues that aided Labor in the 1992 elections.*¹⁴

Moshe Arens¹⁵ argued that: *"relations between the two formerly close allies plummeted to an unprecedented low, with the Bush Administration interfering in the Israeli domestic political arena in an undisguised attempt to bring down the democratically elected government of Israel."*¹⁶ He blames the United States for causing a number of government crises in Israel that contributed to the downfall of the Shamir government.

¹⁴ Robert Freedman, *The Middle East and the Peace Process*.

¹⁵ Was a Likud member, and foreign minister during that period (1977-1982).

¹⁶ Robert Freedman, *The Middle East and the Peace Process*.

A historical perspective

*In the early days of the Arab-Israeli struggle, each side was totally isolated from the other. The only contact was through conflict, often violent and bitter.*¹⁷

The Palestinians in particular held themselves aloof. Though all dialogue arises from conflict, such a conflict must be one of ideas, of positions, and interests. The Arab-Israeli confrontation, however, manifested itself for many decades only as a physical struggle. It found expression only through the emotions within the breasts of its combatants. There was no intellectual dialogue and no attempt to understand.

*The sole exception was in the shape of a handful of scattered contacts between certain figures from the Zionist leadership and a handful of members of the Palestinian social élite.*¹⁸ These included, for example, the initiative of Chaim Weizman in 1931, when he proposed to Moussa al-Alami an understanding between Jews and Arabs, and the meeting in 1934 between David Ben Gurion and Moshe Sharett on the Jewish side, and the Palestinians Moussa al-Alami, and Awni Abdel Hadi.

*These tentative ouvertures, however, failed to create any real foundation for understanding.*¹⁹ There were two reasons why they had no impact:

- a) The aggressive nature of Zionist project itself, whose objective was to create a Jewish state in Palestine, at the cost of the existence of its Arab population.
- b) Such Zionist initiatives were linked to unacceptable conditions to the Arabs, requiring them in general to relinquish their rights to their own land.

Furthermore, these initiatives were also political manoeuvres, intended to undermine the position of Hajj Amin al-Husseini as leader of the Palestinians. As such, the initiatives lacked serious intent and did not incorporate practical proposals that the Palestinians could even consider. The Palestinians refused,

¹⁷ David Makovsky, *Making peace with the PLO*.

¹⁸ www.pij.org

¹⁹ David Makovsky, *Making peace with the PLO*.

therefore, to be drawn into an uneven and inequitable dialogue, where the other party had the upper hand on the ground. Their ambition was to overcome their weakness and to be able to negotiate from a more favourable position at some future date.

As the conflict continued over the succeeding decades, and especially after the “Nakba” of 1948, mutual animosity and hatred exacerbated the state of alienation and denial each side felt for the other. Israel chose not even to recognize the existence of the Palestinian people. *Israeli leaders explicitly asked the question: “Where are the Palestinians? Do they really exist?”*²⁰

Legitimate struggle on the part of the Palestinians, in order to recover their national homeland and regain their freedom, was branded as terrorism. Israel passed laws to prevent any Israeli from having contact with the Palestine Liberation Organization, the legal and sole representative of the Palestinian people, which guided and directed the people’s aspirations towards freedom and independence. Such measures only served to add to the state of fear and hatred each side felt for the other.

*The Palestinian movement, as an Arab liberation movement, was subjected to all weighty emotional pressures arising from the failures of the Arabs as a whole.*²¹ The Palestinian cause suffered the anguish of those defeats, and of the political, social and psychological failures, which weighed upon Arab hearts and minds in general. Consequently, as was also the case with the other Arabs, they lacked the power to change the situation. *From this position of weakness, it was inconceivable for the Palestinians to entertain the idea of political negotiations with the enemy.*²²

Israel’s belief in its own superiority, its denial of basic Palestinian rights and its unacceptably arrogant stood in the way of such thinking on the part of the Arabs in general and the Palestinians in particular. Resentment obsessed the vast majority of the Palestinians, who rejected Israel’s presence on any part of their former territory. Their belief was that it would ultimately be possible to

²⁰ Robert Freedman, *The Middle East and the Peace Process*.

²¹ David Makovsky, *Making peace with the PLO*.

²² www.esaim-cocv.org

organize effective political and military resistance, with Arab and international support, which would alter the balance of power in their favour.

*In the meantime, the Palestinian armed struggle succeeded in achieving some of its goals.*²³ Its successes, though limited, transformed the Palestinians from the condition of isolated individuals, exiled and scattered all over the world, into a people with political aspirations and national identity, recognized not only by the Arab states but also internationally.

*The Palestinian question became a factor whose resolution was a necessary part of any approach to the Middle East question, rather than a marginal issue.*²⁴ International recognition of the legal rights of the Palestinians gave them confidence and enabled them to assert their political presence in the international arena. Gradually, they perceived that they would eventually have to take difficult decisions and would need to engage in a dialogue with their enemy.

²³ www.mitpressjournals.org

²⁴ David Makovsky, *Making peace with the PLO*.

The PLO metamorphosis

By 1973, the Palestinian struggle had developed into a mature national liberation movement, based on realism and moderation. *The Palestinians recognized the difficulties and obstacles they were facing and modified their attitudes.*²⁵ This new approach broadened the support enjoyed by the Palestinians in international circles, and even won some sympathy within Israel itself. Unfortunately, this new moderate stance was totally ignored when the International Geneva Conference was convened in 1974. The Conference, jointly sponsored by the United States and the Soviet Union, was attended by Egypt and Jordan, but boycotted by Syria and Lebanon. The Palestinians were not allowed to be present in person at the one and only session that took place.

However, the interest of the PLO in contact with Israel had now increased. *The PLO soon gave the first indication of its readiness to participate in political negotiations, in line with the new Arab consensus, and with broad agreement from Palestinian intellectuals.*²⁶

This new position, however, led to profound and open divisions amongst the Palestinians. A "rejectionist" front was formed, with the backing of all those Arabs who still found unthinkable the idea of sitting at a negotiating table with the enemy. *Many Palestinians and Arabs saw the new attitude of the PLO as no more than an expression of weakness and political impotence.*²⁷ In spite of their effort at obstruction, however, the Arab and Palestinian rejectionists were unable to defeat the new pragmatic approach.

Since the middle of the 1970s, the new Palestinian philosophy of "revolutionary realism" gained more influence and support especially when it turned its attention to the plight of the Palestinians in the occupied territories.

²⁵ David Makovsky, *Making peace with the PLO*.

²⁶ www.tari.org

²⁷ David Makovsky, *Making peace with the PLO*.

Accusations of defeatism and similar expressions had little impact, either on the PLO leadership or on mainstream Palestinian activists.

In other words, the military accomplishments of the Arab armies in 1973 created a political climate propitious for negotiations, the idea of which then became acceptable. *The military performance of the Arab states had opened the door for the Palestinians to regain their sense of identity.*²⁸ Self-confidence and political courage paved the way for a display of political behavior, entirely different from the recent political and cultural experience of the Arabs. The conceptualization of the conflict as revenge, the feeling of inferiority instilled by Israel's ostentatious success, the belief of the Arabs in their own incompetence, accumulated over decades of military defeats and political frustrations: all these were factors which had inflicted devastating damage on Arab societies and Arab political attitudes.

In the later 1970s, however, this new Palestinian rationality suffered a severe setback. *Though peace making between the Arabs and Israel began at the Camp David negotiations between Egypt and Israel, the Arab rejectionist front succeeded in winning over many Palestinian groups and organizations.*²⁹ Many Palestinians were shocked by the President Sadat's visit to Jerusalem in 1977 and by the first peace treaty between Israel and Egypt the following year.

In passing it must be noted, however, that the move to North Africa, in Tunis, brought some advantages. Because of it, the PLO began to enjoy a certain degree of freedom from the pressures, which had habitually been exerted upon it by the Arab regimes. *The Palestinian decision-making process enjoyed more latitude once it was psychologically removed from certain Arab countries, which had been in the habit of using it instrumentally to achieve their own diplomatic goals.*³⁰

To some extent, the PLO at last became free to make its own choices in the light of the interests of the Palestinians, gaining a degree of immunity from the machinations of the Arab capitals of the Middle East.

²⁸ David Makovsky, *Making peace with the PLO*.

²⁹ Robert Freedman, *The Middle East and the Peace Process*.

³⁰ Robert Freedman, *The Middle East and the Peace Process*.

Nevertheless, in the difficult years following the departure from Beirut, the PLO had few avenues available to it. The armed struggle, which had restored to the Palestinians their awareness of national identity, was no longer an option.

*In these difficult years, an internal Palestinian debate took place, which resulted in a polarization between two groups.*³¹ On the one hand, a small minority refused to change its ideas or its political and ideological convictions. The majority, however, seemed to be more flexible and receptive to the profound regional and international changes which were under way, all of which had their effect on the situation of the Palestinians. *After the Gulf conflict of 1990-1991, Iraq replaced the Palestinian question as the central concern preoccupying the Arab nation as a whole.*³²

However, just as both the Palestinian people and the leadership were facing insurmountable obstacles in every direction, a new factor appeared on the political scene. *On 7 December of 1987, the Palestinian uprising called Intifada, began: this was a collective civilian movement against Israeli occupation.*³³ The Intifada was an unprecedented movement for freedom and independence inside the occupied territories: images of popular resistance, and of Israel's barbaric reaction, filled the screens of the international television networks, repositioning the Palestinian problem in the center of Arab and international attention. No one – commentators, journalists, the Security Council, or even the Israeli political parties and the leaders of Israel – could continue to ignore the Palestinians, when Israel's policy of the demolition of homes and assaults on Palestinian children was seen on television around the globe each night.

Despite certain shortcomings and misjudgements, especially in the later years, the Intifada resulted in a resurgence of Palestinian national self-confidence, which was equivalent in its impact to that of the 1973 war. This changing situation was not only felt by the Palestinians, but also by other Arabs, who encouraged and sustained their Palestinian brothers and sisters. It became possible once more for the Palestinian leadership to take its political courage

³¹ www.mfa.gov.il

³² David Makovsky, *Making peace with the PLO*.

³³ Robert Freedman, *The Middle East and the Peace Process*.

in its own hands, and to explore the possibilities of reaching a peaceful settlement through negotiation. *The Intifada gave the Palestinians a feeling of pride and self-worth. With it they won a new international understanding, together with widespread sympathy for their aspirations for freedom and independence.*³⁴

³⁴ David Makovsky, *Making peace with the PLO*.

The Labor victory in 1992

*Without an understanding of the dynamics of internal power relations within Labor, and of its movement towards a more dovish position on the Palestinian issue, there can be no adequate explanation of the breakthrough in the peace talks.*³⁵ The progress made by the Palestinians, was a prerequisite for the conclusion of a peace treaty with Jordan and for improvements on other fronts. An official document was created, in order to stand as manifesto of the Labor party; it states what follows:

Israeli Labor Party Platform

November 1991

SECURITY / FOREIGN AFFAIRS

- *In favor of immediate talks with the Palestinians on the autonomy plan as an interim solution. Talks will be held with Palestinians from the territories, including from East Jerusalem, but not directly with the PLO. The permanent settlement with the Palestinians and the various Arab states will be worked out in bilateral talks. Regional problems can be dealt with in an international conference.*
- *Jerusalem is to remain united, under Israeli sovereignty, as the capital of Israel.*
- *A permanent solution will be based on territorial compromise.*
- *There will be no return to the 1967 borders, but Israel will be willing to give up, in return for peace, those territories which have a dense Palestinian population in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Territorial compromise is also possible on the Golan Heights. Territories from which Israel will withdraw will be demilitarized.*

³⁵ Robert Freedman, *The Middle East and the Peace Process*.

- *There will be no additional state between Israel and the Jordan River (no Palestinian mini-state). Labor favors the establishment of a Palestinian-Jordanian political entity, whose constitutional structure will be determined by the Jordanians and the Palestinians themselves.*
- *The special relationship with the United States is invaluable. Israel should not accept American dictates on issues involving its vital interests. Differences of opinion should be ironed out by means of talks, and every effort should be made to avoid situations of loss of confidence.*

GOVERNMENT AND ELECTORAL FORM

- *Strongly supported the law for the direct election of the prime minister.*
- *Favors ranking the qualifying threshold to 2.5 percent. Supports electoral reform under which half the MKs will be elected in multimember constituencies and the other half by proportional representation.*
- *Aspires to conclude the drafting of a constitution.*

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC POLICY

- *Aspires to a society based on social justice and equal opportunities.*
- *A good economic policy must be based on a mixture of private initiative and government direction. The government must also be responsible for infrastructure. There should be privatization of government-owned enterprise, though the government should maintain a controlling interest in enterprises dealing with raw materials and military production.*
- *The Histadrut is a vital tool in the realization of the desired goals, and must keep up with the times in terms of its structure and modus operandi.*

IMMIGRANT ABSORPTION

- *The successful absorption of the new immigrants is a top-priority goal.*
- *The absorption of new immigrants cannot be left exclusively to market forces. The government must be directly involved in housing, social absorption, and job creation.*
- *The successful absorption of the immigrants requires massive investment in infrastructure, industrial development, and services. This task can only be achieved if all the possible financial means are mobilized inside Israel, from world Jewry, and from the international community.*

RELIGION AND STATE

- *Advocates the separation of religion and politics, the relationship between religion and state must be defined in a constitution.*
- *There should be no religious and no anti-religious coercion.*
- *The mass exemption of yeshiva students from military service, and religious girls from national service, must end.*
- *There should be no change in the definition of a Jew as it currently appears in the Law of Return.³⁶*

Over the years scores of Israelis and Palestinians challenged the mutual nonrecognition, demonization, and taboos on contacts with the “enemy” camp.³⁷ Following is a brief discussion of one outstanding example, a prominent official of the Labor party, which illustrates how the trail was blazed and the price paid for being a pioneer, ahead of one’s time.

In 1970 Arie Lova Eliav³⁸, then secretary-general of the Labor party, charged his faction with ignoring the political rights of the Palestinians and challenged Israel’s continued occupation of territories as an obstacle to peace. In so doing he entered into a collision course with Prime Minister Golda Meir, which led to his resignation from his position and eventually from the party. “Eliav paid a

³⁶ David Makovsky, *Making peace with the PLO*.

³⁷ David Makovsky, *Making peace with the PLO*.

³⁸ He was secretary-general of the Labor party at the time (1971-1979).

*high price for his personal integration and political conscience.*³⁹ A man who might have become prime minister spent the next thirteen years in the relative obscurity of the political opposition.

Eliav, along with many others, made a significant contribution in paving the way for the present peace process. Eliav first met secretly with Issam Sartawi in Paris in 1975 under the auspices of Pierre Mendes. A year later, after Sartawi had renounced terrorism, Eliav told Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin that there were PLO leaders with whom Israel could negotiate. *Rabin, according to Eliav, replied, "I'll meet them on the battlefield."*⁴⁰

Eliav and Sartawi shared the Kriesky Peace Prize in 1980 for their efforts to establish an Israeli-Arab dialogue. It is most likely that Sartawi was acting as a weather balloon, testing the Palestinian political climate for the possibility of a shift in PLO tactics and policy. The assassination of Sartawi by Abu Nidal in 1984, at a meeting of the Socialist International in Portugal, was a tragic proof of the high stakes paid by courageous Palestinian pioneers of the peace process.

*How did Rabin and Peres, who led the Labor party until Rabin was assassinated by a fanatic Jewish opponent of the peace process on November 4, 1995, move from rejection of the possibility of meeting secretly, with moderate elements within the PLO in 1976, to their support for Oslo I and II?*⁴¹

In his examination of Labor positions on national security issues, Efraim Inbar's analysis of the movement of Labor to the left in the 1980s is a most instructive point of departure. He cites multiple causes for this movement – in spite of movement of the Israeli electorate in the opposite direction during the same period.

Inbar concludes that the "perception of threat" is a major determinant of security policy, in fact we argue that it is one of two major factors shaping ideological polarization in Israeli political culture on this issue. Top party leaders came to perceive a fundamental change in Arab aims concerning Israel. Whereas Inbar does not explain the reasons for this perceptual shift, we

³⁹ Robert Freedman, *The Middle East and the Peace Process*.

⁴⁰ Robert Freedman, *The Middle East and the Peace Process*.

⁴¹ David Makovsky, *Making peace with the PLO*.

suggest that it was the consequence of: 1) the breaking down of stereotypes of mutual demonization by pioneers like Eliav and Sartawi, 2) their perception of gradual shifts in PLO policy, which we will discuss in more detail later.

*The perception of the reduction of threat was a fundamental cause of the greater flexibility and willingness of Labor leaders to take risks.*⁴²

The results were Labor's recognition of the Palestinian national movement as a factor in regional arrangements, its willingness to make greater territorial concessions, its greater openness to a Palestinian state, and its greater reluctance to engage in large-scale military operations.

*Inbar suggests that a move forward was also necessary to stress the difference between Labor and the Likud – particularly as their differences narrowed on social, economic, and religious affairs.*⁴³

The exodus of the most hawkish elements from Labor, along with peer group pressure from external groups (the Socialist International) and internal pressures from intellectuals, and the media, contributed to the leftward shift. Additional factors were the return of the Sinai for a peace treaty, increased awareness of the demographic "problem", fatigue from constant and continuous conflict, the lack of an acceptable alternative to the dovish position in Labor, and sensitivity to outside constraints, particularly the need to maintain cordial relations with the United States.

Finally, Inbar concludes, personnel changes at the elite level led to the advancement of more doves than hawks into the Knesset and into higher levels of leadership within the party and eventually within the government. *The recruitment of a coterie of influential younger advisers and activists, by Shimon Peres during his tenure as party chairman, is the primary explanation.*⁴⁴

Internal party reforms played an important role as well. The most prominent of the Peres coterie was elected to the Knesset, because of the more open and democratic forms of candidate selection adopted by Labor prior to the last two elections, which helped to bring Labor to power in 1992.

⁴² Robert Freedman, *The Middle East and the Peace Process*.

⁴³ Robert Freedman, *The Middle East and the Peace Process*.

⁴⁴ David Makovsky, *Making peace with the PLO*.

*The democratic reforms facilitated the upward mobility of younger and more dovish leaders.*⁴⁵ In the first national primary election held by Labor, on February 21, 1991, Yitzhak Rabin barely managed to top the 40 percent that avoided a run-off against his perennial rival, Peres, for the top spot on Labor's Knesset list. He won because most Laborites, including several prominent Peres supporters, came to the conclusion that Rabin had a better chance of leading Labor to an electoral victory.

Peres managed to place his supporters strategically in the cabinet as well. For example, his most trusted protégé, Yossi Beilin (who as his deputy foreign minister initiated and supervised the critical early stages in the Oslo talks) was later promoted to minister of economy and planning; Beilin was replaced by Eli Dayan, in the Foreign Ministry.⁴⁶ These supporters are even more dovish than Peres, much less than was Rabin.

*The political coalition, that made possible the peace initiatives of the Rabin government, combined the strongly dovish Meretz cabinet members and Knesset delegation with the parliamentary support of the even more dovish members of the Arab Democratic Party and the Democratic Movement for Peace and Equality.*⁴⁷ Although the rivalry between Rabin and Peres was muted, it did not disappear altogether, especially in the first year. Yet, had these two leaders not managed to find a modus vivendi for cooperation, the significant progress in the peace talks could never have been achieved.

*After the announcement of the election results, the ranks of the Right, which had governed Israel for fifteen years, collapsed, and Shamir announced his intention of retiring from politics. To the Israelis his retirement heralded the demise of the Zionist dogma.*⁴⁸ He was followed by Moshe Arens, who was retiring too, trying to shirk responsibility for Likud's short-sighted policies over the past years by blaming Shamir. He said that Israel must not continue to

⁴⁵ David Makovsky, *Making peace with the PLO*.

⁴⁶ Beilin became minister without portfolio in the office of the prime minister with special responsibilities for the peace process in the reconstituted government led by Prime Minister Peres.

⁴⁷ Robert Freedman, *The Middle East and the Peace Process*.

⁴⁸ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

occupy all the territories, and that Shamir was behind the procrastination in the negotiations, and that this had brought about Likud's defeat.

4.1

Yitzhak Rabin for a road to peace

*Rabin was born in March 1, 1922, in Jerusalem (British Mandate of Palestine) to Nehemiah and Rosa (née Cohen), two immigrants of the third wave of Jewish immigration (Third Aliyah) to Israel from Europe.*⁴⁹ Rabin grew up in Tel Aviv, but later the family relocated when he was one year old. In 1940, he graduated with distinction from the Kadoori Agricultural High School, and hoped to become an irrigation engineer.

In 1941, during his practical training at kibbutz Ramat Yohanan, Rabin joined the Palmach section of the Haganah, and remained in the military world officially until the beginning of the Six Day War (1967). On that occasion he was scheduled to retire from the army in 1968, but a few weeks before the war blew up, he started to think about his future as a diplomat member. *When the Six Day War broke out, thoughts of the ambassadorship were put aside, and Rabin's military skills were put in the field, conferring him the title of national hero, and a serious contender for the American post in Washington as Israeli ambassador.*⁵⁰

In 1966, Richard Nixon – then a private citizen practicing law – arrived in Israel after a tour of the Far East, at that moment Israeli officials did not consider Nixon an influential player in American politics. Rabin was invited to a dinner party for Nixon because Rabin, too, had recently returned from a goodwill visit to the Far East: an interesting, intellectual relationship between the two men developed. *In the end, after the Six Day War was over, Rabin officially became the new Israeli ambassador, with a five-year assignment.*⁵¹

⁴⁹ www.wikipedia.com

⁵⁰ Libby Hughes, *Yitzhak Rabin*.

⁵¹ Libby Hughes, *Yitzhak Rabin*.

In the US election of November 1968, Rabin's friend Richard Nixon was nominated as the Republican candidate for president. It was clear from the beginning that Israel's issue was not a priority for the new US president, but he had to change his mind on June 1970, when Israeli army launched air strikes inside Egypt.

*In September of 1970, President Nasser of Egypt died and his vice-president, Anwar Sadat, succeeded him. After his election he sent a message to the United States, stating that Egypt was ready to enter peace negotiations.*⁵²

Another unexpected event happened in July of 1972, Sadat no longer wanted the Russians in Egypt, and this is the reason why he expelled 20.000 Russian advisers: with this decision, a huge weight was lifted from Israel's shoulders.

*During the years in Washington, Rabin had a taste for politics, which he discovered he liked and, when the experience ended, he announced his intention to run for a seat in the Knesset, the Israeli parliament.*⁵³ The Knesset is modeled after the Great Assembly from biblical times, it contains two main parties, Labor and Likud, and many other smaller ones, numbering 19, two of which are Arab Parties. Unlike the American system of government, where church and states are separate, secular and religious groups are woven together in the Knesset.

The elections were scheduled for the fall of 1973, but on Yom Kippur, a religious holiday on October 6, a coordinated attack by neighboring countries took Israel by surprise. The Egyptians on the southwest, and the Syrians on the northeast, attacked Israel at their borders, hoping to regain their lost land. Caught off guard, the Israeli army had to scramble to defend Israel against those attacks.

After three weeks the Yom Kippur War was over: when the IDF got better organized, they pressed hard into Egypt and deeper into Syria. Israelis were on their way to Cairo and Damascus, when a cease-fire was proposed by the Russians. *The United Nations Security Council responded to the war by passing Resolution 338 on October 22, 1973, that called for a cease-fire and for the implementation of Resolution 242 (of 1967) for a durable peace in the*

⁵² Libby Hughes, *Yitzhak Rabin*.

⁵³ Libby Hughes, *Yitzhak Rabin*.

*Middle East.*⁵⁴ Anyway, most of the political blame for the Yom Kippur War, fell upon the shoulders of prime minister Golda Meir; when elections were held at the end of December 1973, the Labor party won a slim majority: Rabin became a junior member of the Knesset.

*But, in April 1974, Golda Meir resigned as prime minister, and the Labor party was in uproar: Rabin was untainted by the 1973 war, and so his name, along with that of Shimon Peres, moved to the top of the list of candidates for a new government.*⁵⁵ In fact Rabin won the central committee's vote, and he became Israel's prime minister at age 52: *"Yitzhak was the first native-born Israeli, the first person from the military environment and finally the first Israeli-educated person to become prime minister."*⁵⁶ In choosing who will serve in his cabinet, Rabin wanted his longtime friend, Yigal Allon, to become his defense minister, internal politics to Shimon Peres, because of his seniority in the Labor party: on June 3, 1974, the cabinet was approved.

*Rabin inherited a troubled economy, plus unfinished peace treaties with Egypt and Syria, but now he had Henry Kissinger who begun his shuttle diplomacy in the Middle East, trying to act as mediator between Israel and its Arab neighbors.*⁵⁷

When Gerald R. Ford succeeded Nixon as president, Rabin wanted to make it clear to Ford and Kissinger that Israel would not give up a piece of land, unless a piece of peace was part of the exchange. More importantly, Rabin wanted to submit to Ford a list of arms Israel needed for emergencies, short term and long-term ones.

Rabin had personal concerns about Anwar Sadat: in a private meeting with King Hussein, he agreed in writing to support the Jordanians and not the PLO when negotiating the future of the West Bank. At the Arab summit Sadat changed his position, which led Rabin to question Sadat's trustworthiness. In January 1975, when Sadat invited Russia's Leonid Brezhnev to Cairo, Rabin was convinced that Sadat was playing games with him.

⁵⁴ Libby Hughes, *Yitzhak Rabin*.

⁵⁵ www.alzaytouna.net

⁵⁶ Libby Hughes, *Yitzhak Rabin*.

⁵⁷ Libby Hughes, *Yitzhak Rabin*.

During Rabin's tenure as prime minister, in June of 1976, an act of terrorism kept the world's attention, for what was then called the Entebbe incident. An Air France flight, from Tel Aviv to Paris, was hijacked by two Germans and two Palestinian terrorists and forced to land in Entebbe, Uganda. The 53 hijackers threatened to blow up the plane unless 53 Arab prisoners were released from Israeli jails (only one-third of the 230 passengers were actually Israelis). Initially Israel agreed to negotiate with them, who answered extending the deadline, giving the Israelis time to organize a plan: the Hercules plan. The idea was to fly a commando unit to Entebbe Airport and take it by force, using Nairobi's airport as the refueling place: the commando rescued the hostages and shepherded them onto the Israeli plane. But three hostages were killed, as well as one Israeli soldier, Jonathan Netanyahu, brother of Israel's future Likud prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

*Meanwhile, Rabin's government began to unravel, his cabinet resigned at the end of 1976, to prepare for elections in May 1977.*⁵⁸ Because Rabin had concentrated on lengthy peace negotiations, he had neglected Israel's economy, which was plagued by high taxes, inflation, and a series of strikes. *Before the 1977 elections, Rabin was hounded by scandals within his administration, in fact the governor of the Bank of Israel, Asher Yadlin, was accused of financial misconduct, and similar charges were made against Housing Minister Avraham Ofer, who eventually committed suicide.*⁵⁹ Moreover Peres distanced himself from Rabin and challenged him for his party's nomination to prime minister. Rabin was saddened, but not surprised at Peres' timely move.

*"Leah Rabin was at the center of a new political storm in March 1977"*⁶⁰: the scandal focused on joint bank accounts that the Rabins held in Washington, in fact Leah, like many Jewish wives, controlled family's finance.

The reason for the controversy was an Israeli Treasury regulation outlawing the holding of a bank account by Israeli citizens, except during long assignments to another country; otherwise some unscrupulous citizens might

⁵⁸ Libby Hughes, *Yitzhak Rabin*.

⁵⁹ www.wikipedia.com

⁶⁰ Libby Hughes, *Yitzhak Rabin*.

hide money abroad to avoid paying Israeli taxes. The revelation of its existence came when several members of the Israeli embassy were told by one of the bank's clerks that the prime minister's wife had been conducting business, and so an investigation began.

*Rabin never condemned his wife for those accusations, but decided they would share the responsibility of that episode, and thought it was a matter of honor that he should resign.*⁶¹ But the Jewish legal system prevented such a move, in fact he could only take a leave of absence and let Peres become "chairman" of the cabinet until the elections, this is what he decided. As the trial went on, the judge made a distinction between Rabin and his wife, however, because his name appeared on the accounts, Yitzhak wanted to take equal responsibility. Of course the judge refused to treat the couple at the same way, and then, in the final decision, Yitzhak was fined \$1600, and Leah was given the choice of serving one year in jail or paying a fine of \$27000 within 45 days: she obviously chose to pay the fine.

*Israel would conduct new elections in May 1977, Shimon Peres was chosen as Labor's candidate, the Likud party instead Menachem Begin, that eventually won the electorate.*⁶²

In 1978, US president Jimmy Carter called for a peace summit, having noticed that the peace negotiations were, in fact, in a deadlock phase. The meeting was at Camp David, the presidential retreat in Maryland, and the states involved were Israel, Egypt and the United States. Israel accepted to returning the Sinai territory to Egypt, and finally establishing diplomatic relations with the Egyptian government. They also disagree about the Palestinian issues , but considered self-rule for Gaza and the West Bank during a transition of five years: these were the Camp David Accords. That accord was signed in March 1979, between Israel and Egypt, on the White House lawn.

*In 1980 Rabin returned to politics, running against Peres in order to achieve his party's nomination: what happened was that Peres eventually won the nomination of his party, but lost to Menachem Begin in those elections.*⁶³ In

⁶¹ Libby Hughes, *Yitzhak Rabin*.

⁶² Libby Hughes, *Yitzhak Rabin*.

⁶³ www.usembassy-israel.org

June 1982 he entered a war in Lebanon, in order to destroy PLO bases, located in the southern part of that state. But, for unclear reasons, Begin suddenly resigned in 1983, and his party elected Yitzhak Shamir as his substitute, who decided to keep Israeli position in Lebanon war.

In this tough political moment for Labor, Rabin thought to have a chance to regain his leadership in the following elections of 1984, but he had to consider that also Peres and Yitzhak Navon, former president of Israel, would share with him that political challenge. As he thought that his reputation was not completely restored, he decided to give his support to Peres, for the seat of prime minister in discussion.

*After having realized that his chances of winning this election were weak, Shamir decided to create a new National Unity Government, who would have included also Labor members, in case he was elected.*⁶⁴ This is in fact what was made, and this project was created: Peres as prime minister for two years, and then Shamir for the next two, Rabin was minister of defense for the total four years mandate.

One of the first things Peres did, as new prime minister, was to withdraw IDF forces from Lebanon, since it was clearly impossible to reach an agreement with them: starting from June of 1985, Israeli soldiers were withdrawn. *For what concerns Rabin's field, his major concern was the Palestinian affair, in such a moment in which the first Intifada, was obtaining the international attention after the stones throwing by Palestinians at Israeli soldiers.*⁶⁵

In 1988 the reputation of Rabin was strongly damaged by his "Break their bones" theory, that was the order he gave to IDF in order to face the Palestinian uprising riots. In fact Rabin thought, at first, that they were sporadic clashes, that had to be faced making an inappropriate use of power: *"the Palestinians demonstrated to be ready to sacrifice their own lives for future justice."*⁶⁶

Of course what must be remembered about Rabin is his work for the peace channel, but it is also important to remark that he was also a key player in the

⁶⁴ www.meforum.org

⁶⁵ Libby Hughes, *Yitzhak Rabin*.

⁶⁶ Libby Hughes, *Yitzhak Rabin*.

expulsion of tens of thousands of Palestinians during the 1947-'49 war. *That episode basically led to Israel's founding, a moment which Palestinians refer to as al-Nakba, the Catastrophe, because it is also seen as the starting of the Palestinian diaspora.*⁶⁷

When these facts were running, the peace path started to shape in front of the Israeli leader, and the meeting with Palestinians in the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip started. What happened in the top floors of the Israeli government, was that Shamir, in charge as prime minister, fired Peres as finance minister: in so doing all members of Labor party in key positions, including Rabin, resigned in March 1990. But Shamir endured the Knesset's vote of non-confidence, which had no precedents in Israeli history: the battle for power between Rabin and Peres was officially started.

*Also the public support was shifting from the Likud party to Labor, unhappy for the decisions taken.*⁶⁸ After the Persian Gulf War, US Secretary of State James Baker arranged a peace conference in Madrid, in October 1991, in order to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict. Shamir reluctantly consented, but did not accept to deal directly with the PLO: he basically stalled the peace conference.

Moreover, President Bush refused to lend Israel \$10 billion in the fall of 1991, the condition was that the Israelis halted the expanding of their settlements in Arab territories, but in reality Israel desperately needed that economic aid. So Shamir was living his worst political moment, then Rabin could take profit of this situation, a thing that he did winning the Labor's vote: only the general election was keeping him far from the nomination as new Israeli prime minister.

*What actually made him win that election was the right choice of topic, in fact he hounded the Shamir government for having neglected the provision of homes for Jewish immigrants, while expanding Jewish settlements deep into Arab territories at huge expenses.*⁶⁹ He also stated that the Golan Heights would never go back to Syria, and thanks to these right moves he gained the

⁶⁷ Libby Hughes, *Yitzhak Rabin*.

⁶⁸ www.wikipedia.com

⁶⁹ Libby Hughes, *Yitzhak Rabin*.

trust of Israeli people: on June 23, 1992, Israeli voters gave Labor and Rabin a great victory.

*He became a respected statesman on the global scene, and started a new friendship relation with Peres, that had the merit to persuade Rabin in reconsidering his opposition to dealing with the PLO.*⁷⁰

He also stopped the building of new settlements located in unsafe areas for Israel, and met with Egyptian prime minister Mubarak: on August 11, 1992, the United States sent Rabin the \$10 billion loan promised. The plan for peace with Palestinians were started in a concrete way, the Madrid channel remained open, and thanks to Peres's deputy foreign minister, Yossi Beilin, the parallel channel of Oslo was arranged, and the first meetings started.

The sign of Oslo I, on September 13, 1993, a peace agreement with King Hussein of Jordan, on October 1992, a Nobel Peace Prize, on December 1994, the Oslo II agreement, on September 1995, these are the main results of Rabin's choice of the road to peace. *The opposite party, the Likud, could instead play upon that part of Israeli people that basically did not accept the idea of making peace, pressed by the major weight of religious extremist ideals and priorities.*⁷¹

It was this same useless and fool extremism that caused the death of Yitzhak Rabin: on November 4, 1995, during a peace rally called to protest violence that had been rising on both sides, and to reaffirm the commitment of the government to peace. That was kept at the King of Israel Square, now Rabin Square, in Tel Aviv, the place where he was killed by Yigal Amir, a radical right-wing Orthodox Jew, who opposed the signing of the Oslo Accords.

*When the rally ended, Rabin walked down the city hall steps towards the open door of his car, at that point Amir fired three shots at Rabin: he was rushed to Ichilov Hospital, where he died on the operating table of blood loss.*⁷²

⁷⁰ Libby Hughes, *Yitzhak Rabin*.

⁷¹ Libby Hughes, *Yitzhak Rabin*.

⁷² www.mideastweb.org

Shamir and the Madrid stalemate

After achieving two victories during his presidential term in office, one in the Gulf and the other in the Eastern Europe where the breakup of the Soviet Union and its Socialist allies made the United States the single unchallenged superpower, former US President George Bush found it appropriate to follow up his victories by turning his attentions to the Middle East. *This was not simply to score further victories but to confirm US credibility following the speedy implementation of the UN resolutions on the occupation of Kuwait.*⁷³

His aim now was to try to implement UN resolutions concerning the other major problem in the Middle East. Naturally one cannot expect the same enthusiasm with which the United States prosecuted the war in the Gulf to apply to the search for a settlement of the Palestinian question. Still, there are parallels.

*While there were over thirty countries involved in the Gulf war, a similar number was involved in the multilateral Middle East peace negotiations.*⁷⁴ It was an international demonstration of the desire for peace. On 6 March 1991 George Bush announced his four-point initiative to solve the Middle East problem: implementation of Resolutions 242 and 338; the acceptance of the principle of "land for peace"; the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people; peace and security for the State of Israel. The Palestinian leadership immediately welcomed the contents of this initiative.

The US Administration showed willingness to have dealings with Palestinian residents in the occupied territories through a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation and sent Secretary of State, James Baker, to the area. *Palestinians then faced two problems, which most members of their leadership recognized.*⁷⁵ The first concerned their representation at the peace conference: only those from the occupied territories, other than Jerusalem, could qualify.

⁷³ Robert Freedman, *The Middle East and the Peace Process*.

⁷⁴ Ahmed Qurie, *From Oslo to Jerusalem*.

⁷⁵ Ahmed Qurie, *From Oslo to Jerusalem*.

This condition was rejected from the Palestinian side. The second problem was that representation had to be through a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation, and this was too rejected from the Palestinians.

*We sought participation in an independent Palestinian delegation or in a joint Arab delegation, but both America and Israel rejected the first proposal while the Arabs themselves rejected the second.*⁷⁶

The participating Arab states, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan, rejected the participation of Palestinians on the grounds that this would be an obstacle to their achieving regional solutions because of the intricacies of the Palestinian issue. Therefore everyone without exception told us that the idea of a joint Arab delegation was impractical. When we realized that both our proposals would not be accepted, we agreed, after a prolonged debate to open negotiations with Jordan to determine the nature of the joint Palestinian-Jordanian delegation.

*We had no demands regarding the peace process, but we did ask the Soviets to obtain a letter of assurance, for us from the Americans, defining their views about Palestinian rights based on "international legality".*⁷⁷

Alexander Bessmertnikh, the then Soviet Foreign Minister, was enthusiastic about the peace process that seemed to be starting and presented the request to James Baker. The US letter of assurance was duly supplied to each party. *Yitzhak Shamir's government rejected European participation in the peace process and would not allow the United Nations any role in it, no matter how small.*⁷⁸

At the same time it rejected the idea of an international conference, insisting instead that it be a regional conference. Bessmerthnikh played a salutary role in the rapprochement of views during a meeting held at the Soviet mission in Geneva on 14 May 1991 with a Palestinian delegation led by Arafat and included Abu Mazen Suleiman al-Najjab, PLO Executive Committee member, Yasser Abd Rabbo, also a PLO Executive Committee member, and Nabil Amr, PLO representative in Moscow. The problems that this meeting tackled were

⁷⁶ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

⁷⁷ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

⁷⁸ Ahmed Qurie, *From Oslo to Jerusalem*.

those that had been raised by the parties concerned with the peace process. The answers to these problems were as follows: the conference was to be called the "Peace Conference". Europe would participate as an observer, the agreements were to be consigned at the United Nations, and the UN would ratify any agreements arrived at.

James Baker felt it necessary to assure Shamir's Cabinet that the Palestinians who would conclude the Jordanian-Palestinian agreement would be Palestinians from inside Israel. He therefore continued to insist that Faisal Husseini, Hanan Ashrawi and Zakariyya al-Agha should travel to Jordan on different occasions to meet King Hussein or the Jordanian Prime Minister, Taher al-Masri. *His intention was to reassure Shamir's government that the PLO had no role in the process, and that only those three figures were involved.*⁷⁹ Meanwhile, Shamir had been threatening the Palestinians inside Israel that he would implement the Knesset legislation of 6 August 1986 which stipulated that anyone contacting the PLO would be liable to imprisonment. *On 23 October 1991, a week before the Madrid conference, we were in Amman to put the final touches to the Jordanian-Palestinian agreement. This coincided with the arrival of Husseini, Ashrawi and Agha.*⁸⁰

Upon Baker's instructions, Husseini's delegation was placed under the spotlight while the PLO delegation drifted completely out of the picture to give the impression that the agreement would be concluded with Husseini's delegation and not ours. We therefore agreed that Husseini and his colleagues had to go to the office of the Prime Minister, and then confirm to journalists that the agreement had been concluded. We would then go in to complete the process. *This is how the Jordanian-Palestinian agreement, which allowed us to participate in the Madrid conference, was reached.*⁸¹

The Jordanian-Palestinian agreement was a necessary starting point for the launching of the peace process in Madrid. James Baker had camped in Jerusalem waiting for a smokescreen (agreement with Jordan) there would be no Palestinian participation in the negotiations; he also knew that without the

⁷⁹ Robert Freedman, *The Middle East and the Peace Process*.

⁸⁰ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

⁸¹ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

PNC's adoption of such a course the Palestinians inside Israel would not consent to participating. Baker was confronting very difficult and complex formulas in terms of stages, since the agreement had to be concluded between the PLO and Jordan, without the PLO being seen as a party to it. It also required PNC ratification without the PNC admitting to its existence. *Our Palestinian friends on the inside were awaiting its ratification without saying they were awaiting it.*⁸²

Finally, the PLO leadership had to determine the names of the members of the delegation without saying so. Everyone knew this, and everyone had to claim they knew nothing. Israel too was aware of this scenario and turned a blind eye. Baker knew everything and claimed to know nothing. The friends on the inside awaited instructions from Tunis, but had to claim sole responsibility for any decision. In fact the PLO was running everything but announcing nothing. In Tunis the PNC was discussing the terms of the Jordanian-Palestinian agreement but saying nothing about them. In Jerusalem James Baker sat with our Palestinian friends allegedly choosing the names of the Palestinian delegation, while in reality the names were being chosen in Tunis.

*Shamir's sterile policy made this beating about the bush necessary, something we had to tolerate patiently. We had to endure this rigmarole because the end was nobler than the means.*⁸³

A committee composed of members of the PLO leadership was formed to follow up the negotiations, to supply the delegation with directives and to prepare the studies it would need at the negotiating table. In doing so, it may perform its duties well, at the negotiating table, and avoid contradictions and embarrassments; moreover it was to circulate the results of the negotiations to our embassies and bureaux involved. *So we set out to prepare for this task thoroughly in order to supply the delegation with all the documents and studies as and when they were needed.*⁸⁴

The Jordanian-Palestinian agreement stipulated that the Jordanian team in the joint delegation would deal with the Jordanian track and Jordanian issues,

⁸² Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

⁸³ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

⁸⁴ Robert Freedman, *The Middle East and the Peace Process*.

while the Palestinian team would handle the Palestinian track and Palestinian issues. We thought that the American Administration and consequently the Israeli Government were aware of this agreement and had approved it in principle, especially since Secretary Baker had firsthand knowledge of the negotiations in Amman that had led to this agreement. *It was inconceivable that our brothers in Jordan would sign an agreement that we did not approve or one that the American administration would immediately intervene.*⁸⁵

However, the Israelis insisted on negotiating with the joint delegation over both Palestinian and Jordanian tracks: this forced our delegation to withdraw from the negotiations for a whole week, a move, which was supported by the Jordanian delegation. The issue was finally resolved when the Israelis accepted a proposal which called for the Palestinian delegation to be headed by Haydar Abdel-Shafi and to include two Palestinians from the Palestinian delegation. This formula expressed the solidarity of the joint delegation. They began the negotiations in the corridors of the US State Department; hence the label "the corridor negotiations". *The initial rounds took place while the Likud were still in power in Israel, and very soon we noticed that each side had to halt at a certain point unable to progress further because the Israeli delegation would always block any positive step forward.*⁸⁶

The Israelis could not accept our proposals because of their conviction that the land of Palestine was theirs and that we should come to terms with this reality: in matters of substance, there was no meeting ground. The word "Palestine", or "Palestinians", was one of the harshest to Israeli ears. It reminded them of the people who had lived on the land that was Palestine, the land that had been transformed to become Israel. They went along with what had been inculcated in their minds by the leaders of Zionist ideology since the turn of the century: "A land without people, for a people without a land".

*We, the Palestinians, did not accept the presence of Jews on our land. When they declared the creation of their State, we refused to recognize its existence. Two-thirds of our people left their land in 1948 and there the situation stood.*⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

⁸⁶ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

⁸⁷ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

Then the PLO was created, and the Fatah movement launched in 1965, and the call for the liberation of all Palestinian soil went on.

The Palestinians knew that Likud would not take one single step towards a settlement, and so they became doubly interested in the preparations for the Israeli elections that were announced in June 1992: the Cabinet changed, but the negotiating delegation did not. With the holding of the sixth round of negotiations, on 24 August 1992, an atmosphere of optimism reigned in international circles as well as in the Arab world. *This was due to the victory of the political alliance in Israel, which arrived bearing a program based on the need for direct negotiations with the Arabs in accordance with Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338.*⁸⁸ This gave the sixth round a distinctive character, especially as the Israeli Government agreed to the negotiations continuing over a much longer time frame than its predecessors had. It also agreed to relocate the negotiations to Washington, after it had been agreed that they would be held in Rome. This increased the degree of optimism.

*But things followed a different path after the American Administration announced its consent to release 1 billion in loan guarantees to Israel, and that it would allow the Israeli Government to finish building 11.000 residential units in settlements in the occupied territories, including Jerusalem.*⁸⁹ This decision was an early blow to the Palestinian side. The American elections then cast a shadow over the seventh round of negotiations when, following Clinton's victory, the negotiations had to be suspended for ten days until the new American Administration was installed to replace the one that had sponsored the political process from its inception.

As a result of the failure of negotiations, and after realizing that the Israeli position was to reject the simplest of conditions, *'the Palestinian leadership decided to reduce the membership of the delegation to only four or five delegates as an expression of protest'*⁹⁰ at the barrenness of the previous rounds and the inflexibility of the Israeli positions.

⁸⁸ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

⁸⁹ Ahmed Qurie, *From Oslo to Jerusalem*.

⁹⁰ Robert Freedman, *The Middle East and the Peace Process*.

The eighth round was limited to eight days of negotiations, because of the break requested by the Palestinian delegation to mark the fifth anniversary of the uprising: all talks were suspended. The delegations left the eighth round without fixing a date for future meetings: it was obvious that the break would be a long one.

*The stalemate meant that a general gloom would hang over the Middle East, and that the uprising would continue, and that tension would rise day by day.*⁹¹

The Israeli leadership was aware of the situation. It too worried as much as others for the problems facing Israel were not so very different from those of the Palestinians. In fact the disagreement between Rabin, who controlled the bilateral negotiations, and Peres, who was prevented from following these negotiations, but controlled the multilateral negotiations, was apparent to everyone.

*For our part, we realized that the Washington negotiations were headed for a crisis and sent word to Rabin and Peres asking them to open informal channels that would save the negotiations from floundering, but Rabin rejected the idea.*⁹²

Rabin, who was the center of the Israeli apparatus for decision-making, believed that he should depend on the Washington channel, which offered fewer risks than Oslo. The Washington negotiations were espoused by the American sponsor for several reasons: a) they followed the conditions set in Madrid which Likud had approved and which Labor had upheld; b) the PLO was actually excluded from them; c) they were conducted on the Palestinian side by Palestinians from inside Israel.

*In this gloomy atmosphere, Shimon Peres resorted to an adventurous move by sending two of these men to contact the PLO delegation at the multilateral negotiations in London.*⁹³ They were to initiate the unofficial dialogue after presenting themselves as academics who wished to push the peace process forward. This is how Oslo came to be.

⁹¹ Robert Freedman, *The Middle East and the Peace Process*.

⁹² Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

⁹³ Ahmed Qurie, *From Oslo to Jerusalem*.

The Oslo Peace Process

When the Madrid Conference started on 1991, the Palestinian people could no longer be put apart: they now represented a top priority issue. But, both for the acquiescence of the United States of America, and the main opposition of the extremist Israeli party, the Palestinian could not be fully represented on that occasion. In fact they did not obtain the status of full partners, but just as a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation, or neither they were recognized as a political entity *de facto*.

*All these changes and developments led up to what could be described as the "Spirit of Oslo", such initiatives are not born in vacuum.*⁹⁴ In fact the Declaration of Principles came after several attempts to impose a settlement activity, through violence and bloodshed, so in a sense that was the mere consequence of a drastically changed scenario. First of all we can notice the most important peculiarity of the Norwegian channel: *"being the first channel which derived from the free decision of the two sides involved, rather than being any sort of international coercion."*⁹⁵ And surely, the United States were now playing the main role as Western superpower on the international stage, after the collapse of the Soviet Union during the '90s.

*Negotiations would begin with discussions on arrangements for a transitional self-rule government. Agreement on this issue was to be reached within one year.*⁹⁶ So the idea was to define the political entity of a Palestinian State that, after agreement was reached, would have had a self-rule interim government to remain in charge officially for five years. A big part of the decisions and mechanisms of this negotiation would have been based on two crucial documents, which basically represent a milestone for the Israeli-Palestinian history; we report them here below:

⁹⁴ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

⁹⁵ Robert Freedman, *The Middle East and the Peace Process*.

⁹⁶ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTIONS 242 AND 338

UN Security Council Resolution 242

November 22, 1967

The Security Council,

Expressing its continuing concern with the grave situation in the Middle East,

Emphasizing the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war and the need to work for a just and lasting peace, in which every State in the area can live in security,

Emphasizing further that all Member States in their acceptance of the Charter of the United Nations have undertaken a commitment to act in accordance with Article 2 of the Charter,

Affirms that the fulfillment of Charter principles requires the establishment of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East which should include the application of both the following principles:

Withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict;

Termination of all claims or states of belligerency and respect for and acknowledgement of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of every State in the area and their right to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries free from threats or acts of force;

Affirms further the necessity

For guaranteeing freedom of navigation through international waterways in the area;

For achieving a just settlement of the refugee problem;

For guaranteeing the territorial inviolability and political independence of every State in the area, through measures including the establishment of demilitarized zones;

Requests the Secretary General to designate a Special Representative to proceed to the Middle East to establish and maintain contacts with the States concerned in order to promote agreement and assist efforts to achieve a peaceful and accepted settlement in accordance with the provisions and principles in this resolution;

Requests the Secretary General to report the Security Council on the progress of the efforts of the Special Representative as soon as possible.

UN Security Council Resolution 338

October 22, 1973

The Security Council,

Calls upon all parties presently fighting to cease all firing and terminate all military activity immediately, no later than 12 hours after the moment of the adoption of this decision, in the position after the moment of the adoption of this decision, in the positions they now occupy;

Calls upon all parties concerned to start immediately after the cease-fire the implementation of Security Council Resolution 242 (1967) in all of its parts;

*Decides that, immediately and concurrently with the cease-fire, negotiations start between the parties concerned under appropriate auspices aimed at establishing a just and durable peace in the Middle East.*⁹⁷

The idea of a transitional period was decided by the United States, as they saw the existing condition of a thick wall of suspicion and distrust, which had to be crossed, in order to build a new order for the crucial negotiations on the final status of the occupied territories. *The purpose of these transitional arrangements is the peaceful transfer of authority from Israel to the Palestinians, who need to exercise control over the political economic and other decisions, which affect their lives.*⁹⁸

The main nature of the Washington talks was that it was first of all an event for the eyes of the publicity, and basically it did not succeed in achieving that much. On the other hand, the Oslo channel, which was pursuing more or less the same objectives of Washington, was kept under the highest level of secrecy, so that the interlocutors did not feel under public pressure, but free to quietly discuss with the counterpart. *The difference was that while in Washington carefully chosen delegations, reflecting the established relationship between Israel and the Palestinians, worked their way through an agenda not of their own choosing, the Oslo talks on the other hand were the result of the free choice of their participants.*⁹⁹

The Oslo negotiation did focus on the achievement of long-term solutions, which would have brought mutual benefits for both the sides, and above all it succeeded in creating a relationship of a new nature. The "Spirit of Oslo" intended to create a condition of mutual trust between Palestinians and Israelis, the only possible way to achieve solutions and needed compromises: show understanding for the needs of the other side. After nine months of talks, of ups and downs, and in general of hard work for the interlocutors, on 13 September 1993, the whole world could assist to the birth of the Palestinian entity, with the sponsorship of the United States.

⁹⁷ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

⁹⁸ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

⁹⁹ David Makovsky, *Making peace with the PLO*.

*The solemn ceremony at the White House marked the beginning of a new era in the Middle East. It was a key event in the history of the region, and has had a continuing impact on the lives of Palestinians and Israelis.*¹⁰⁰ So basically this peace process allowed to the Palestinians to finally obtain the status of acknowledge entity in the region, leaving behind the condition of intruders in the Middle East. It was possible for them to achieve a real geopolitical existence, after the start of their diaspora (“Nakba” is the Arabic term they use to refer to it, which means tragedy) in 1948. *‘The Norwegian channel created new balances between these populations’*¹⁰¹, who now had to discuss the definition of the official boundaries of this new entity of an independent state: this is how the international recognition of the Palestinian leadership came to be.

The will of the Oslo agreement was to give life to three important changes:

- 1. It was meant to give the Palestinian people the right to establish its first political entity on Palestinian territory, with unlimited political, civil, administrative, economic, security, legislative and judicial powers. The first democratically elected Palestinian Authority would be established in a part of historical Palestine. This did not of itself end the conflict, but gave the Palestinian people a new instrument to prosecute it, through different methods. The new approach enabled the transformation of incremental gains into political realities.*
- 2. It was intended to create a suitable political foundation for the national Palestinian struggle and for its continuation. Before Oslo, the Palestinian national movement faced deadlock. Pathways familiar from the three decades of the PLO’s existence no longer existed, and the doors of many capitals that were vital for the PLO’s survival were closed. The new agreement offered the national movement the possibility of resuming its struggle, but this time with a new mentality*

¹⁰⁰ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

¹⁰¹ Robert Freedman, *The Middle East and the Peace Process*.

and an open mind, aiming for realistic goals that could be achieved in the foreseeable future.

3. *The agreement offered hope to the Palestinian people, who had previously been submerged in despair. Formerly, an end to the occupation had been impossible to envisage, but the new situation gave renewed impetus to the national movement. The return of the Palestinian leadership, and their assumption of political authority in a part of their own country, was further evidence of change, and its meaning was more than merely symbolic.*¹⁰²

It is out of doubt that the role of Norway, and later that of the United States, played together a crucial role in the negotiation, but without the real desire of both the parties involved in the dealing, nothing would have been achieved. They agreed in the creation of an agreement whose nature was of gradual implementation, made by consecutive and interdependent steps; this mindset implied mainly three factors, for the Palestinian side:

- a) *The first of these was the principle of the faithful implementation in practice of the Declaration of Principles during the transitional period. The intention of the implementation of this Declaration was to lead up to negotiations on the final status after the withdrawal of military occupation from a significant part of Palestinian territory, and after the establishment of a Palestinian National Authority, with its democratic institutions.*
- b) *A real breakthrough on the ground was achieved through the immediate application of the Gaza-Jericho agreement. The tangible changes this created were intended to encourage the Palestinians to devote themselves to economic and social development and to an improvement in their living conditions. It was also meant to provide the Palestinians with an example of what could be expected in the final status.*

¹⁰² Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

c) *The direct participation of the PLO leadership, and its political and security aspects, would consolidate the role of the PLO in the shaping of the coming phase of the Palestinian entity. This would include the reinforcement of the existence of the Palestinian entity, the formation of a transitional government and the holding of general elections. These arrangements were essential steps on the road to final status negotiations.*¹⁰³

We can say that the Oslo talks went through three main phases:

- a) First stage, exploration of the real outcomes and possibilities offered by that channel.
- b) Second stage, creation of the authorized contacts both on the Israeli and the Palestinian part, which will consequently get to the first draft of agreement.
- c) Final phase, when the Israeli government did officially give acknowledgement to that channel.

The accord that was finally achieved represented a detailed political framework, something that dealt with the Palestinians' lives in all its aspects: political, social and economic. *The role of the United States in such a dealing was that of a real guarantor, for the facts that would have followed the sign of the DOP.*¹⁰⁴ It also had the function to serve as a strategic plan that would serve for a future path made by other negotiations between the two peoples, so it has a long-term nature based on a step-by-step model.

Both the Israeli and the Palestinian strategy was to avoid the single deal, as it was well intended, by the two of them, that the issues that had to be discussed were extremely tough and complex. *We tried to find common denominators, which would yield dividends to each side, without causing loss to the other.*¹⁰⁵

We can define the main features of the Oslo negotiation as follows:

¹⁰³ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

¹⁰⁴ Robert Freedman, *The Middle East and the Peace Process*.

¹⁰⁵ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

- a) *Secrecy*, this was a *sine qua non* condition fully understood by both the delegations, as the possibility of a leakage would have undermined the whole process.
- b) *Motivation*, the two teams demonstrated to be extremely in possess of a great level of determination, as the only way to reach positive outcomes.
- c) *Complexity*, due to the very nature of the relationship between the two peoples, it was in any case overcome.
- d) *Animosity*, the *hatred and bloody confrontations of the previous decades had inevitably left their mark on every aspect of Palestinian-Israeli relations, they clouded the vision of both parties and created daunting obstacles: our obstacle was to see past these difficulties.*¹⁰⁶
- e) *Reciprocity*, intended as mutual exchanges of compromises, which were supported by the common will for a better future, it was basically an obligation to make some sort of sacrifice in order to obtain any kind of benefit.
- f) *Balance of power*, it was a matter of fact that the Israelis were keeping a stronger position in opposition to the Palestinian one, which was mainly sustained by patience, skills and endurance.

6.1

Track to diplomacy

*The long process that we identify as "Oslo Peace Process" presents a preliminary phase, that built the background for the following meetings between the official parties, and finally brought to the signing of the "Declaration of Principles".*¹⁰⁷

This preliminary moment is technically called "Track-II Talks", meaning discussions held by non-officials of conflicting parties in an attempt to clarify outstanding disputes, or to explore the options for resolving them in settings or circumstances that are less sensitive than those associated with official

¹⁰⁶ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

¹⁰⁷ Agha, Feldman, Khalidi & Schiff, *Track to Diplomacy*.

negotiations. The non-officials involved usually include scholars, senior journalists, former government officials, and former military officers. Government and other officials, acting in an informal capacity, sometimes also participate in such talks alongside the non-officials involved.

*Track-II talks, in general, are hosted by non-official institutions such as universities, research institutes, and dedicated non-governmental organizations (NGOs).*¹⁰⁸

We can even state what these talks are not: neither academic conferences nor secret diplomacy conducted by government representatives. They are usually convened to foster informal interaction among participants regarding the political issues dividing their nations and to find ways of reducing the tensions or resolving the conflict between them.

*Track-II talks should also be distinguished from secret diplomacy, which involves covert interactions between government officials.*¹⁰⁹ Officials taking part in secret diplomacy normally operate as representatives of their respective governments and follow their superiors' instructions.

By contrast, officials who take part in Track-II talks usually do so in an informal capacity and in a manner that does not commit their governments to any positions taken in these talks. *At the same time, if the Track-II talks prove exceptionally successful, they can lead to secret formal negotiations, as occurred in the Norwegian settlement.*¹¹⁰

Track-II talks may be held separately and independently of any official negotiations taking place or not taking place at the time. Indeed, at time Track-II talks are often held precisely because the relevant parties cannot or will not engage one another in formal Track-I negotiations.

*In general the purpose Track-II talks vary, but they are all related to reducing tensions or facilitating the resolution of a conflict.*¹¹¹ At a minimum, Track-II talks are aimed at an exchange of views, perceptions, and information between the parties to improve each side's understanding of the other's

¹⁰⁸ Agha, Feldman, Khalidi & Schiff, *Track to Diplomacy*.

¹⁰⁹ Robert Freedman, *The Middle East and the Peace Process*.

¹¹⁰ Robert Freedman, *The Middle East and the Peace Process*.

¹¹¹ Agha, Feldman, Khalidi & Schiff, *Track to Diplomacy*.

positions and policies. These may be termed “soft” Track-II talks, which may also help participants familiarize themselves with one another, increasing their understanding of the human dimensions of the struggle in which they are engaged. *By informing their respective publics, elites, and governments of the perceptions and insights they have gained, participants may indirectly contribute to the formation of new national political priorities and policies.*¹¹²

A less modest purpose for Track-II talks might be to help negotiate political agreements between governments: these may be termed “hard” Track-II talks. Here, use is made of the informal standing of Track-II participants to initiate talks on sensitive issues that cannot be dealt with in formal settings or between parties that have not yet recognized each other and hence cannot engage one another in official negotiations. The objective in these cases is to reach a political agreement or understanding that will be acceptable to the conflicting parties.

Establishing criteria for judging the success or failure of Track-II talks may be very difficult. Just in one case, the one that we are discussing, eventually led to a historical breakthrough: an agreement that began a process of reconciliation among two peoples. *Oslo was an extreme case, most Track-II talks efforts were launched with much more modest purpose in mind: even the Oslo talks were initially aimed at assisting the stalled Track-I negotiations in Washington, rather than replacing these official discussions.*¹¹³

6.2

Early contacts

The aftermath of the 1967 War – fought by Israel, Egypt, Syria and Jordan – set a formal framework for a peaceful settlement with the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 242, based on the formula of “land for peace”, to secure and recognize borders for all the states in the area.

¹¹² Ahmed Qurie, *From Oslo to Jerusalem*.

¹¹³ Agha, Feldman, Khalidi & Schiff, *Track to Diplomacy*.

Although in November 1967, this resolution was accepted in principle by Israel, Egypt, and Jordan, no progress toward a settlement was achieved in spite of the efforts of the UN and other external mediators.

The outbreak of the 1973 October war gave renewed urgency to the search for peace. The UN Security Council adopted Resolution 338 reaffirming UNSCR 242 and calling on the parties to begin peace negotiations. *Postwar Egyptian moves toward peace with Israel indicated that the era of all-out Arab confrontation with the Jewish state was beginning to end.*¹¹⁴

Further important changes were taking place elsewhere within the Arab camp. In 1974, Syria formally committed itself to a negotiated settlement based on UNSCR 242 for the first time, and accepted a U.S.-brokered disengagement agreement including a partial Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights. *Coupled with the 1975 Israeli-Egyptian disengagement agreement in Sinai, progress on the Syrian-Israeli track suggested that a comprehensive peace on all major Arab-Israeli fronts was now possible.*¹¹⁵ Although postwar diplomacy did not fully meet such expectations, by late 1977 Egypt had embarked on its own separate course with Israel, culminating in the U.S.-sponsored 1978 Camp David Accords that brought about the first-ever peace treaty between Israel and an Arab state.

*As a result of such developments, the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) leadership began a process of strategic reappraisal of its own goals.*¹¹⁶

The 1973 war had seen the acceptance by all the major regional protagonists of UNSCR 338 calling for a U.S.-Soviet-sponsored international conference to end the conflict. Soon afterwards, the PLO leadership came to the conclusion that such a conference was inevitable given the post-1973 regional and international balance of power. One of its most pressing priorities therefore was to ensure its place in this projected conference and in any subsequent negotiations as the “sole representative of the Palestinian people.”

Accordingly, the PLO’s political-diplomatic program turned increasingly away from “armed struggle” as the sole basis of its attempt to regain Palestine and

¹¹⁴ Agha, Feldman, Khalidi & Schiff, *Track to Diplomacy*.

¹¹⁵ David Makovsky, *Making peace with the PLO*.

¹¹⁶ David Makovsky, *Making peace with the PLO*.

*closer toward acceptance of a negotiated settlement with Israel based on the "two-state solution".*¹¹⁷ This stipulated coexistence between a Palestinian state in East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip (the territories occupied by Israel in the 1967 War) and the state of Israel within its pre-1967 borders. The shift in policy was cautious and often wrapped in conflicting signals but nonetheless reflected the emergent pragmatism of the Palestinian movement and in particular that of its dominant Fatah leadership.¹¹⁸ *As part of an overall attempt to engage the Israeli side on the basis of a negotiated two-state settlement, the PLO leadership became more interested in contacts with the Israeli side.*¹¹⁹

This new environment set the stage for a surge of Arab-Israeli exchanges. Often prompted by interested third parties, such contacts were also propelled by a genuine desire by various Israeli and Palestinian individuals and groups to establish a meaningful dialogue and promote the prospects of peace with the other side. *In most instances, Israeli peace activists were isolated and their activities met with sharp criticism in Israeli press, the Knesset (Israeli parliament), and among the public at large.*¹²⁰

Although there were a number of Israeli contacts with other Arab parties (particularly with the Egypt after Sadat's visit to Jerusalem in 1977, and the Camp David Accords in 1978), until the late 1980s the Palestinian-Israeli track was by far the most active venue of Arab-Israeli contacts.

This was the result of four factors:

- 1) The PLO leadership was relatively uninhibited about initiating and pursuing such contacts, and believed that this served the Palestinian national interest.
- 2) The Palestinian leadership was largely unencumbered by any formal or bureaucratic restraints, and was highly responsive to personal initiatives that came from within or without the organization's establishment.
- 3) The vast political and existential chasm between the two sides highlighted the need for dialogue and the urgency and value of any useful contact.

¹¹⁷ Ahmed Qurie, *From Oslo to Jerusalem*.

¹¹⁸ Fatah, the largest of the movements constituting the PLO, was founded in the late 1950s, and has been headed by Yasser Arafat since the late 1960s.

¹¹⁹ Ahmed Qurie, *From Oslo to Jerusalem*.

¹²⁰ David Makovsky, *Making peace with the PLO*.

4) Perhaps most importantly, was the PLO leadership's ceaseless quest to obtain recognition from the Israeli side as a valid and acceptable negotiating partner.

*During the mid-1970s a number of Palestinian-Israeli channels were developed.*¹²¹ As early as November 1973, the PLO's London representative, Said Hammami, had come out publicly in favor of the two-state solution. Hammami's articles in the *Times* of London drew the attention of Uri Avneri, Knesset member and long-time peace activist, and the two men met in London for the first time in early 1975.

*Another overlapping channel that was particularly active was initiated partly through the good offices of Henri Curiel, a Paris-based Egyptian Jewish communist.*¹²² Curiel arranged for meetings between Hammami and Israel physicist Danny Amit. After a number of meetings, the Paris channel succeeded in producing a joint document outlining the shape and structure of a two-state solution.

*These contacts, paved the way for a larger Palestinian-Israel meeting in Paris in April 1976.*¹²³ The Palestinian side included Issam Sartawi, a Palestinian surgeon and "reformed" guerrilla leader, acting as the personal representative of PLO Mahmoud Abbas, alongside Sabri Jiryis, an Israeli Arab lawyer who had been recently deported by the Israelis authorities. The Israeli side was largely made up of members of the newly founded Israel Council for Israel-Palestine Peace (ICIPP), which had been set up in Tel Aviv in 1975. Present at the Paris meeting with Avneri were council members Peled, former Secretary General of the Labor Party Lova Eliav, historian Meir Pail, former treasury official Yaacov Arnon, and Danny Amit.

*The meetings held between Hammami, Sartawi, and their Israeli counterparts were no secret in Israel.*¹²⁴ Israeli participants took some trouble to report on their talks and disseminate their results among the Israeli leadership and

¹²¹ Agha, Feldman, Khalidi & Schiff, *Track to Diplomacy*.

¹²² David Makovsky, *Making peace with the PLO*.

¹²³ Agha, Feldman, Khalidi & Schiff, *Track to Diplomacy*.

¹²⁴ Ahmed Qurie, *From Oslo to Jerusalem*.

public. However, the document of February 1976, on a two-state solution, met with strong criticism on both sides, hobbling the prospects for further work in this direction. Nevertheless, the PLO leadership made a special effort to sustain and upgrade its dialogue with the Israeli peace camp.

At the thirteenth session of the Palestine National Council, which was held between 12 and 22 March 1977, Issam Sartawi was bitterly attacked for having met Israelis. *“I discovered that none of them knew what they were talking about, that their knowledge of Israel was limited to the simple fact that it was the enemy against whom continuous war should be waged.”*¹²⁵ Sartawi did not act on his own initiative, but upon Abbas instructions, that decided to embrace new ideas as a number of Fatah leaders did. The PNC arrived at a positive decision that was to emphasize the importance of establishing relations with democratic and progressive Jewish factions, which were struggling within and outside Israel against the letter and spirit of Zionism. Thus making contact with Israel became legitimate and protected by the decision of the PNC.

*The Hammami-Avneri and Sartawi-Peled channels set an important precedent for Palestinian-Israeli (and to some extent Arab-Israeli) contacts for the following two decades.*¹²⁶ By breaking previous taboos and allowing engagement and public debate with the other side, these contacts crossed previous psychological and political red lines and helped to create the climate for subsequent talks, including Track-II engagements and ultimately formal negotiations.

*The Knesset’s decision of banning contact with the PLO, in 1986, did not prevent a number of individual Israelis from trying to bypass it for the noble cause of peace, even though they knew they would be liable to imprisonment.*¹²⁷

6.3

The beginning

¹²⁵ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

¹²⁶ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

¹²⁷ David Makovsky, *Making peace with the PLO*.

*During a meeting, held in London on 3 December 1992, by the multilateral negotiations leadership committee, Faisal Husseini, Hanan Ashrawi and the PLO's London representative, Afif Safieh, asked Abu Ala, the PLO's finance chief, to meet Yair Hirschfeld.*¹²⁸ This man was an Israel Labour Party member and Professor at Haifa University, who described himself as a simple adviser to Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, and his deputy, Yossi Beilin. That meeting was finally attended by Afif Safieh and Abu Ala, as the other Palestinian members were occupied, and it was certainly the first time that Abu Ala found himself face-to-face with an Israeli representative.

They basically had two meetings in London, on 3 December 1992: the first one for a breakfast at the Cavendish Hotel, close to Piccadilly Circus, where the two Palestinians met the Israeli professor; the second one, later that day, at Ritz Hotel. *"This would be the first experience in my life of meeting an Israeli, and I will frankly admit that I was apprehensive: cooperation with Israel was one thing in theory, but I was very reluctant to sit together in a room with any Israel."*¹²⁹

During the first meeting, the three persons sat together at a table, pretty uncomfortable and scarcely knowing how to start. In fact caution and reserve dominated the atmosphere, and during that two hours they had general discussions, with the positive conclusion that the initial antipathy was overcome. The Ritz meeting was much more important, because the three could talk more seriously about how they could contribute to the peace path; they exchanged some considerations concerning the suffering of his own population, then Hirschfeld concluded by saying that the Rabin government had a serious approach towards peace. At this moment, it was the Israeli professor who made the proposal of Oslo as a suitable venue to continue the discussion: *"it seemed clear to the Palestinians, that the Israeli contact was a profitable one, and thus Abu Ala gave his agreement to a further meeting in Norway, as reported here below."*¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

¹²⁹ Ahmed Qurie, *From Oslo to Jerusalem*.

¹³⁰ David Makovsky, *Making peace with the PLO*.

**REPORT BY ABU ALA TO THE LEADERSHIP ABOUT MEETINGS
WITH YAIR HIRSCHFELD**

4 December 1992 (Highest Confidentiality and Private) To Chairman Abu Ammar: revolutionary greetings. Enclosed, please find a memorandum summarizing an exchange between myself and Afif Safieh and an Israeli, Yair Hirschfeld. He is a professor at Haifa University, a member of the Israeli Labour party, and has some relationship with Shimon Peres and Yossi Beilin. (It appears that this meeting took place upon the request of Peres and Yossi Beilin.) The contents of this summary deserve special attention, although they do not constitute a commitment on the Israeli side.

Revolution until victory, Abu Ala.

MEMORANDUM

Main points of the discussion between Afif Safieh and myself with Yair Hirschfeld (London, 3 December 1992):

Professor Hirschfeld is an intellectual and a member of the Labour Party. He is a professor at Haifa University, and is regarded as a member of the Peres-Beilin group, but is also on good terms with Rabin. The meeting lasted for three hours and a half over two sessions, during which the positions of both the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Israeli government and the concerns of both sides were reviewed. The modalities necessary to give a serious and real momentum to the current peace process with the aim of reaching a comprehensive settlement also came under discussion. In his exposition of the current Israeli position, and the positive approach taken by the Rabin government, Hirschfeld made a number of points, which I quote below. (I quote these with no comment, either positive or negative. Whether those observations were made with the intention to mislead, as some might think, or were well-meant, as others might believe, the observations themselves are in any

case worth bringing to your attention. Coming, as they do, after a long history of enmity, conflict and mistrust, these remarks carry a significance that merits your deep and serious consideration, especially after the long period of duplicity on the part of successive Likud governments):

1 . Hirschfeld's account of the attitude of the Rabin Government.

The Rabin government has transmitted a number of messages, some in the form of measure taken, and others in the form of public statements which deserve to be carefully scrutinized for what they contain. These are as follows:

- (a) The Rabin government has virtually halted settlement activity and has curbed Likud's appetite for the expansion of settlements.*
- (b) The Rabin government has opened discussions on issues relating to land and water (in the context of the bilateral and multilateral negotiations).*
- (c) The Rabin government has altered the conditions made by Israel over Palestinian representation when it allowed Palestinians from the diaspora to take part in all the multilateral committees, and even in the bilateral committees.*
- (d) The Rabin government has released a number of detainees as a sign of good will. It has also proposed beneficial measures in the field of charges on taxes imposed on the Palestinians.*
- (e) Rabin has also made a number of personal statements as follows which imply certain connotations: (1) He referred to a "Palestinian entity" and compared the PLO with the Zionist movement which established the state of Israel. (2) He has spoken of an Israeli-Palestinian-Jordanian confederation, with all the implications of such a statement. (3) He referred to "the Palestinian people" in his address to the United Nations.*
- (f) Rabin has made meaningful approaches to the PLO in the following ways: (1) the ban on meetings with the PLO has been annulled by means of a Knesset resolution, with all the implications this has; (2) meetings with cadres and leading members of the PLO, such as our meeting today, are now permitted.*

2. Hirschfeld's position regarding his negotiating status.

In relation to the status of meeting, Hirschfeld have a hint in our second meeting that he had been in touch with the Israeli government after our first contact this morning by way of a contact with Yossi Beilin. He was also in contact with the US State Department via Dan Kurtzer. If what he said was true, then he is in touch with both the Israeli government and the US State Department. He said the purpose of the meeting was to discuss the possibility of facilitating an agreement on the following points: (1) a declaration of principles; (2) an agenda; (3) an agreement in general terms. The momentum and opportunity created should not be lost, and the aim should be to render the peace process irreversible. Hirschfeld raised the issue of Nabil Sha'ath's thirty points. He pointed out that we should expect a flood of Israelis who wished to meet with us now the Israeli Knesset sanctioned such meetings. These would include journalists, intellectuals, members of the Histadrut, industrialist and economists, as well as parliamentary and politicians. He enquired whether we would be ready and willing to take part in such meetings in Tunis.

3 . Hirschfeld's proposals for further talks.

Hirschfeld raised the following points:

- (a) He asked whether the Palestinians would agree to regular meeting in Oslo, especially as the Norwegian government is ready to host such meetings. I asked him between whom these meetings would be held. His reply was: "Between you and myself". Regarding the purpose of such meetings, he said it was to facilitate the reaching of an agreement and to explore the horizons of future economic and political relations.*
- (b) He suggested the meetings could be expanded, for example, with Elyakim Rubenstein and the Israeli Minister of Finance on one side, and Hayder Abdul-Shafi and Abu Ala on the other. (He specified neither the*

source of this proposal, nor the modalities of how such meetings should be organized).

- (c) On the crucial nature of the status of Jerusalem for any process, he suggested the formation of a Palestinian-Israeli Committee to discuss the issue of Jerusalem in all its aspects, cultural, religious, economic and political. This committee should meet in secret since the Israeli public opinion considered this issue to be taboo and a red line. To put it on the negotiating table now would be sufficient to bring Rabin's government down. He asked why we did not show more flexibility in the multilateral talks, particularly as Yossi Beilin had sent a placatory message to our delegation to the steering committee, which remained unanswered even after the intervention of Edward Djeredjian. He believed it was important to exchange statements declaring a mutual desire for future cooperation, which would be of particular benefit to the participating delegations.*

4 . Hirschfeld made the following general points:

- (a) The Rabin government was surprised that Chairman Arafat agreed to the exclusion of the Jerusalem representatives from the Madrid process. It would now be difficult to amend these provisions, which had been inherited from the Likud government.*
- (b) The present government of Israel was the most important government in country's history, and had a real wish to achieve peace. Were the Palestinians no longer to have this government to talk to it would be a great loss, as it would be very difficult to find another Israeli government as committed to peace. The Israeli peace camp believed that the Palestinians should help Rabin and his government to convince Israeli public opinion to continue with the peace process.*
- (c) It would be a total mistake for the Palestinians to believe that any differences existed between Rabin and Peres. Hirschfeld took the view that any conclusions drawn from such an assumption would be totally mistaken. Hirschfeld claimed to know both leaders well and said they agreed fully both on strategy and tactics.*

- (d) *Hirschfeld asked why the Palestinians did not support the international movement towards the lifting of the economic boycott as a sign of good will and as a confidence-building measure.*
- (e) *Hirschfeld pointed out that the Palestinians were aware that the Rabin government had defined its priorities in domestic policy as economic development and prosperity together with the enhancement of security. At the same time, the government would pay special attention to economic development in the occupied territories. Israel believed that the present moment was very suitable to initiate economic and commercial cooperation in the occupied territories. Such cooperation would definitely have regional dimensions.*
- (f) *Hirschfeld said there were some apprehensions in Israel about the transitional period. They were concerned over how the Palestinians would keep control over security, and how Palestinian relations with certain forces in the area, like Iran and Iraq, might be revised. On the issue of water resources, he pointed out that Israel currently made use of around 75 per cent of these resources, and that it appeared that agreement would be difficult to reach on this issue.*

5 . Hirschfeld's view of Israel's relations with the PLO.

Hirschfeld said that in his personal assessment, the latest Knesset resolution and Rabin's statement on the PLO would open the door for Israel to focus on the role of the PLO and enhance its contacts with it. He added that he believed the relationship with the PLO would pass through a number of stages, which would depend on Israeli public opinion's acceptance. He also believed the relationship would culminate in some kind of relationship with Yasser Arafat.

REACTION BY ABU ALA

(The above are the positions and proposals that I drew from the meeting and the conversation during the two sessions, which I submit to you with my comments. The following are the significant points I made in reply):

1. *Israel can demonstrate its seriousness in pursuing efforts towards peace through direct contact with the PLO, the sole, legitimate representative of our people, and the only body entitled to make decisions on this matter.*
2. *I recapitulated the steps the PLO had taken to achieve peace, starting with the principles of a democratic state, the declaration of the Palestinian state, and other measures, including the initiative of the Palestinian National Council and Abu Ammar's speech in Geneva.*
3. *I stressed that the pattern of representation for the Palestinians devised in Madrid must never be repeated if the peace process was to succeed.*
4. *I made an analysis of the Israeli plan submitted to our negotiating delegation in Washington and of the dangers to the Palestinians implicit in it. These included the partition of land, the distinction between the executive authority and the legislative power, the consolidation and legitimization of settlement activities, and the exclusion from consideration of Jerusalem. I pointed out that for all these reasons this plan was absolutely rejected by us and was wholly unacceptable.*
5. *I assured Hirschfeld in no uncertain terms that any attempt to reach agreement with the Palestinians would have no chance of success and would fail to give momentum to the peace process unless it included certain provisions as follows:*
 - (a) *The entire process with all its stages (transitional and final) should be based on Resolutions 242 and 338.¹³¹*
 - (b) *The scope of the Palestinian transitional authority would extend over all the Palestinian territories occupied in 1967 (exceptions valid during the transitional period only could be discussed.)*
 - (c) *The legislative power would include all competency that would be transferred to the Palestinians during the transitional stage. The*

¹³¹ *UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 formed the basis for negotiations on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Resolution 242 outlines the principles and provisions to be adhered to. It calls for the withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from the occupied territories, emphasises the right of the parties to live in peace within secure and recognised borders and calls for a just settlement of the refugee problem. Resolution 338 calls for a cease-fire and the immediate opening of negotiations.*

transitional legislative council would be formed through general and free elections, by the whole population of the West Bank and Gaza, who resided there according to the demographic records of June 4, 1967, with appropriate international supervision of the elections.

- (d) *The Palestinians must be responsible for their own internal security. Exceptions could be discussed, with the emphasis on our sincere desire to reach an agreement on a comprehensive security system that would be able to ensure stability, future coexistence and mutual benefits.*

I also made a number of other points to Hirschfeld. I asked why the Israeli government, as the occupying power, did not start implementing unilateral confidence-building measures by applying the Fourth Geneva Convention in the occupied territories and by responding to requests presented by the Palestinian negotiator Dr Hayder Abdel Shafi. These included a total cessation of settlement activities in the occupied territories including Jerusalem; a halt to the policy of administrative detention; the closure of Ansar Camp III; the lifting of the night-time curfew in Gaza; an end to the imposition and collection of taxes and charges; an end to the imposition of random fines; a guarantee of access to Jerusalem; freedom of movement between the West Bank and Gaza and the Palestinian towns; a positive response to family reunification requests; the lifting of restrictions on economic projects; and a halt to deportations.¹³²

After the rendez-vous with Hirschfeld, Abu Ala met Arafat and Abu Mazen in Tunis, for an evaluation on what happened, and the Palestinian leaders seemed to find themselves in front of an open door for negotiations, being even deeply convinced the Israeli was acting under official authorization. *They saw the Israeli will for a peace negotiation, which could work better than the Washington channel.*¹³³ But actually, entering into any form of dialogue or negotiations with an Israeli government faction, that had no official

¹³² Ahmed Qurie, *From Oslo to Jerusalem*.

¹³³ David Makovsky, *Making peace with the PLO*.

authorization, was fraught with risks, since it could cause a collision between the two cabinet factions. *“The ability to make peace – to compromise and coexist – will determine our ability to resist religious fundamentalism and national fanaticism.”*¹³⁴

Finally, on 7 December 1992, Abu Mazen met Abu Ala in order to communicate him the agreement to follow up the dialogue in Norway, as it was suggested by Hirschfield, but following certain criteria. *“The choice of a Scandinavian country meant to avoid the eyes and ears of medias”*,¹³⁵ and above all the United States presence, that means in conclusion a serious desire of cooperate. This, in a sense, gave the confirmation that an Israeli political counterpart was involved, and obviously that the Norwegian government already agreed to such a huge commitment.

*If, on the one hand, this fact could in itself lead to the fall of Rabin’s government, which was already on a knife’s edge, on the other hand, the Palestinian side had nothing to loose, in case that it could turn into just small talk.*¹³⁶ However, only three persons were informed of what was really going on: Arafat, Abu Mazen and Abu Ala. The secrecy was imperative.

6.5

The process

The game was worth the candle! The chances of success were extremely limited, both the sides involved knew that, but the strong will for a peace solution made this happen. *Abu Ala* was a banker, in the PLO milieu, in fact he had a role in the foreign investment branch, and in general in everything concerned PLO’s economic field. He had to choose the members of his negotiating team, and his decision was: *Hassan Asfour*, a member of the Palestinian Legislative Council, and *Maher Kurd*, a man involved in Commerce

¹³⁴ Uri Savir, *The Process*.

¹³⁵ David Makovsky, *Making peace with the PLO*.

¹³⁶ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

and Economy, who had a good knowledge of English language, to the contrary of Abu Ala. So the main point for him was to avoid incomprehensions with the Israeli counterpart, and also to have a legal advisor in case an advice was needed.

In order to satisfy the need of confidentiality, the three arrived in Oslo using different trajectories, through a number of airports, to confuse their trail. They got to Oslo on the same flight, but apparently as if by accident, and in any case they did not stare to each other until the final arrival at Fornebu, the small airport of Oslo city: it was the evening of 20 January 1993, the official start for the peace process. *“Peacemaking is a gradual revolution that moves from hostility to a desired conciliation, a collection of moments in which a new trend is set in motion.”*¹³⁷

As they had to arrive there in full secrecy, none of them had applied for the visa, and so actually they had not a visa to enter the Norway soil. The local man that was basically playing the role of the mediator between Israeli and Palestinians was Terje Larsen, and gave them emergency entry permits.

Someone could ask himself the question: “Why in Norway?” In fact we cannot say that it is one of those nations that have ever had great influence in the world order. We could even doubt that the Norwegian state had the necessary capabilities and influence to do that. *In spite Norway achieved what the giants could not and accomplished, what the great ones could not. We record that the events in Oslo that led to the historic Declaration of Principles were one of the twentieth century’s most notable milestones.*¹³⁸

We must remark that this was in fact a Norwegian project, initially directed at the Israeli part, that came to the London meeting in order to achieve full understanding between the parts. The Norwegians played in this process a big part: they had to control the actors and all the surrounding, to guarantee them protection from the medias and from any other intelligence service. *“We could read between the lines a sort of pursue of political credit, but what is sure is*

¹³⁷ Uri Savir, *The Process*.

¹³⁸ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

that they were highly motivated by the desire of peace in the Middle East.”¹³⁹

Moreover, the Norwegian Foreign Minister, *Johan Joergen Holst*, was fully in charge of the Norwegian team, which took care of that mission, and it is necessary to underline that he often followed personally the events of the negotiations, always keeping himself informed.

*The two main conditions for the success of any venture were present in Norway: first, when it is sponsored by the State, and second, when the people assigned to its service are dedicated to it, have enthusiasm and a true desire to succeed.*¹⁴⁰

Terje Larsen was a social scientist, he founded in 1981 FAFO, an institute for research. In 1989 he went to Cairo in order to reach his wife, *Mona Juul* (who at the moment of the peace process is Holst's bureau chief) that worked there for the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It was during that period that Terje created his sociological study of living conditions in the areas of West Bank, Gaza and Eastern Jerusalem: that was the occasion for him to make good contacts for the Oslo negotiations. After Terje and the three Palestinians left the airport, they started a two hours drive out of Oslo, heading to Borregaard Castle, in Sarpsborg; the Israelis were already there waiting for their arrival.

The Israeli team was made by two professors, we have already talked about *Yair Hirschfeld*, but with him there was Dr *Ron Pundak*, another Israeli academic, and both members of a small research group linked to the Israeli Labour Party, clearly operating under the figure of Yossi Beilin, Deputy Foreign Minister (1992–1995) under Shimon Peres.

The first round of talks

21 - 22 January, 1993

After breakfast, the two teams started their work together: even though a general sense of nervousness was felt their general willingness was to get

¹³⁹ David Makovsky, *Making peace with the PLO*.

¹⁴⁰ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

down to business. The two factions tried to create a study group, in order to assess a FAFO's document, which was about the social conditions of the Palestinian occupied territories. After that meeting, Egeland, Juul and Heiberg, the person who presented the FAFO's document, left the castle, leaving only Larsen to act as the mediator between the hosts.

*When lunch was over, that round of talks officially started, lasting until the end of the following day: in the Norwegian atmosphere, the Middle East seemed so far away.*¹⁴¹ Larsen waited outside while Israelis and Palestinians started their discussions, deciding first of all to avoid going back over past history, which could be so easily the cause for disputes and tension. What was going to be under their focus was obviously the present and clearly the future situation of their populations, they tried to find common grounds that could work as safe bases for a future agreement, to reduce the distance standing between them. *The disparity of position was pretty clear: the Palestinian team was made by official members of the PLO authority, acting under the solemn order of the highest Palestinian political entity.*¹⁴² Whereas the Israelis were on a totally opposite position, in fact the two professors, wearing casual dress and being academic, did not seem to be provided with any official acknowledgment. The Palestinian project was to discuss the Israelis proposals and ideas, following the ten guiding principles, which were created by the Chairman of the Higher Negotiating Committee, Mahmoud Abbas; these were the same points that were sent to the negotiating team in Washington.

- 1. The goal is to reach a just, comprehensive and final peace agreement through direct negotiations based on Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338.*
- 2. The scope of the transitional Palestinian authority will stretch over all Palestinian territories occupied in 1967. Administrative exceptions will be agreed upon in the course of the negotiations, however without any provision jeopardizing Resolutions 242 and 338, and the basic principles of international law.*

¹⁴¹ David Makovsky, *Making peace with the PLO*.

¹⁴² David Makovsky, *Making peace with the PLO*.

3. *The transitional Palestinian authority will exercise all the powers attributed to it by negotiating parties who agree to refer to it, taking into consideration the revision of existing laws.*
4. *The transitional Palestinian authority will be chosen through direct elections by all Palestinians resident in the West Bank, including Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip, according to the population records of June 4, 1967.*
5. *An international party, to be agreed upon, will supervise the election process and the transition of power to the elected body.*
6. *A joint committee will be formed to discuss the mutual relations and resolve problems that may arise between the Palestinian authority and the government of Israel.*
7. *An arbitration committee will be formed, to which differences and disputes between the two sides are referred. Members of the arbitration committee should be from the two Madrid Conference sponsors (the United States and Russia), together with Egypt, Jordan and the United Nations, who will be joined by representatives of the Palestinian authority and the government of Israel, or other parties agreed upon.*
8. *Strategic questions of security, with all they entail for future peaceful coexistence in the region, require intensive and well-intentioned consideration by all sides as well as sincere willingness to seek common interests to give the concept of security positive content.*
9. *The two negotiating parties will begin their discussions on the final status two years after the implementation of the transitional phase, or as they agree, whichever comes first. In any case, negotiations on the final status should begin no later than the beginning of the third year of the transitional period.*
10. *Without jeopardizing the final status, an unofficial study of the possibility of establishing a confederation could be conducted, to explore the ways and means most appropriate for establishing peace and stability in the region.*¹⁴³

¹⁴³ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

The ten points worked as the basis for the Palestinian part, in order to obtain the document of "Draft Agreement on a Non-Final Statement of Principles", which was later signed at the end of the second round of negotiations, in February of 1993. *So as the Palestinians were still not sure about the real intentions of the Israelis, they tried to give the shape of a practical matters to those discussions;*¹⁴⁴ it is also remarkable the fact that, the background of the document which will be later created, had a clear Palestinian origin.

The Palestinian team proposed several points, as a confidence-building in the economic sphere, which could improve a Palestinian economic independence, and above all they started to think about a possible Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, which was well known to be the will of a large part of Israelis.

My opening statement

We are passing through an important and decisive stage, which requires a great deal of courage and determination. Both sides need to seize this opportunity. It is clear that failure on our part would bring more wars and suffering to both peoples. We are serious in our endeavour and we are here with good intentions- on our side, the decision to work for peace has been taken. However, the frustration arising from the faltering negotiations in Washington has greatly assisted the radical Palestinian opposition. I tell you very frankly that the frustration is caused by three factors. These are, first, the exaggerated and harsh nature of Israel's policies. We believe the time has come for this to change and for Israel to become more moderate. Second, the negotiations in Washington have not produced any positive results. On the contrary, we feel that so far they have had negative effects. Third, there has been a deterioration of the economic social and financial conditions in the occupied territories. With good intentions, you can change the prevailing conditions. We went through a very difficult time after the Gulf War. Our position in regard to this subject was misinterpreted, but also we are not

¹⁴⁴ David Makovsky, *Making peace with the PLO*.

ashamed to admit that we went too far. Now, we have begun gradually to restore our relations with the Arab countries. Abu Mazen has just visited Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Oman. The PLO leadership, of course, approved this visit. I can also say confidently that our relations with Europe, with the Scandinavian countries and with Japan are improving. As for the United States, our contacts have not been resume, although there are indications that it may be. I believe that the resumption of the Palestinian-US dialogue will help us in the negotiations. We demonstrated the sincerity of our intentions when we accepted the invitation to Madrid under unfair conditions, and we shall remain committed to the peace process as long as there is hope for success. We will continue our struggle within the framework of the peace process to improve the level of representation of the PLO. But I believe you concur that we have reached a critical point in Washington. These negotiations have continued fruitlessly for 15 months, although the initial invitation specified that negotiations should be completed within one year, which would be followed by the implementation of transitional self-rule in the occupied territories. We have attempted on many occasions to submit proposals and solutions to bridge the gap between our positions, but unfortunately with no success. Now we tend to believe that those Palestinians who oppose negotiations may be right when they argue that the talks in Washington should end. For these reasons, I would like today to present some proposals that might be useful, as follows:

The reference we require to UN Resolutions 242 and 338: Edward Djeredjian suggested to our delegation in Washington a proposal that seems to be acceptable for solving this problem. We also have a proposal of our own which we could present to you, if you wish. It is imperative that I mention that the reference to the UN Resolutions is also applicable to the transitional period.

The remit of the proposed Palestinian Authority: it should be clear that the jurisdiction of the Authority should extend over all the Palestinian territories occupied in 1967. Any administrative exceptions could be agreed upon in the course of the negotiations, provided they do not

derogate from the general applicability of our jurisdiction or clash with the contents of Resolution 242.

Security: it should serve our mutual interests and strategic needs, with all the implications this has for future coexistence and peace in the region.

The concept of security should have a positive dimension so that all feel responsible for it and none are intimidated by its measures. In other words, it should be security based on interests and not on fear.

Elections: it should be understood that the transitional Palestinian Council should be formed as a result of direct, general and free elections by all Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, based on the census records of June 4, 1967. The Council should be able to exercise all legislative powers which belong to it. It should also be understood that all existing laws should be subject to review. An international body to be agreed upon should supervise the elections.

For its part, Israel should implement a number of measures, which would not cost her anything. For example:

Deportees: a solution must be found to the problem of deportees. We believe that an agreement by Israel to allow those who have been deported since 1967 to return home would give an important degree of credibility to its statements of intent. In fact the return of deportees should be seen of particular importance, as their return would contribute greatly to the peace process.

Status of the PLO: the moment has come to reinstate the role of the PLO in the peace process. This would give a new impetus to the process, and would help our decision-making.

Settlements: the government of Israel should take immediate steps to halt settlement activities. This step would demonstrate Israel's good intentions and would be a sign that it does not intend to expand at the expense of our territory. Measures should be taken to relax restrictions on economic activities and to improve human rights in general.

Gaza: both Rabin and Peres have talked about withdrawal from Gaza. Why not just implement this, if Gaza represents a problem for Israel? If this took place, it could mark the beginning of fruitful cooperation between us, since Gaza needs a development plan on the lines of the post-war Marshall Plan in Europe. Gaza could be transformed into a free zone, and if Israel is interested and willing, the free zone could be expanded to include Ashdod. This would be a vast and ambitious cooperation project requiring serious studies from both our sides as well as by international parties. (This idea has just been raised within the PLO and we have not discussed it thoroughly yet). The resolution of the Gaza problem will lead to the resolution of a number of economic and social issues. I do not ask for an immediate answer, but please give these ideas serious attentions for the future, because they could represent an important aspect of our future, because they could represent an important aspect of our future cooperation. We should consider the impact on the Arab region as a whole, since we could establish various industries, such as a motor-manufacturing industry and high technology projects. However, withdrawal from Gaza should not take place as a substitute for withdrawal from the West Bank, and should not be understood in this way, though it would be an important measure, which should give great momentum to the peace process and could have a dramatic effect. Withdrawal from Gaza should be a unilateral Israeli measure as proof of good will, while negotiations on the other issues continue.

After making these points, I moved on to discuss some issues arising out of the multilateral negotiations:

Development committee: there is a list of confidence-building measures in the economic field, which could be discussed in the economic development committee. We hope that the Israeli delegation will have no objection. It would serve both our interests if Israel were to permit the establishment of a Palestinian development bank, a cement factory and a

commercial seaport at Gaza, as well as housing projects, including some in Jerusalem.

Water Resources Committee: I cannot understand Israel's logic in refusing to discuss Palestinian water rights. Why does Israel reject the idea of forming a committee on water rights. Why does Israel reject the idea of forming a committee on water rights? The Palestinians only receive a small portion of their water. Why do you object to the construction of a West Ghor canal, similar to the East Ghor Canal?

The Committee on Refugees: for political and humanitarian reasons we should create a positive atmosphere by lifting the ban on discussing the issues of the reunification of families and the return of deportees. Then we could move on to the discussion of other issues on that committee's agenda.

The Environment Committee: when we suggested the idea of forming an authority for the protection of the environment, the Israeli delegation objected. We did not believe that this objection was justified.

The Security Committee: we trust that no problems will be raised about the choice of Palestinian representatives on this committee.

The Steering Committee: we do not understand the reasons for your objection to the formation of a multilateral committee on Jerusalem, because we believe that it could create a positive atmosphere on both sides. We also believe that there is a need to invite both Iraq and Lybia to join the process.

The Palestinian National Authority: it is essential in the extreme to lift the ban on establishing a Palestinian National Authority in the occupied territories. You should encourage and support such an authority. I should advise the adoption of this idea by Israel in the multilateral talks.

Other points: we need to discuss projects for Red-Dead and the Med-Dead Canals together with cooperation in exploitation of the Dead Sea, minerals, chemicals, tourism and a free zone in the Jordan Valley.

*Final point: Rabin has been talking about a confederation as a future option. We do look seriously at this matter and would like to hear all viewpoints on the subject.*¹⁴⁵

The Israelis seemed in general to agree to the Palestinian projects of an economic plan, as well as to the Gaza withdrawal, now the second step was to introduce those ideas to their authorities in Israel. Moreover Hirschfeld said that he and Yossi Beilin had worked together on a study of modalities of unilateral withdrawal from Gaza, which had already gained quite a large support in the Labour Party, and was even appreciated in Likud circles. In detail, Israelis and Palestinians seemed to be in agreement with the building of a cement factory in Gaza, of a Palestinian development bank, even though they had to decide: which currency was to be used, which housing plan - about 75000 new units in order also to stimulate the economy – had to be choose, and finally reach an agreement on water issue, but bilateral talks were needed to fully resolve this point.

Speaking about refugee issues, Hirschfeld said the Israeli position on the reunification of families was that it should be discussed in the bilateral talks. *He added that Israel feared that any discussion in the multilateral Committee on Refugees would raise the issue of a "Right of Return" and pointed out that if rights were conceded to return to Jaffa or Haifa the whole region could be destabilized.*¹⁴⁶ Regarding this main point, the Israelis thought they had to first of all accomplish the withdrawal from that territory, and only secondly they would have considered the principle of "Right to return" for the Palestinian refugees. The Palestinians instead thought these were two aspects of the same issue, and for this reason they deserved to be handled as two parts of the same process: *progress on one track would certainly lead to progress on the other.*¹⁴⁷

Another main point was the issue of Jerusalem, in fact as this holy city was equally contended between the two populations, the need to agree on some

¹⁴⁵ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

¹⁴⁶ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

¹⁴⁷ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

sort of special status was pretty clear. But an agreement seemed quite far, as no one really wanted to divide the town but preferred it could remain united, especially the Israelis made this clear, but they also understood the Palestinians should not be absorbed from Israelis. *Given its religious value, such a discussion was a crucial one, since it could have consequences on the Israeli inner politics.*¹⁴⁸ In fact, if the religious Shas Party knew that Jerusalem was under discussion, they would certainly have quit the Rabin government leading it to fall.

After the whole discussion, the Palestinian team traveled to Tunis, center of the Higher Committee, in order to present a document that will represent the real structure of the negotiations for the future. The importance level of the Tunis discussion was high, considering the fact that the Palestinian leadership would have decided, thanks to the report of its team, whether to continue the talks with the Israelis or not. The Committee in Tunis basically wanted to have the answer to two main questions:

a) Was the Israeli team really bound to any official commitment?

b) Which would be considered the "off limits" topics, in the Israeli view?

On that occasion, the Palestinian team could establish a plan for the future talks, a basis that will represent the nub of their following decisions; they even decided to accept the temporary doubt about the official status of the Israelis, but being aware that the Israelis could try to impose an unsatisfactory solution for them. *Pessimistically, we supposed that this would be the most probable result, because of what we knew in advance about Israel's historical intransigence, and the arrogant attitude of the United States, which viewed the Middle East as its exclusive sphere of influence.*¹⁴⁹

Anyway the Palestinians knew that many people in Israel were seriously thinking about peace as a real possibility, and this was a matter of fact that could eventually bring to the historic compromise. *An intensified and bloody*

¹⁴⁸ David Makovsky, *Making peace with the PLO*.

¹⁴⁹ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

*confrontation would only inflict more pain on both sides. If the moment for compromise were to pass, the situation could irrevocably change.*¹⁵⁰

Finally, the Tunis discussion turned into the decision of not missing the opportunity that was taking form in front of them, they decided, after rigid analysis, that the new level of political maturity, reached in Israel thanks to the Labour party, could really work for the peace cause. *Both the political authorities realized that the price and the consequences of the political stalemate, were paid by their populations, they felt under a huge pressure.*¹⁵¹

But it is necessary to underline that, in this impasse, the Palestinians were actually living in a position, which was undeniably worse, in fact they were de facto under the Israeli military occupation, and even a certain international isolation, after the Gulf War. On the other hand the Israelis had to face another kind of threat, a growing one, which was coming from the religious extremism brought by the Islamic Revolution. The Israelis understood that a peace agreement with the Palestinians could possibly represent the key for the end of the Arab boycott: these factors worked as a boost to concretely improve the peace talks between the two peoples.

*Finally, we now possessed one extremely important bargaining point. This was the fact that we were serious in our choice of the negotiating route, and our abandonment of violence, in our desire to restore the national political rights of the Palestinian people.*¹⁵² This new attitude of the Palestinian leadership had also the merit to start its first official dialogue with the United States of America.

The second round of talks

11 - 12 February, 1993

After the Tunis meeting, the Palestinian team was ready to get back to Norway on 10 February, more ready than ever before to sit at the table of talks and to discover something new about the real identity of the Israeli interlocutors.

¹⁵⁰ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

¹⁵¹ David Makovsky, *Making peace with the PLO*.

¹⁵² Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

Mona Juul was waiting for them at Fornebu airport, bringing some immediate entry visas for her guests, and a car that would eventually have brought them to Sarpsborg Castle.

*By now, we knew we were engaged in talks that might well have practical consequences. Our initial strategy was to work for concrete results, which could be realized in the short term. In the longer term, we wanted the Israelis to make concessions on issues on which they would have to be pressed to agree.*¹⁵³ So the idea of the Palestinians was basically to reach an agreement on those issues considered less controversial, in the first stage, enhancing more confidence with the Israeli partners, and leading step by step to the creation of a complete agreement. But they also did not want to lose that positive momentum, so in a second stage the idea was to reach an understanding on the more relevant key issues, those that represent the core of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. So the hard mission for the Palestinians was to keep these two stages as a whole, without wasting time and trying to open a new chapter in the life of the peoples in the Middle East.

*In other words, our negotiating strategy was based on a gradual but continuous process, which was intended to result in accumulated achievements.*¹⁵⁴ For what concerns the Israelis, the approach seemed to be the same, in fact, since the Camp David Agreements with Egypt of 1978, the “step-by-step” way of dealing had been crucial in their political thinking. The real value of that negotiation, for the Palestinians, concerned the chance for them to provide the basis of a legitimate Palestinian national right, that is to say the acknowledgment of a Palestinian State, an independent political entity with Jerusalem as its capital. *What we needed to do was to break away from the circle of mutual suspicion, which had historically been dominant in the positions of both sides.*¹⁵⁵

Abu Ala and his colleagues, knowing that the Israelis were more interested in keeping the West Bank and Jerusalem, decided to press them to accept the idea of withdrawal from Gaza. It was a matter of fact that the West Bank had a

¹⁵³ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

¹⁵⁴ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

¹⁵⁵ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

greater importance for the Palestinians, in fact that is a part of land which represents a stretch of more fertile land, in short a better place for a Palestinian state. For the Israelis that area could be better adapted to the establishment of new settlements, but had first of all an immeasurable value for the historical claims of Zionism.

Anyway, the reasons that pressed the Palestinians to the choice of Gaza withdrawal seemed to be prevailing:

1. *Withdrawal from the Gaza Strip would serve as a preliminary test of Israel's real intentions, and of the ideas prevalent within the leadership of the Labour Party, though such a withdrawal was still indistinctively rejected by many Palestinians who saw it as a poisoned chalice, or as a time bomb.*
2. *Withdrawal from Gaza, if it became a reality, could create a historical precedent that could be applied to other Palestinian lands, with all that such a broader withdrawal might imply.*
3. *Withdrawal from Gaza would be a psychological boost for our people, convincing them that the occupation would eventually end, and allowing them to believe that their long struggle and their sacrifice would finally bear fruit.*
4. *Withdrawal from Gaza first would also give a real impetus to progressive withdrawal from the rest of the occupied territories.*
5. *Withdrawal from any part of the Palestinian lands, in this case the Gaza Strip, would undermine the long-held Israeli contention that they have a legal right to the occupied territories. This is based on the false premise that since the West Bank and Gaza do not belong to any other state, they are not occupied territories, and may therefore be regarded as part of greater Israel. This has for those Israelis who take this line the further implication that the occupied territories may neither be abandoned nor be the object of negotiations.*¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁶ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

*Our hope of escape from the vicious circle that had for several months characterized the negotiations in Washington was sincere.*¹⁵⁷ On 11 February, the second round of talks officially started, but the Israelis seemed, from the very start, to have changed their approach concerning the idea of “Gaza first”, demonstrating that some important changes in their mindset took place. In fact Yair Hirschfeld was ready to present an important document on that occasion, a draft of a Declaration of Principles, a sort of response to the previous Palestinian “ten points” document.

Together with that paper, the Israelis were bringing some economic measures comparable to a “Marshall Plan” for the area of Gaza and also, indirectly, the confirmation for the Palestinians that the two professors were speaking in the name of a certain Israeli authority. *However, Israeli leaders at the level of Rabin or Peres could not be involved before the Palestinians had provided clarification on a number of issues. Hirschfeld added that substantial progress needed to be achieved in the talks, and that a real improvement in conditions in Gaza and the West Bank needed to be achieved.*¹⁵⁸

What seemed clear now was that Rabin realized it was possible to go through some kind of progress with the Palestinians, but his desire was to keep on supporting the official bilateral negotiations in Washington.

During this round of talks the two professors said their people were strongly afraid about the new threats represented by the Hamas movement and all the other Islamist groups in general. They feared that such a menace could take over in Jordan too, and looked at the Islamic regime in Iran with deep preoccupation.

Concerning the West Bank and Gaza, they said that Shimon Peres was not interested in the annexation of those territories, that he even spoke about a possible confederation with the Palestinians, after a peace agreement would be achieved. Pundak then added that the Chairman of the Israeli Chamber of Commerce was aware of the need to encourage economic development in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, thinking about the possibility of a unified

¹⁵⁷ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

¹⁵⁸ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

Israeli-Palestinian economy. The idea of the two professors was to speed up the talks, trying to reach a comprehensive understanding about the toughest issues.

The two teams agreed for what concerned the attitude of the then US president, Bill Clinton, who was basically withdrawing from foreign policy but taking good care of the domestic one. In a sense, this behavior created a momentum for the Israeli and Palestinians leaders to take the very lead of the Oslo peace process, being sure that Washington was not going to interfere. *To reach an agreement on a Declaration of Principles would in itself be a great breakthrough, and could mobilize public opinion to once more to support the peace process.*¹⁵⁹ Both the Israeli and Palestinians knew what they could get through that unofficial channel: a stalemate was possible, but they were pushing together to the peace agreement they were waiting for.

*In the next session, Yair Hirschfeld presented his draft of the Declaration of Principles, as well as the economic programme and the Marshall-style development plan for Gaza that we have requested, as well as a draft Israeli-Palestinian agreement on a schedule for further negotiations.*¹⁶⁰ Once that document was exposed, the Palestinians replied that there were several points that had to be discussed and analyzed in depth, especially for what concerns the political process that will take to the creation of a legitimate Palestinian authority. Many things had to be defined, but it is remarkable that the signing of the Declaration of Principles would have led to the election of a Palestinian authority in less than nine months. *We continued to disagree on the issues of jurisdiction*¹⁶¹, in fact the Israelis were not going to concede the Palestinian to have a jurisdiction during the interim period.

There was some disagreement for the timetable part: for the Palestinians the final status negotiation had to start on the third year of the transitional period; for the Israelis the withdrawal from Gaza had to commence with the start of the negotiations for the final status.

¹⁵⁹ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

¹⁶⁰ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

¹⁶¹ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

*Overall, the second round on 11 and 12 February, 1993, seemed to be more significant than the one before, not only because of the more specific nature of the issues discussed, but also for its easier atmosphere, which added to mutual confidence of both parties.*¹⁶² The proposal of the Draft Articles brought a general atmosphere of confidence and credibility in the Oslo process, the participants did in fact overcome the wall of mutual suspicions and now wanted to achieve more. The two teams decided to produce the document of the Draft Declaration, on a FAFO Institute headed paper in order to maintain the highest level of confidentiality in the event of a leakage. So under that bizarre form of FAFO document, the Israelis and Palestinians succeeded in their mission of reaching an agreement in that specific case called the "Sarpsborg Document". *What seemed to be clear by now was that they were not playing a secondary role, but the solemnity of that channel was sure: that document officially represented the first joint paper created by Israel and the PLO.*¹⁶³ After the end of that round of talks the Palestinian team returned to Tunis, in order to present the Sarpsborg Document and hear which would be the comments of their leaderships, Chairman Yasser Arafat and Mahmoud Abbas.

The PLO reading of the draft Sarpsborg Document:

The following document records the PLO's comments on the document after a careful reading of it by the PLO leadership.

(1) "GAZA FIRST"

Bearing in mind that we wish to avoid any suggestion that Gaza is a separate entity from the West Bank, the following points should be considered. We seek in fact to enhance the relationship between Gaza and the West Bank and to encourage the movement of people and goods between the two.

General principles

¹⁶² Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

¹⁶³ David Makovsky, *Making peace with the PLO*.

(a) The Declaration of Principles should stress the unity of the occupied territories in their entirety as a single political entity. (b) This declaration should include provision concerning Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank in the shape of a gradual redeployment of the Israeli army from border area such as Jericho. (c) Appropriate measures should be guaranteed to ensure economic development and internal security.

The actual transfer of responsibility in Gaza

(a) Authority in the Gaza Strip should be transferred to a trusteeship body made up of the United Nations and the two sponsors of the Madrid Conference (the United States and Russia), together with Egypt and Jordan, until the election of the transitional Palestinian authority. (b) This trusteeship body should institute an international security force whose powers should in due course be transferred to the transitional government or any Palestinian National Authority which may be formed. (c) Immediately after the completion of the withdrawal of the Israeli forces from Gaza, between 10 and 15 thousand Palestinian security officers trained in Jordan and Egypt should enter the Gaza Strip to take charge of security.

(2) MOVEMENT OF INDIVIDUALS AND GOODS

To enhance the connections between the West Bank and Gaza as one political and economy entity, the following measures should be agreed upon: (a) There should be a "land bridge" between the West Bank and Gaza for the movement of individuals and goods. (b) An airport should be established in Gaza for transportation between the West Bank and abroad. (c) A commercial seaport should be established in Gaza as the major seaport for the Palestinian territories (both the West Bank and Gaza) for both imports and exports. (d) There should be freedom of movement of

individuals between the West Bank and Gaza without control or prior permission from Israel. (e) There should be unity between the administrative institutions in both areas.

(3) ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

There should be a single and integrated plan for economic development in both the West Bank and Gaza. Immediately after the completion of Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, the following measures should be taken: (a) A Palestinian Development Bank should be established in the West Bank, with subsidiaries in the Gaza Strip, to receive economic aid and loans and coordinate expenditure on the economic and social projects, in accordance with programmes and priorities determined by the Palestinians. (b) An international emergency fund should be set up, to fund economic and social development. Funds will be disbursed through the Palestinian development bank. An appropriate amount should be set aside for urgent assistance. (c) The development programme should be targeted at the following priorities: (i) The correction of distortions and imbalances in the economic structure of the West Bank and Gaza; (ii) the reinstatement and modernization of the infrastructure of all sectors of the Palestinian national economy; (iii) the implementation of an immediate and comprehensive housing scheme, with effective private sector participation; (iv) the immediate implementation of all sectors of the economic development programme including agriculture, industry, tourism, finance, trade, etc. It should be emphasized that, for the purpose of the plan and its implementation, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip should be viewed as one, and work will start simultaneously.

(4) COOPERATION

Palestinian economic policy should be structured as a centralized and mixed economy. This will provide the private sector with maximum freedom, while at the same time ensuring the participation of the public sector in providing for the requirements of low-income groups, and for the

development of infrastructure not covered by the private sector.

Appropriate and guaranteed opportunities for participations should be made available: (a) to the Palestinian private sector from within Palestine and from abroad; (b) to Arab and international investors in projects in the West Bank; and (c) for joint ventures to participate in all economic projects and activities.

(5) SECURITY

Security, in all its political and economic dimensions, is the central element on which stability depends, and is essential for the creation of the appropriate climate for economic and social development and for cooperation between the different sectors. Appropriate security forces will be established at each stage: (a) the pre-election stage (when training and qualification will take place); (b) the "Gaza First" stage (if withdrawal takes place before the elections); (c) the post-election stage, with the installation of the national authority, including the final stage. Security forces need to be established for the protection of citizens and their properties, for the maintenance of law and order, for the protection of public buildings, installations and officials, and in order to safeguard air and sea transit.

At a minimum, the following security departments should be established for this purpose: (a) a public Security Department including criminal police, traffic police, border police and customs, prison administration, a criminal investigation force; (b) a department of internal security for the protection of vital public installations and officials, and a rapid deployment force for the maintenance of law and order; (c) an intelligence department including information-gathering, intelligence networks, and counter intelligence; (d) a training department, which should at once begin to provide for the training of recruits from both inside and outside Palestine.

The size of the forces required to keep law and order and maintain stability should be set as follows: an international force of 25.000 (for five years); and a Palestinian force of 10.000. The national Palestinian forces are to be formed of 5.000 members of the Ain Jalout force (trained in Egypt) and

5.000 members of the Badr force (trained in Jordan). Of the international force, 10.000 should be stationed in Gaza and 15.000 in the West Bank, while the Palestinian force should be 5.000 in Gaza and 5.000 in the West Bank.

The international police force should be formed of nationals of the two sponsor nations of the peace process, together with other nationals including the Scandinavian countries. A higher security committee should be set up to coordinate joint security issues between the Palestinian authority and the government of Israel in accordance with the terms of the agreement. Finally, a security commission should be created to coordinate with Israel and Egypt over common border security issues.¹⁶⁴

The third round of talks

20 - 21 March, 1993

The second round was a turning point: after this meeting a draft of document had already been achieved, and the greetings between the two teams seemed genuine, they now knew each other much better. *But the Palestinians were still waiting for a confirmation of the political legitimacy of the two professors, they knew about the presence of Yossi Beilin above them, but it was not enough.¹⁶⁵*

Abu Ala and his colleagues got back from Tunis with the belief that the document they produced with the Israelis was a very good compromise, but there were several points that had to be discussed and eventually changed. In particular, the issue of the measures related to the West Bank had to be included as well as for Gaza; the necessity of the need to recognize the PLO as the sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinian people; and finally the implementation of a wide range of human rights confidence building steps, to the West Bank and Gaza. Moreover, Abu Ala addressed a number of questions straight to the Israeli delegation:

¹⁶⁴ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

¹⁶⁵ David Makovsky, *Making peace with the PLO*.

1. *Does this track still constitute the first priority to Israeli leadership, or does the leadership still view other tracks as more important, as we constantly read in your press and hear from senior Israeli officials?*
2. *We are aware that there are other channels, in the form of seminars and intellectual exercises, which could be useful. Yet others have tackled serious issues, and there are offers to open additional channels on different levels. Are we on the Palestinian side to understand that all these channels serve the same purpose, or are they intended to dilute the results which could be reached?*
3. *What are Israel's proposals to give this channel in Norway serious momentum and enhance its credibility so as to increase its impact on the main negotiations?*
4. *Since we on the Palestinian side are concerned with the rapidity of results we are interested to know the position of your most senior figure regarding this channel, and whether he is ready to give its first priority as the main channel? Has he decided to lend this channel his full support as we can see he is capable of reaching serious and quick achievements?*
5. *We were able for the first time to achieve a written proposal in our last meeting. Has this channel and the document it has produced gained the interest it deserves from the Israel side?*¹⁶⁶

In response to those questions, Hirschfeld presented a speech that contained comments and thoughts of his leadership, after the reading of the Sarpsborg Document. First of all the Israeli leadership was looking positively at the Oslo channel, even thinking they could reach an epic turning point, switching the negotiation from an hostility level to a friendship one.

*He then expressed his conviction that Israel was placing absolute priority on the Palestinian track. He added that the Israeli government wished to achieve peace with the Palestinians first, and then peace with the Syrians.*¹⁶⁷ So it seemed pretty clear that the Israeli leadership really wanted to improve its

¹⁶⁶ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

¹⁶⁷ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

relations with the Palestinians, at the condition that they could concretely control the situation in the occupied territories. And what was important to notice is the inclusion of a peace agreement with the Syrians, in terms of promotion for peace on the neighbors states.

The Israeli concern to the growing of terrorism in its area was the main reason behind the conception of the peace path: they needed the PLO support to coordinate the efforts to control violence. *Both Israeli and Palestinian decision-makers needed therefore to be more effective in guiding public opinion in order to achieve real progress.*¹⁶⁸

The Israeli delegation proposed two options for the continuation of the Oslo negotiation:

- a) To cooperate more closely with the United States authorities, which were fully informed of Norwegian talks.
- b) Improvement of the dealing between Israel and Palestinian, which would be later supported by an American presence.

That is to say that Israeli leadership was finally ready to contemplate the expected recognition of the PLO authority, on its way to the coming scheduled elections. *What Rabin and Peres were now waiting for was a further agreed document, based on the Sarpsborg draft, that will enable the two professors to ask for a final authorization: all possible efforts should be made.*¹⁶⁹

What was more controversial was the Jerusalem issue, discussed by the two professors with their leaders, which presented two sides:

- 1) The positive was that several points could be easily improved, which was an advantage for the Palestinians.
- 2) The negative was the awareness that Jerusalem represented the toughest issue to explore and possibly to improve.

Israel's proposals

The proposals Hirschfeld had brought from Israel could be summarized in a number of points:

¹⁶⁸ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

¹⁶⁹ David Makovsky, *Making peace with the PLO*.

1. *Responsible figures in Israel had received the draft agreement on the Declaration of Principles positively, and were encouraged by the ideas that draft contained.*
2. *Peace with the Palestinians would run parallel with an Israeli effort to achieve peace with the Syrians.*
3. *Israel was prepared to move on the economic track faster than on the political track.*
4. *The Israelis were worried about the deterioration of the situation on the ground and about losing control of developments.*
5. *The Israeli government had not yet given its full authorization to the negotiators, and this was conditional upon reaching a draft agreement or document.*
6. *The Israeli position concerning Jerusalem was more flexible than it officially appeared to be.*
7. *The Israeli side was seeking to reach a more detailed agreement, which would make it possible for the United States to become directly involved in the negotiations, and for the parties to take advantage of the additional momentum thus created.*

After Hirschfeld's presentation, I decided to resume my discussion of the basic points from which I had started, instead of discussing the new points raised by the Israeli team. I began by suggesting that before embarking on a debate on new texts, my hope was that we could confirm the text on which we had worked for the past seven weeks. To this end, I made a number of points, addressing the Israeli delegation directly:

1. *The last three meetings have created a comfortable atmosphere, which has brought the Palestinians side close to the belief that we will be able to achieve our goal. Our approach has always been candid and open.*
2. *We have presented to our leadership what we discussed in the last round and the issue raised by both sides. The reaction in general has been positive.*

3. *The American paper presented in Washington (this concerned the position of the Clinton administration, in relation to the Israeli government's right to deport Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza, and to UN Resolution 799 on this issue) was a great shock to us. It should have had the same impact on you. In our view, it went completely outside the conventions of the negotiations. At the same time, it implied the abnegation of all that has taken place in this channel. This was why I decided not to go to the meeting of the steering committee for the multilateral negotiations in Moscow. I preferred to focus on our efforts here and to achieve the breakthrough we have hoped for from these meetings between Palestinian leaders and members of our delegation in Washington took place to discuss the abovementioned American paper.*
4. *We have begun to suspect that the American paper had been coordinated with you and that Israel is exploiting this channel for the purpose of deception. It is for this reason that I am speaking so frankly now.*¹⁷⁰

Abu Ala and his team hoped to reach an agreement in three different fields:

- a) The development of the Declaration of Principles, including also the period that would have led to independence and end of occupation.
- b) The achievement of a common position concerning Gaza and Jericho, in order to show concretely that something had changed.
- c) Common participation of both PLO and its security forces, for the establishment of security and stability in liberated Gaza and Jericho.

These were basically the heart of the Palestinian request from that negotiation. He decided to remark to the Israeli team, which were the main issues reached until that moment, points that he already considered as crucial for the continuation of the talks:

¹⁷⁰ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

1. *The jurisdiction of the Palestinian National Authority: we have explained our position concerning this issue clearly. Palestinian jurisdiction should extend over all the territories occupied in 1967, with the exception of areas left for negotiations on the final status. As we have agreed, we will open discussion of these exceptions at the beginning of the third year of the transitional period.*
2. *Security: we have discussed the security requirements, including Palestinian security forces, international forces and joint patrols.*
3. *The nature of the transitional council and the transitional government in the transitional period: there should be a legislative council to which the transitional government will be accountable, a transitional executive government, and an independent judiciary.*
4. *Jerusalem: we have discussed the participation of the inhabitants of Jerusalem in elections, the establishment of Palestinian government departments in Jerusalem, and the role of Jerusalem as the seat of government. Other issues include the right of the Palestinians to operate Qalandia airport, and to run the Jerusalem electricity company. For the moment, the status quo must be maintained in Jerusalem.*
5. *Settlements: there must be a halt to new settlements, a limitation on the number of settlers, with no increase in numbers and no physical expansion. We have also posed some queries on this issue for the Israeli authorities.*¹⁷¹

The Israeli team carried with them a document which they called "Unofficial Draft for the Final Text", that contained a sort of reconciliation between Palestinians and Israelis, trying to combine their positions. As time was passing by, it seemed that the two professors were changing their position concerning some points included in the Sarpsborg Document; these are the following:

¹⁷¹ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

1. *They refused to agree in advance that the outcome of the negotiations should be the implementation of Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338.*
2. *They did not accept any reference in the draft to the legitimate rights and just demands of the Palestinian people, except as such rights and demands might be redefined in an agreement on final status.*
3. *They refused for security reasons to agree to the dissolution of the military government, whose role was to take responsibility for all security responsibilities relating to the Israeli military, settlements and Israeli citizens in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.*
4. *They refused to agree to the automatic transfer of all powers to the elected Palestinian council except for areas to be agreed upon. This was seen as unacceptable as some issues might remain unresolved.*
5. *They would not agree to prior definition of the issues to be negotiated in the final status talks, insisting that either party should have the right to raise whatever questions they might see fit in the final stage.*
6. *They refused to accept any reference to Palestinian institutions or interests in Jerusalem, and to any link which might be established between Jerusalem and the elected council.*
7. *They would not agree to setting a timetable for the redeployment of the Israeli forces outside the populated areas before the elections as a first stage and a second redeployment of Israeli forces only in a certain locations outside the populated areas.*¹⁷²

Moreover, others issues appeared to be seen as controversial by the Israeli delegation, corresponding to more general points:

1. *The addition of the expression "political rights" to the expression "legitimate rights" in the preamble of the agreement. The Israelis insisted on the wording: "The legitimate rights of the Palestinian people*

¹⁷² Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

and its just demands will be agreed upon in the course of the negotiations on the permanent status.”

2. *The principle that the negotiations on final status should lead to the implementation of Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, in conformity with whatever the two parties agreed in the final status negotiations.*
3. *The suggestion that the Palestinian police should be in charge of public security during the election period.*
4. *The proposals that the West Bank and the Gaza Strip should be considered as one entity, although the Israelis had reservations about the word “all” in relation to the West Bank.*
5. *The suggestion that the transitional period would begin after Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and Jericho.*
6. *The transfer of certain powers, but not all powers, defined in the temporary agreement to authorized Palestinians, with the implementation of the Declaration of Principles and with the withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and Jericho.*
7. *The recruitment of a Palestinian police force as agreed.*
8. *The establishment of independent Palestinian judicial bodies alongside the executive and legislative authorities.*
9. *The dissolution of the Israeli Civil Administration of the West Bank and Gaza after the opening of the elected Palestinian Council.*
10. *That Jericho should be the headquarters of the elected Palestinian Council after Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and Jericho.*
11. *That arrangements for the participation of the inhabitants of Jerusalem in the elections should be agreed between the two parties.*
12. *On the issue of the displaced persons, that a paragraph as follows should be inserted: “The future of the displaced Palestinians registered on June 4, 1967 will not be prejudiced because for practical reasons they will not be able to participate in the electoral process.”*
13. *That there should be arrangements for secure and safe transit for VIPs between the Gaza Strip and Jericho.*

14. *That the Palestinian police force would comprise both recruits from within the Palestinian territories and a number from outside holding Jordanian nationality.*
15. *That the temporary agreement would include certain arrangements defining joint utilization of the infrastructure during the transitional period.*¹⁷³

So after Israeli change of positions it was clear to the Palestinians that they needed to review their position too, in order to keep the right balances of those talks.

The fourth round of talks

30 April – 1 May, 1993

*After a great start, characterized by enthusiasm and important results achieved in a short time, the atmosphere was changing, as also the venue for the dealing was changed.*¹⁷⁴ This time the scheduled place was the Holmenkollen Park Hotel, whose only positive peculiarity was the fact that it offered a perfect condition of isolation, in fact it actually stood in the middle of a forest close to Oslo. It was necessary to dislocate the negotiation from Sarpsborg, as some local people started to notice the frequent arrivals of foreigners. This is why Holmenkollen Park was chosen: a business hotel, often used by the Norwegian government, provided with suites that could host meetings. The Palestinian side started with this fourth meeting a new phase, called ‘*legitimation*’, because now they pretended to reach status and recognition for their talks, trying to create a document containing some official status as basis for an agreement. So their decision was to put more pressure on the Israeli side, in order to recognize officially the legitimate nature of the Oslo channel. *Why this had become urgent was that, in Tunis, the senior Palestinian circle directing our negotiations was well aware that the Israeli negotiators lacked*

¹⁷³ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

¹⁷⁴ David Makovsky, *Making peace with the PLO*.

*any official status and that neither of the two members was a government official.*¹⁷⁵

Before this session started, the Palestinians received an important confirmation from a Norwegian unknown person: it was certain that the Israeli government gave full acknowledgement to its negotiating team, and that it recognized that channel as an official back channel. But that was not enough for the Palestinians, who now wanted an Israeli official at the table of negotiations in order to achieve a real diplomatic status. What happened is that, after the Israelis knew about the Norwegian information, they started to mention ordinarily the name of their Prime Minister, Yitzhak Rabin.

Another important change was the Israeli statement that Shimon Peres wanted to know when Yasser Arafat intended to move his base from Tunis to Gaza, and also who will be the candidates for the future Palestinian elections in the West Bank and Gaza. *The Israeli negotiators also drew to our attention the fact that the Israeli media had started to portray Yasser Arafat as a brave man of peace, with the evident intention of paving the way for popular Israeli acceptance of an agreement.*¹⁷⁶

In short, crucial changes were taking place throughout these talks, and, mainly the confirmation on Rabin's presence in the upper floors of the Israeli delegation, did sensibly raise the legitimacy level perceived by the Palestinians. Their strategy now was to maintain a high level of pressure, in order to obtain two important developments: a) to bring an official Israeli figure to the talks, in order to strengthen the credibility of the Oslo channel; b) to press for recognition for the real status of those talks in more diplomatic terms. *What I proposed was for the two delegations in Norway to put our signatures to the latest version of the Draft Declaration of Principles under the official copy of the document.*¹⁷⁷

The two professors did not really respond to these questions, but Hirschfeld decided to speak about the real difficulties that his country was facing, while carrying out the negotiation with the Palestinian delegation. The idea of "Gaza

¹⁷⁵ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

¹⁷⁶ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

¹⁷⁷ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

first” could cause strong political opposition other than be extremely costly for the Israeli government. *Terrorism and violence, as Hirschfeld described it, could derail any process of negotiation and might be a problem for Rabin, who was already under attack for the lack of progress in the Washington negotiations, and was at the same time being criticized for going too far in making concessions to the Palestinians.*¹⁷⁸ If Rabin wanted to avoid the accusations of “selling” Israel’s land, he had to be sure that, in any case, the concessions had to be mutual based on the principle of “give and take”. The Palestinian team responded to the Israeli matters, by saying that for Arafat as well it was not easy to negotiate with the Israelis, that is to say that it was not a popular move but something that could cause political difficulties with the domestic public. *I said we were pleased when our friends the Norwegians had told us that the Israeli government had given the Israeli negotiators formal authorization, from which we concluded that Israel had begun to view the Norway talks as an official back channel.*¹⁷⁹

That was an important passage, because it gave the Palestinians the awareness that they were officially negotiating, and with the knowledge of other crucial States, namely United States, Egypt and Norway. But we need to remark that the Palestinian leadership gave, from the absolute start, an official authorization to the Oslo channel and to those people that were going there to represent the Palestinian State.

*I said we should also take steps, as soon as the agreement was signed, to mobilize both policy initiatives and public opinion in its support. I added that in my view any agreement we signed should be put on the negotiating table in Washington as soon as possible, as an integrated deal and not in dribs and drabs.*¹⁸⁰ With this sentence, Abu Ala wanted to say that the time had come to confer real full legitimacy to this channel, as he deeply believed that the Oslo path could concretely represent a turning point for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He said to Hirschfeld, for the very first time in such official words, that his leadership had actually made the decision to blockade the Palestinian

¹⁷⁸ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

¹⁷⁹ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

¹⁸⁰ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

delegation in Washington, from placing any sort of substantial issue on the negotiating table. An improvement for the Washington channel could come only after an official accord in the Oslo talks: there and not in the American capital they wanted to concretize a comprehensive agreement, that is to say a Declaration of Principles.

*I also told Hirschfeld that it was important for the Israelis not to imagine that we could talk solely about Gaza, leaving the West Bank out of the equation.*¹⁸¹

Abu Ala had studied the possible response of the people about that issue, and what seemed clear was that even the West Bank had to be set free from the Israeli occupation. *I said to Hirschfeld, "You know the value and the magic of the word withdrawal among our people."*¹⁸²

So the Palestinian idea was to reach a finalized agreement in Oslo, and bring it to the stage where it could be placed on the negotiating table in Washington. But, for that, it was necessary to have the presence of an official Israeli representative, which should have joined the talks as soon as possible.

We can talk about a turning point of the talks, as from this moment on Hirschfeld started to be back-pedaling, stating that the talks started as an open-ended exercise without a specific idea of what was going to be accomplished. *He said that when he first met with me in London, Dan Kurtzer, the American Assistant Secretary of State, had told him that back channels were desirable, but that this channel was far from exclusive.*¹⁸³ So basically the two professors were saying that the talks did move too fast, maybe too much than what was expected, even though they honestly appreciated the Palestinian openness. In short Hirschfeld wanted to keep the negotiation on a level of mere academic discussion, he seemed scared by the importance of the issues they would eventually have fixed in a written document.

However, he said that both Rabin and the United States took the view that, while Norway was important, the negotiations in Washington must be given

¹⁸¹ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

¹⁸² Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

¹⁸³ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

*more time in the hope of bringing the two positions there together.*¹⁸⁴ So the Israelis, supported in this decision by the Americans, realized the huge important and the real chance represented by the Oslo channel, but they did not want to keep it as the only channel for the negotiations. The channel of Washington seemed to remain on top of the possibilities to achieve a peace document between Palestinians and Israelis.

*Hirschfeld also raised the possibility that the Norway channel could serve as a forum for discussion of how final status should be understood.*¹⁸⁵ The two professors were assuming an unseen position until that moment, Hirschfeld said the role of the Norway channel could be to discuss and examine a variety of diverse approaches to general issues. *Israel was insisting, however, that anything further relating to a Draft Declaration of Principles should be done through the Washington talks.*¹⁸⁶

The Palestinian team responded with a deep dejection, in fact the two professors seemed to move away from the commitment of the Sarpsborg Document, recently produced. That looked like a policy decision, some kind of stratagem or a maneuver: the aim was to reduce their involvement to the negotiation. Hirschfeld said that he was not looking at the document achieved as an official agreement, but more like a sign of Palestinian good will; he proposed the introduction of some sort of "confidence-building" measures, in order to raise the level of positive atmosphere, sensibly worsened after the last changes. The two professors preferred now to focus on economic issues, rather than the more concrete discussions, as for example the Gaza withdrawal which they propose could be done in two years: that was not enough. The balances of the negotiation seemed deeply changed, with the Palestinians asking for more, and the Israelis trying to avoid any official statement or promise.

What was really happening was that Israel now expected some changes from the Palestinian side:

¹⁸⁴ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

¹⁸⁵ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

¹⁸⁶ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

- a) The return of their delegation to the Washington talks, ready to achieve some serious steps.
- b) The Palestinians had to take care of those occupied Palestinian territories, as a way to take care of the suppression of violence.

*On the economic front, Hirschfeld suddenly came up with a very precise proposal. Israel and the PLO should jointly approach the World Bank, where funds of \$500 million would be available.*¹⁸⁷ That proposal would have meant the availability of a financing project both for Palestinian and Israeli institutions, but would have also boosted the real presence of the PLO governmental apparatus.

Abu Ala and his delegation did not respond positively to these points, as they believed that the time for the discussions of those economic issues would have been only after the signing of the Declaration of Principles by both the delegations. But Hirschfeld did not contemplate for a second that such a crucial document would have been approved in Oslo: the Washington channel was the only conceived as possible for official steps.

When Abu Ala asked Hirschfeld, which was the time framework that he envisaged for the agreement of the Declaration in Washington, he responded at least six weeks. But the Palestinian delegation immediately responded that such a period was clearly too much, as the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories was turning into explosive.

*Another point the Israeli side he believed was necessary was a media campaign in favour of peace.*¹⁸⁸ In short they wanted to take advantage of the role of the medias, as a key actor in their peace process, mainly to give a better image of Yasser Arafat.

So it was a matter of fact that the Israelis were refusing to initial the Draft Declaration of Principles, as that would have meant a raise of the negotiation level: it seemed that the two professors did not want to upload the negotiation. *Hirschfeld's strategy, and therefore the strategy of Israel, was now apparently to undermine the position of the PLO, and even to undermine the authority of*

¹⁸⁷ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

¹⁸⁸ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

*the Norway channel in which we were engaged.*¹⁸⁹ The Israelis did not want to keep the Oslo channel as the only channel for negotiation, neither they wanted it to be really official: so basically after the creation of the Sarpsborg Document the Israelis were showing reluctance to sign it. They tried to justify their new approach exposing two main reasons:

- a) An agreement on Jerusalem had still not been achieved.
- b) Their concern of a document leakage.

So their proposal was to create a Draft that did not include the Jerusalem issue and the Gaza withdrawal, but the Palestinians, which were embracing a “all or nothing” approach, rejected that idea. But no agreement meant any input into the negotiation, which would have basically caused a halt to the peace process: *‘But in spite of our misgivings, we decided to give this round of talks another chance.’*¹⁹⁰

During the second day of that round of talks, on 1 May 1993, and after consultation with its leadership, Hirschfeld and Pundak got back with a more conciliatory approach. *He began by praising our past efforts, hoping no doubt to flatter us. He emphasized that he and his colleague Ron Pundak were anxious to retain the Draft Declaration of Principles.*¹⁹¹ The two professors explained later that they had to respect a real obligation to achieve a draft of the document, which was needed for their return to Israel and to receive the final approval.

At that point, Hirschfeld said that there were two possible options, two ways in front of them:

- 1) The Oslo Draft Declaration of Principles could become the basis of an agreement, in case the negotiators in Washington would have failed their talks, even though he did not really want to put at risk the Washington talks.
- 2) The possibility that the Americans would have introduced the Oslo Draft in Washington, but under the title of their own proposal to reach a final agreement.

¹⁸⁹ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

¹⁹⁰ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

¹⁹¹ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

So again that demonstrated Rabin's will to achieve an agreement in the Washington talks, underestimating the role of Oslo channel as a mere back channel, whose role was to find a solution for the problems that might arise at the official negotiations. On the other hand, the Palestinians needed something to justify the Oslo talks, and wanted Gaza to be part of the general agreement rather than be isolated from the other issues.

*Hirschfeld was at this stage apparently very anxious to talk about immediate developments, which might take place in the coming three weeks, rather than about issues of principles.*¹⁹² The Israeli exposed their idea of movement on three sides of negotiations:

- a) Focus on the agreement which was reached, work harder on it.
- b) Overcome the deadlock in Washington, thanks to a better involvement of both sides.
- c) Give a real boost to the multilateral negotiations in progress.

He really wanted to achieve a document on the Oslo channel, mainly because that could serve as the proof for its leadership that the channel was really working and that was useful as a problem solving for their cause, but before it could be approved a deep study was needed. *Again, it was Jerusalem and arbitration to which he pointed as the difficulties.*¹⁹³

The Palestinians, from their side, tried to focus more on concrete aspects of the negotiation, in order to reach real changes choosing a more comprehensive approach, that could guarantee the finalization of the agreement, the definitive sign of that document. But at the end of that round the position of the two teams seemed to be divergent, and the cooperative spirit of the beginning was not working anymore.

*Now we were suffering the dead hand of the Israeli leadership, and especially that of Yitzhak Rabin, with his well-known caution and emphasis on security.*¹⁹⁴

After the creation of Sarpsborg's document, the general atmosphere of the talks was pretty much changed, thing that went together with the decision of change location: from a castle fully immersed in the Norwegian winter to a

¹⁹² Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

¹⁹³ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

¹⁹⁴ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

businessmen hotel, from optimism to depression. *Hesitation and lack of willingness were now the real issues of that negotiation, the remaining obstacles were few but now they seemed harder than ever to solve.*¹⁹⁵ From the Palestinian part frustration and regret were high, even more after that Larsen was informed of the news: the lack of an official person in the Israeli delegation did really represent the main impasse for the talks prosecution.

The fifth round of talks

8 – 9 May, 1993

Although after the fourth round of talks the level of cooperation seemed at its worst moment ever, Abu Ala agreed to Hirschfeld's proposition to go through one more meeting. On that occasion, the meeting took place in the Norwegian capital itself, Oslo city, in a government guesthouse close to the Royal Palace. From this moment on, the Norwegian Foreign Minister Johan Joergen Holst, decided to participate more closely to the dealing, demonstrating a personal interest at the highest level.

The Palestinian delegation brought with them from home, the most recent version of the Sarpsborg Document, which contained several Israeli ideas and other points, which were actually the results of the precedent talks. It states what follows:

DRAFT DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES

(Text at the close of Round 5, Version 4)

Draft for DOP (Declaration Of Principles)

- 1. The aim of Israeli-Palestinian negotiation is to obtain agreement regarding arrangements for establishing a Palestinian Interim Self Government Council, for a period leading to a permanence settlement based on Resolution 242 and 338. (It is understood that the interim*

¹⁹⁵ David Makovsky, *Making peace with the PLO*.

arrangements are an integral part of the whole process leading to the implementation of 242 and 338), (Palestinian version).

2. *In order that the Palestinian people in the West Bank and Gaza may govern themselves according to democratic principles, direct, free and general political elections, (under international supervision) *(in which all Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza, as registered in the population register on the fourth of June 1967, would participate) * would be held three to six months after the signing of this DOP.*
3. *The elections for the establishment of the Palestinian Interim Council will constitute a significant interim preparatory step towards the realization of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people and their just requirements.*
4. ** (The jurisdiction of the Palestinian Interim Council will cover the Palestinian territories occupied in 1967. Any administrative exception hereto should be discussed during negotiations, stipulated these exceptions should not prejudice UN Resolutions 242 and 338 and the principles of international law.) * (The Israeli side has not accepted this paragraph).*
4. ** (The jurisdiction of the Palestinian Interim Council will cover control over land, as mutually agreed upon). **
5. *Immediately after the signing of this DOP a transfer of authority from the Israeli military government and the Israeli Civil Administration to the Palestinians and such committees that will be appointed by the Palestinian representatives, will start. The transfer of authority to the Palestinian committees will be of temporary and preparatory nature and will include Palestinian control over taxation, tourism, education, health and social welfare, as well as other agreed upon spheres.*
6. *In order to guarantee optimal economic development and growth, immediately with the signing of this DOP, a Palestinian Land Committee and Palestinian Water Administration Committee will be established. The Palestinian Land Committee and the Palestinian Water Administration Committee will be given immediate powers as mutually agreed upon. A coordinated land and water resources development*

plan will be negotiated between the Palestinian Land Committee and the Palestinian Water Administration Committee on the one hand, and the Government of Israel on the other.

- 7. In order to guarantee optimal security arrangements for the Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the Palestinian Interim Council will establish a strong police force, responsible for internal security and public order. Preparatory steps, necessary for the establishment of the Palestinian police force, will be taken immediately (after the signing of this DOP), in liaison with the Palestinians, Israel, Egypt and Jordan.*
- 8. In order to enable the Interim Self Government Authority, the Palestinian Interim Council, to promote economic growth, several institutions will be established at the time of its inauguration, such as: a Palestinian Land Authority; a Palestinian Water Administration Authority, a Palestinian Electricity Authority, a Gaza Port Authority, a Palestinian Development Bank, a Palestinian Export Promotion Board and an Environmental Authority. The Palestinian committees will negotiate with the Government of Israel the necessary relevant agreements for these institutions.*
- 9. The Palestinian Interim Council will be empowered to legislate for all the authority that are mutually agreed upon. Both parties will reassess jointly all laws and military orders presently in force.*
- 10. An Israeli-Palestinian Liaison Committee will be established and will deal with all issues of dispute and common interest.*
- 11. Agreements on cooperation and liaison will be negotiated and implemented on the professional levels in order to provide for security and mutual understanding between both parties.*
- 12. Further liaison and cooperation arrangements will be negotiated and agreed upon between the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Interim Self-Government Authority on one hand and the Governments of Jordan and Egypt on the other hand. Immediately after the signing the DOP the transitional period of five years will begin. As soon as possible, but not later than the beginning of the third year, negotiations will take*

place to determine the final status of the West Bank, Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip and its relationship with its neighbors.

- 13. After the signing of the DOP, Israeli-Palestinian negotiations on the redeployment of Israeli military forces in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip will start. A first redeployment of forces will be carried out on the eve of elections for the Palestinian Interim Council. Further redeployments will be gradually implemented in line with the introduction of other * (agreed upon) * security measures. At the end of the second year of the interim period, Israeli military forces will withdraw completely from Gaza, in the spirit of partial implementation of 242 and 338. The Israeli withdrawal will be fully coordinated with the Palestinian Interim Council. (After the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza a trusteeship will be established, as agreed upon between the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Interim Self Government Authority.) (Palestinian Version.)*
- 14. The Israeli and the Palestinian delegations will negotiate an Interim Agreement that will specify the mechanisms and substance of the envisaged transfer of authority. (During the transitional period, representatives of Israel and the Palestinian Interim Council may decide by agreement to seek arbitration. The conditions for arbitration will then have to be fully and mutual agreed upon.) (Israeli proposed version.) (An arbitration committee will be created to whom all issues of disputes will be submitted, in case an Israeli-Palestinian agreement will have been achieved, otherwise. The committee will include representatives of the co-sponsors of the Madrid Conference, of Egypt, Jordan and the UN Secretariat, and furthermore a representative from Israel and from the Palestinian Interim Council.) (Palestinian proposed version.)*

ANNEX 1

Draft for an Israeli-Palestinian Cooperation and Working Programme (CWP)

The Israeli-Palestinian DOP will be accompanied by an agreed upon Israeli-Palestinian CWP. Preparation hereof shall start immediately.

1. Preparation of Israeli-Palestinian CWP:

- a) Meeting with engineers and experts, to prepare a joint water development plan and studies and plans on water rights of each party equitable utilization of joint water resources to be prepared for implementation in the final status.*
- b) Meeting of electricity and energy experts to prepare a CWP regarding the exploitation of energy resources, to include the construction of oil and gas pipelines and the establishment of a petrochemical complex in the Gaza Strip.*
- c) Meeting of financial experts to prepare a blueprint for establishing a Palestinian Development bank.*
- d) Meeting of transport and trade experts to prepare a CWP for establishing a greater Gaza Sea Port Area; prepare communication lines to and from Gaza and work out proposal for organizing a free-trade zone in the Gaza-Ashdod area.*
- e) Meeting of industrialists to prepare a CWP for establishing a joint Israeli-Palestinian car industry in Gaza Strip and may propose other ideas for joint venture enterprises.*
- f) Meeting of members of the Israeli and Palestinian trade union movements, to prepare a CWP for improving labor relations and enhancing the provision of social benefits.*
- g) Meeting of experts on human resources development issues, to prepare a CWP, providing for joint Israeli-Palestinian workshops and seminars; the establishment of joint vocational training centers, research institutes and data banks.*
- h) Meeting of security experts, to prepare studies on regional security issues in all its strategic, comprehensive and future aspects.*

2. Preparation of Israeli-Palestinian-Jordanian-Egyptian CWP.

- a) Meeting of electricity experts, to prepare a CWP for international Egyptian, Palestinian, Israeli and Jordanian electricity grids.*

- b) Meeting of financial experts, to prepare a CWP for establishing a Middle East Bank for Reconstruction and Development and/or a Middle Eastern Development Fund.*
- c) Meeting of transport experts, to prepare a CWP for improving land, air and sea communications in the area.*

ANNEX 2

The Israeli-Palestinian DOP and CWP (Cooperation and Working Programme) will be accompanied by a "Marshall Plan" Initiative of the G7 and other OECD members states. The G7 and other OECD member states participating in the multilateral negotiations will commit themselves to prepare a Marshall Plan Initiative for the West Bank, Gaza Strip and the Region, which will be implemented after the election and inauguration of the Interim Self-Government Authority, the Palestinian Interim Council. Substantial additional aid will be raised, by the Palestinians from Arab states, as well as from existing all-Arab institutions.

The Marshall Plan Initiative will be composed of two parts: First, a REDP (Regional Economic Development Programme).

- 1. The PEDP (Palestinian Economic Development Programme) will be composed of three parts:
 - a) a Social Rehabilitation Programme;*
 - b) a small and medium Business Development Plan;*
*an infrastructure Development Programme (water, electricity, transportation and communication, human resources, financial institutions, etc.)**
- 2. The REDP (Regional Economic Development Programme):
 - a) Construction of a Mediterranean Sea-Dead Sea Canal, and development of a joint Israeli-Palestinian-Jordanian Plan for the coordinated exploitation of the Dead Sea area.*
 - b) Regional Desalination and Power Generating Plant, as well as the interconnection of electricity grids, and the development of regional**

cooperation for the transfer, distribution and industrial exploitation of gas, oil and other energy resources.

c) Regional Tourism and Transport Development Plan.

*d) Regional Cooperation in other spheres as mutually agreed upon.*¹⁹⁶

The presence of this important document went together with the explicit Palestinian will of an official commitment, by the Israeli delegation, to that version of the Draft Declaration of Principles, as unique condition for the continuation of their participation to the talks. On the other hand, the Israeli team had finally understood the importance of a formal commitment to the document created, they spoke with Yossi Beilin in order to explain him the need to respond to the strong pressure of the Palestinians. He was also informed of their request for an official Israeli presence, on the Norwegian channel, the only act that could give a real official status to the talks: so commitment to the Document, and a joined official Israeli members, were *sine qua non* conditions for the future of Oslo.

Inevitable consequence of the lowest level reached by the negotiations, was on the Norwegian side: *'for the Norwegians these negotiations were an unrepeatability opportunity to go down in history as the facilitators of a Middle East peace agreement.'*¹⁹⁷ Abu Ala spoke with both Larsen and Holst, who were clearly upset for the recent developments of that channel, to which they demonstrated a strong commitment. Moreover, during that conversation, Larsen even admitted that he was not totally sure of the official presence of Rabin. *I would like to see tangible proof relating to the status of the persons involved in this channel, and you are the only person who can get that proof. You have to convince them.*¹⁹⁸ With these words, Abu Ala received the promise of Larsen to reach out and make what contacts he could.

But on the Israeli side it seemed that something was moving in order to raise the level of the negotiation; Yossi Beilin asked Larsen, via telephone, that the Palestinians could prove the effective presence of Yasser Arafat, that there

¹⁹⁶ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

¹⁹⁷ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

¹⁹⁸ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

actually was authority behind the role of Abu Ala, that he really had the role of decision maker. So Abu Ala decided to satisfy the Israeli request, by giving a concrete sign of his position of authority in the PLO, using the upcoming session of the multilateral refugee committee. *'He issued the needed instructions to the Palestinian delegation at the refugee talks, and the amendments were duly included.'*¹⁹⁹

That act basically meant that Ala had passed the Israeli test, and now Beilin said that the path was open for official seniors on both sides. The Israeli leadership demonstrated to be really impressed by what Ala did, and finally such a quite easy tactical maneuver did actually open the door for the next stage of the Norwegian talks: Israel would have sent one of its own officials to the Oslo negotiation.

*This exciting development immediately restored our confidence in the possibility of future success, it also led the Palestinian leadership in Tunis to give our Norway channel more of their attention.*²⁰⁰ So finally the Palestinians had something in return, from the Israeli leadership, for their persistent request of an official presence of the counterpart. So basically this act meant that the talks were going to move on a new level of negotiation: the next round of talks was going to take place between two official delegations as a matter of fact, two delegations representing two different governments.

The sixth round of talks

20 May, 1993

The location for that meeting was changed, in fact the Holmenkollen Park hotel was abandoned and Larsen chose the Holmenkollen ski jump. It was close to the precedent venue, and more precisely at the Thomas Heftye House, an elegant mansion used as official guesthouse by the local government.

*We got there first, this time, for once, before the Israeli delegation, and soon Terje Larsen walked in together with the Israelis, headed now by Uri Savir.*²⁰¹

¹⁹⁹ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

²⁰⁰ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

²⁰¹ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

The atmosphere became much more informal after this crucial change, and both the delegations, especially Larsen, tried to treat Savir's arrival with the maximum extent of professionalism, and formality of course. But, in a sense, the two teams had to break once more the ice, as they did the first time in London, moreover the general sensation was pretty odd as it was felt a sort of opposition to the newcomer. Uri Savir, went on with the speech he had previously planned: *'The goal of this newly elected Israeli government is to achieve a historic settlement with the Palestinian people. Our interest lies in peace and security, and in the achievement, together with the Palestinians, of the peace of the region. Israel found itself the occupying power in 1967 and our moral and political goal is to liberate ourselves from that situation, thus guaranteeing freedom for the Palestinians and security for Israel.'*²⁰²

What in Savir's opinion had to be changed, about the issues of the Draft of DOP, were mainly two points: a) Jerusalem, it represents the very heart of the Israeli national spirit and for this reason considered not negotiable; b) outside arbitration, it was necessary to figure out if the two delegations were going to work together as partners and through dialogue, or if it was necessary to call in cause a mediator, and Israel was favourable for the first option. So actually if these two conditions were accepted from the Palestinian delegation, then official negotiations would have been started by Rabin and Peres in person. *He then spoke about the need to move forward in stages and to test the results of our negotiations in Gaza.*²⁰³ Savir also focused his attention on very important issues like the keeping of security, the problem of violence and also the economic side, meaning economic cooperation. *'So you should certainly air the idea of "Gaza first",'* Peres told me, *"but don't commit us to the addition of Jericho, and don't start negotiating the draft of a declaration."*²⁰⁴

After Savir's first speech, as an official member of the Oslo channel, Ala was ready to answer him, stressing what was his position with regard to the Israeli position:

²⁰² Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

²⁰³ Uri Savir, *The Process*.

²⁰⁴ Uri Savir, *The Process*.

*"My colleagues and I, as well as our leadership in Tunis, are gratified that these contacts have now at last reached an official level between Israel and the PLO. Together with our two friends Hirschfeld and Pundak, we have already accomplished important things. I would be very pleased if you would convey to your leadership that our intentions and those of Chairman Yasser Arafat are serious. You must accept that there is no chance for achieving peace between Israel and the Palestinians other than through the PLO and its legitimate leadership. No other party has the authority, legitimacy or capability to speak for the Palestinians. We are willing to coexist and cooperate with you and to develop a Marshall-style economic plan for the Middle East. We can thus open the way for your integration into the region as a nation, and you can in turn open the road to freedom for us a people. The situation in the occupied Palestinian territories is desperate, both on the political and economic levels. Time is passing quickly and it can never be recovered."*²⁰⁵

In terms of security, Abu Ala stated that he had heard some Israeli describing the PLO as a very dangerous presence to their existence, but he does not understand how the Palestinians could represent such a danger for the Israelis. What Ala says is true without any doubt: on the Israeli side a big regional power, even provided with nuclear devices, with one of the best army in the world supplied by one of the best intelligence services globally, facing the Palestinians, carrying just a few Kalashnikov and hand grenades, but mainly using stones as their own weapons. Savir's answer is just absurd: *"you constitute a danger because you want to live in my house."*²⁰⁶ When Palestinians and Israelis started this negotiation, it was clear to both of them that it was necessary to "leave the past and agree about the future". That is such an important formula that actually Mr. Savir needed to deeply understand: the path to walk takes to compromise rather than to rehearse antagonism.

Savir's approach to these talks seemed pretty intransigent at the start, thus creating a confrontational atmosphere trying to impose his will and his position, but that position could not obviously help the proceedings of the dealing. 'I

²⁰⁵ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

²⁰⁶ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

*was at one point so exasperated that I had to ask Savir whether his purpose in coming had been simply to complicate the situation and to put further obstacles in the way of an agreement.*²⁰⁷

What seemed to be clear to both the delegations was that the Palestinian refusal to recognize Israel's existence, did not bring them the freedom they needed. So a valid possibility was to end the occupation in order to obtain Israel's security, and this had to be done in stages, gradually. The newcomer understood from the start the need to build a strong feeling of mutual confidence, going through the growing of peace and prosperity.

An important moment came when Savir and Ala took a walk together in the forest, a good occasion to get to some sort of an informal talk between them: in order to improve the future outcomes of the dealing, it was necessary they develop some chemistry. Abu Ala was there informed about the Israeli's past, he now knew that his father was a diplomat during the 1970s, who called for a dialogue between PLO and Israel. So in a sense that was the *"realization of the dream he had long cherished"*.²⁰⁸ In response to Savir's confessions, Ala spoke about himself, about his long journeys through the main cities of the Middle East and about his past as a Palestinian revolutionist. *"The Jewish tendency to see anti-Semitism everywhere was a disease, my father believed."*²⁰⁹

But what allowed Ala to change concretely his mind about the Israeli colleague was when he admitted to feel ashamed of representing a country which was occupying the land of others: he did not want that this could happen, rather he expressed his will that his country would bring to an end the atrocities of occupation, in order to live in peace with its neighbors.

That meeting was concluded with a brief conclusion, that belonged to general statements: *"if there was no change in the Palestinian attitude to security, the Israeli government would not be able to introduce the desired changes on the ground"*.²¹⁰

²⁰⁷ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

²⁰⁸ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

²⁰⁹ Uri Savir, *The Process*.

²¹⁰ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

Report to the leadership

After the end of this important round on 22 May 1993, we returned to Tunis as quickly as we could, taking with us a copy of the Declaration of Principles as developed and amended on this occasion. Meanwhile, Savir took a copy back to Tel Aviv, this time to show it officially to the Israeli government. On our arrival at the PLO headquarters, we met first with Mahmoud Abbas, then with Yasser Arafat. We had drafted a brief report on the round of talks, to which we attached our comments. These remarks, which greatly helped in the discussions we then held behind closed doors, were as follows:

REPORT AND COMMENTS

- 1. The presence as the head of the Israeli negotiating team of the Director General of the Israeli Foreign Ministry is a final confirmation of the legitimacy of the channel.*
- 2. We are now aware that the Israeli leadership, at the highest level, is aware of the progress and results of the Oslo channel. We also know the Israeli leadership believes the results of this channel would be difficult to reproduce in Washington. However they do not regard it as a substitute for Washington.*
- 3. Uri Savir expressed his approval of the results of this channel and the help it can give the negotiations on both the bilateral and multilateral tracks.*
- 4. He emphasized that the date of 21 May 1993 was a historic occasion. This was the day on which direct negotiations between Israel and the PLO began. Nobody had imagined that official negotiations, direct and without intermediaries, could take place so soon. He described this as a great event in itself.*
- 5. He evaluated positively the breadths of the channel's approach. This had begun to make a qualitative difference to the process, by avoiding concentration on technical matters.*

6. *He laid stress on the importance of the time factor. He said slow progress could be as bad as moving backwards.*
7. *He also reaffirmed Israel's desire to reach a comprehensive peace with the Palestinians.*
8. *He expressed displeasure with the ineffectuality of the American role in the Washington negotiations. He asserted that direct dialogue and agreement between us, conducted with openness and honesty, constitute the only available avenue for the establishment of real peace and future coexistence.*
9. *He passed on the information that the Americans and some Arab leaders had warned Israel against the PLO and advised them not to hold dialogue with it, claiming that we lacked credibility and made promises that we reneged on.*
10. *He told us what when the Labour Party government had done to promote peace in the short period since it has been in office. These achievements include: halting 90 per cent of settlement activities; cancelling hundreds of millions of dollars allocated for investment in the settlements; the release of a number of detainees; the return of some deportees.*
11. *He talked about the fears of both parties, concluding that these fears were the reason why both the parties take defensive positions in the negotiations. Israel, however, which is geographically surrounded by the Arabs, had stronger fears of the future. He detailed Israel's fears, namely (i) The instability of politics in the Middle East: Israel will always face threats from any conflict in the Middle East, even if it is not a party to it. A peace settlement with the Palestinians would not be sufficient to remove those fears. (ii) Israel's permanent feeling of isolation makes it feel beleaguered and obliges it continuously to demand security guarantees. Any negative developments during the transitional period could lead to new tensions. Therefore his government was reluctant to cross all its previous red lines at once. He said that democracy in the Arab region would offer a guarantee to Israel. Lack of democracy is considered a problem for Israel's*

security, since a single ruler alone could capriciously threaten Israeli irrespective of the will of people.

12. Savir believes that we should reach agreement on all our problems without the involvement of the United States other than to the minimum and unavoidable degree.

13. He emphasized the importance of the economic factor for enhancing the prospects for peace and for achieving stability in the region.

14. He noted that the remaining differences to be discussed in the framework of the Declaration of Principles were Jerusalem, Jericho and outside arbitration.

15. He questioned our ability to implement the agreement, asking whether we would be able to deliver what we promised. He underlined that this was one of the main doubts in Yitzhak Rabin's mind. (As a parallel he pointed to the Syrian President Hafez Asad's ability to implement agreements.)²¹¹

The seventh round of talks

13 – 14 June, 1993

The Israeli delegation was reached, on that meeting, by a new negotiator: that person was Yoel Singer, a lawyer who studied in New York city who would have take care of the legal aspects, and who spent his past in the Israeli army as a colonel, until 1988. As he had to confer legal thickness to his team, his arrival can be seen as another confirmation of Rabin's presence on the top floors. His approach to the talks seemed to the Palestinians definitely too aggressive, in fact he started his first speech by saying that *"he wanted answers to a long list of questions, an attitude which prompted Ala to respond by appearing rigid and inflexible."*²¹²

The questions Singer had prepared were actually a psychological test for the Palestinian delegation, aimed at finding out their views on security issues first of all, in order to deeply understand their thoughts. The Palestinian response

²¹¹ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

²¹² Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

to Singer's move was a bit nervous at the beginning, but then they made full use of patience and willingness, resolute to success that examination. Singer's arrival meant that some important changes had to be done for what concerned the DOP, he embodied Rabin's obsession with caution and security, and this is why Singer asked to discuss with the Palestinians those points that needed to be modified. Those points that appeared controversial at the end of this operation, were the followings:

- a) *The Palestinian insistence that the implementation of SCR 242 and 338 would be the final goal of the peace process;*
- b) *The listing of the subjects to be included in the final status negotiations;*
- c) *Issues connected with security issues in relation to the Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and Jericho;*
- d) *The mechanism for the proposed Palestinian elections, especially in Jerusalem;*
- e) *The rights of the Palestinians displaced as a result of the 1967 war.*²¹³

Singer expressed his will to understand who would eventually sign the agreement, once that was reached, if the delegation in Washington or that in Oslo. Moreover, he wanted to focus on the crucial question of mutual recognition between Israel and the PLO: *"Israel was attempting to obtain the most valuable card the Palestinians possessed in return for gains which would never match the value to Israel of formal and public recognition by the PLO."*²¹⁴

The main change due to Singer's arrival was, after all, a perceptible growth of doubts, discussions, causing frustration and irritation: the final success of the Oslo channel seemed further away than ever before, the interlocutors had to double their efforts in order to complete that negotiation. What urged for the Palestinian delegation was, first of all, to go straight back to Tunis and to discuss with its leadership about the developments which took place in the Oslo channel.

²¹³ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

²¹⁴ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

Report to Tunis

What follows is a summary of the impressions and recommendations which we, as the Palestinian delegation, submitted to the leadership in Tunis on 15 June 1993.

SUMMARY OF THE REPORT TO THE PALESTINIAN HIGHER LEADERSHIP

It was obvious to us that the fourth member of the delegation, Yoel Singer, was Yitzhak Rabin's personal representative, and that his questions came directly from the Israeli Prime Minister. Singer was the legal advisor and a member of the Israeli delegation to the first and second disengagement talks with the Syrians. He was also the legal advisor at the Camp David and the Taba talks. He worked for five years with Peres at the Ministry of Defence and had worked very closely with Rabin for a longer period. He left the government four years ago and now lives in the United States. He is shortly to be appointed as legal advisor to the Foreign Ministry. He is regarded as very close to Rabin, who values his advice. According to unconfirmed reports he has been selected to join the negotiating team in Washington, and might replace its present head Elyakim Rubenstein. His participation in the delegation, in addition to that of Uri Savir, was considered as full involvement of the decision maker in this channel.

Rabin's evaluation of the agreement we have so far reached appears to be that it is well structured and is a useful achievement, but that the text does not cover all the requirements of the transitional period. He feels it is not clear how it will be implemented. He considers that it requires either amendment or the addition of explanatory memoranda, as do other agreements ensuing from the Declaration of Principles. We also gather that Rabin accepts that the PLO and the Israeli government will sign the agreement. Throughout our negotiations, discussions have focused on

the separate understanding of each article, how should be understood and how it would be implemented. The Israeli side put a number of questions and queries. We needed to exercise much patience and control to give suitable answers to these questions. Our responses convinced them that our intention is to pursue the gradual implementation of the agreement. The Israelis had apparently not yet been convinced of this.

The goal of the Israelis is to achieve a more comprehensive framework for reconciliation, in agreement with the PLO. The issues we have so far dealt with reflect only their concerns. We could expand this framework also to include our own demands. This would create a balance. For example, we should raise the need for mutual recognition between the two peoples and between the two entities (the PLO and the Israeli State). We should also raise all the future issues, such as Jerusalem, settlements, refugees, statehood, security, and so on. Israeli fear of the PLO still exists, although it has been considerably reduced by the resolution of the Palestinian National Council (PNC) and certain statements made by Abu Ammar. Nevertheless, the questions of recognition, the wording of the National Charter, and the Palestinian links with certain Arab states give rise to fears in Israel. This is the reason why they wish to sign an agreement with the PLO.

It is clear that the Israelis need to make progress in Washington. The lack of progress embarrasses the Israeli government and leads it to face criticism from public opinion and even within the Labour Party. We must, however, be very cautious in offering concessions without calculating carefully the consequences. The Israeli proposal that we should make a joint statement may be a trap, we may be able to offer some signals that we wish to see visible progress in Washington. All the Israelis we have talked to, however, have assured us that they wish to pursue only the Norway channel. Their view is that all other initiatives outside the main negotiations involve persons on one side or the other who are seeking some advantage for themselves. They assured us that in this respect

their situation is similar to ours. They say they are well aware that we also receive approaches from unauthorized quarters.

What is important is that what is now taking place in Norway now consists not of transient encounters, but of a formal and recorded discussion between official delegations representing the PLO and the Israeli government. The Israeli side considers this a historical event. The Norway channel has emerged as the principal channel for negotiations, able to support and even direct the official channel in Washington. However, the Israelis expressed some fear that the Norway channel might come to overshadow the Washington channel and render it meaningless. This in turn could cause negative reactions from the sponsors and the members of the Arab delegations. The Israelis, therefore, believe that the Norway channel should be given enough time to draft and present its conclusions systematically and meticulously, but with the aim of giving momentum to the public channel.

It is clear that all the minutes of the previous meetings, all the texts of draft agreements, and all reports which have been made studied by the current Israeli delegation in great detail during the period between the last two round of talks. The Israelis have clearly held preparatory sessions about what might come up in the talks. They have given careful attention to the text and to difficulties that might arise during implementation. They have attempted to foresee such obstacles as may arise, in the light of their objectives. I also believe that specialists from all administrative fields have participated in their preparatory meetings and dialogues. I also believe that Rabin, Peres, Beilin and other participants have closely examined the conclusions of all such exercises.

I have come to these conclusions for a number of reasons. Principally, however, my information comes from the Norwegians, who have passed on to me the information that the Israelis have been holding continual meetings. There has been a concentrated and detailed focus on the implementation of the Declaration of Principles. This, together with the questions about the general understanding of the agreement, seems in my view not to have come from any single person. The detailed

*questions they presented to us apparently arose out of dialogues and discussions in which specialists from all fields apparently participated, in addition to the political leaders and possibly even some members of the Israeli delegation in Washington. All their questions were in written form, in a document to which they constantly referred during our discussions. The questions and inquiries, which were addressed to us, targeted a large number of issues. These included: the basic principles and terms of reference; the scope of our jurisdiction; issues relating to the economy and to taxes and customs duties; economic cooperation; internal and external and external security; the civil administration and its structure. In addition, there were questions related to the modalities of the gradual implementation of the agreement. These included the following: the signature of the Declaration of Principles; the transfer of responsibility in certain fields; the withdrawal from Gaza/Jericho and how it will take place; the redeployment of Israeli forces outside cities and populated areas; elections; the Palestinian government and council, and their structure; the transfer of remaining responsibilities; negotiations on the final status.*²¹⁵

The eighth round of talks

27 June, 1993

Rabin's decision to send Singer as joint member of the Israeli delegation, was due to Rabin's will to sign the Declaration of Principles. But actually what did not work was the approach chosen by Rabin's lawyer, who came too rough and aggressive, after that Israelis and Palestinians found a sort of feeling between each other. It is remarkable the change of venue, in fact this eighth round of talks took place in FAFO's Centre, which was located in Oslo city. Singer arrived there with a deeply renewed approach and behavior, he wanted to convince the Palestinians of Israeli good will using courtesy and kindness. "*Singer immediately opened a new chapter when he informed us that he had*

²¹⁵ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

brought with him new proposals that might be attached to the text of a final Declaration of Principles, and that he was personally authorized by Yitzhak Rabin."²¹⁶ So it is clear that his position was pretty much changed, he really wanted to correct any misunderstandings between the two delegations. In a sense he was there to calm everybody's nerves, to make possible the continuation of the Oslo channel, this is why the real aim of that round of talks was to raise the confidence in the dealing.

The Oslo channel seemed to be the only one which really obtained the authorization from the Israeli leadership: *'While the Washington talks stagnated, our channel had by now taken on an enhanced importance.*"²¹⁷

The two teams discussed the crucial issue of mutual recognition between PLO and Israel, considered as one of the most important from the Israeli leadership. So the idea was to reach an agreement in Oslo, in order to submit it to the teams in Washington. *The PLO leadership would instruct the delegation in Washington to discuss what would be described as a new proposal from the United States, which they would sign.*²¹⁸

The Israeli delegation then produced a document which contained the basis for further negotiation, which was delivered to the Palestinian team; here below the main points:

- 1) *The PLO recognize Israel's right to exist, and commits itself to coexist peacefully with it.*
- 2) *The PLO accepts UN Resolutions 242 and 338.*
- 3) *The PLO condemns terrorism and all attacks on Israelis.*
- 4) *The PLO declares its renunciation of all forms of terrorism.*
- 5) *The PLO will not support any faction, which practices terrorism, and will not give its encouragement to terrorist acts.*
- 6) *The PLO declares all articles of its Charter, which conflict with the peace process are null and void.*

²¹⁶ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

²¹⁷ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

²¹⁸ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

- 7) *The PLO commits itself to goals of the peace process, as laid down at the Madrid Conference.*
- 8) *After the Palestinian Transitional Authority has taken power, the PLO will call for the end of the Intifada.*
- 9) *The PLO will ask Egypt and other countries to terminate the Arab boycott against Israel.*²¹⁹

After Singer understood his first approach with the negotiation was wrong, the atmosphere in Oslo seemed to improve, and the two teams started again a smart confrontation and discussion between each other.

The ninth round of talks

3 - 4 July, 1993

The arrival of Singer, in terms of a legal presence in the Israeli team, gave the Palestinian the right to include Mohammed Abu Koush, as Singer's counterpart for their delegation, *'an accountant and lawyer resident in Germany and a member of the PLO delegation in Geneva.'*²²⁰ The venue for the talks was changed once again, and so the two delegations were going to meet in a farmhouse at Gressheim, close to Oslo, the house belonged to an aristocratic lady.

The interlocutors in Oslo started to realize that the time was actually slipping away, they did not want to lose that occasion but the actors had to commit in order to get as soon as possible to concrete outcomes. *"Domestically, Rabin had begun to come under pressure from elements on the left wing of his party who were calling for a settlement to be reached in Washington."*²²¹ Moreover the Israeli media were strongly determined to discover what was really going on between Israelis and Palestinians, even if they still did not know where and what exactly.

²¹⁹ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

²²⁰ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

²²¹ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

The Israeli delegation came to that meeting with a new document, which had lost any connection with the original DOP, that had been unilaterally left out. The Israelis wanted to reach an agreement quickly, but this new document they brought had to be read and examined carefully, before it was accepted by the Palestinians. *“It posited a three-stage process in which autonomy would be instituted first in Gaza and Jericho; then an interim agreement would be concluded on extending autonomy within the rest of the West Bank; and finally negotiations would be held on a permanent settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.”*²²²

So speed became the new *leitmotif* for the Israelis, and they also demonstrated clearly their lack of confidence in some important members who belonged to Clinton administration.

*As soon as Singer took on board that we were not simply going to accept this new document, but needed to talk about many issues in it, the Israelis began to become defensive.*²²³ It was also clear that the issue of Jerusalem was totally untouchable, as it would have caused the instantaneous fall of Rabin’s governments, and that meant the end for the peace talks.

The points that the Palestinian delegation had to put forward in the continuation of these talks, were the following:

1. *Any Declaration of Principles must refer to the implementation of Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, and must refer to the linkage between the temporary transitional stage and the final stage.*
2. *The definition of which issues are to be dealt with at the transitional stage and which at the final stage must be clear.*
3. *The military government and the civil administration in the occupied territories must be dissolved as they are handed over.*
4. *The people of Arab Jerusalem must participate in the elections both as voters and candidates.*
5. *A single Palestinian police force should include recruits from both inside and outside the occupied territories.*

²²² Uri Savir, *The Process*.

²²³ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

6. *The Gaza-Jericho agreement is to be regarded as an inseparable part of the Declaration of Principles and not separate document.*
7. *The Gaza strip and Jericho area will be handed over to the PLO as soon as mutual recognition between Israel and the PLO is declared.*²²⁴

The two delegations started to analyze together those point that were not agreed by both sides, they reviewed each paragraph trying to solve the controversial points, defining the points of disagreement. This ninth round of talks allowed the creation of an important document, which contained few gaps remained between the Israeli and the Palestinian position; it states what follows:

The Memoranda

At the end of these talks, where we had been face to face with the Israelis for many hours, we suddenly decided no further progress could be made. The inquisition with which we had faced them had apparently exhausted them as much as Singer's original onslaught had tired and baffled us when we first met him. He was unable to answer all our queries immediately, and progress was hard to make.

However, it should be said that there were just five points on which disagreement between us was profound and apparently irreconcilable at the level of our negotiations. These issues would require major political decisions of principle.

These were:

1. *The explicit inclusion of a reference to Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 in the document;*
2. *The items to be deferred to the final status negotiations;*
3. *A guarantee that "Gaza First" would not become "Gaza Only";*
4. *The eligibility of candidates in the elections to be held in Jerusalem;*

²²⁴ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

5. *The future of Palestinians displaced in the 1967 war.*

We decided to consult our leadership in Tunis on these points, on how far we should press them, and in what areas we could conceivably give ground. Meanwhile the Israelis went home to talk to Rabin and Peres. I believe the Israelis were disappointed. But we wanted to make it clear that we could not be pushed to accept the unacceptable, or to give up our basic positions. I attach here three memoranda I had passed to the Israelis during our talks, explaining the standpoint of the Palestinians with regard to a number of issues central to our negotiating position.

MEMORANDUM 1

1. *(a) It is to be understood that during the transitional period the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority would extend over all the lands of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, except for the areas whose status would be discussed at the final stage. These comprise Jerusalem, the settlements and the military positions. (b) Regarding the regional highways and the regional electricity lines, these would fall under the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority. Their joint use will be defined in a special agreement.*
2. *The transfer of new responsibilities to the Palestinian Authority before the inauguration of the council will be subject to the rules agreed upon in article 3 of the Declaration of Principles.*
3. *The Israeli authorities will be informed of the names of the Palestinians, who would be in charge of the following fields after transfer of responsibility, in accordance with this agreement: education and culture, health, social affairs, direct taxes and tourism.*
4. *It is understood that the transfer to Palestinian responsibility will not affect existing rights and obligations in these areas.*
5. *These fields will be funded by the existing budget, and from revenue collected by the taxation department.*
6. *The transitional agreement will include arrangements for cooperation and consultation between the Palestinians and Israelis.*

7. *Israel will be in charge of external security and security of the settlements and military positions according to the articles of the Declaration.*
8. *Security responsibility for Israeli visitors who break the law would be defined through special arrangements of the liaison committee.*
9. *Authority and responsibility will be transferred on a gradual basis to the Palestinian police gradually (except for Gaza-Jericho).*
10. *The two parties will exchange the names of the members of the liaison committee. Each party will have an equal number of members and decisions will be made by consensus.*
11. *The committee will be empowered to form one or more technical subcommittees when necessary.*
12. *The committee will decide on the procedure and location of its meetings.*
13. *It is understood that agreement will be reached concerning the Palestinian institutions in Jerusalem, in the interest of its inhabitants and their relationship with the elected council.*

MEMORANDUM 2

There has been a positive atmosphere of this round of talks, where, to my satisfaction, we appear to have agreed a number of texts, which would form part of the Declaration on their final form. We shall each return with these to our leaderships, where, once accepted, they will become a first step on the long road to the construction of comprehensive and lasting peace. We had verbally agreed between us, and I have informed the Palestinian leadership, that the next meeting will take place at the start of July. Any delay would undermine the credibility of the Palestinian delegation.

There have also been persistent leakages, which we do not need, and which have not assisted our serious efforts and intent. We have reason to believe leaks have originated with certain Egyptian figures, and certain Israelis. So far, on our side, only the innermost circle of the PLO leadership has been aware of the existence of the Norway channel, in

spite of all the possibilities of leakage. We believe secrecy is crucial and must be maintained. We have devoted much time and serious effort to this channel. I should, therefore, be grateful to know if it is the intention of Israel also to open other channels, and whether there are those in Israel who do not want this channel to earn its full credibility?

We have in front of us a member of issues and questions relating to the transitional period, and we have even bigger problems relating to the final stage. The most important issues facing us at this stage are the following: mutual comprehensive security, economic issues, and the transfer of responsibility, in an organized and peaceful manner. To achieve this, we propose to bring in security forces from outside, but only for a limited period. The achievement of these goals must, however, be preceded or accompanied by measures that could build and deepen mutual trust. Existing problems include the following: (1) the closure of Jerusalem. This cannot be justified and must not continue. (2) The problem of the detainees and deportees in the period since 1967. Currently, there is also the continuing question of the deportees to Marj al-Zahour, together with other human rights issues. (3) We can no longer exercise control over our delegation in Washington, but there is still no progress there. The negotiations in Washington have reached a real crisis point, because we are not yet in a position to offer them anything from this channel. The present situation cannot continue.

MEMORANDUM 3

(Reconfirming the position and goals of the Palestinians.)

The negotiations between us have entered a very delicate and significant stage. At this critical moment, I would like to set out for your benefit the considerations that have led to our adoption of various positions. We want you to know we are conducting our dealings with you frankly and in all honesty. We believe that this candid and direct approach will lead us to just, lasting and equitable solutions that will serve the interests of both sides. For the first time in the history of our conflict we have an historic opportunity, and we are both responsible for its success.

At the present moment, our position is the following:

- 1. We expect you to withdraw from the Gaza Strip and Jericho District as soon as this agreement is signed. This would be a major step much needed by us in order to persuade Palestinian public opinion and the wider institutions of the PLO of the benefits of this agreement. Minor measures such as a transfer of certain powers here or there would not bring the desired change and would expose the agreement to criticism and even obstruction.*
- 2. Our physical presence in Palestinian areas evacuated by Israel would enable us to face all eventualities, including anything radical forces might do to abort the agreement. It will also give the Palestinians in the occupied territories a feeling of psychological and political security, and will create a new atmosphere that will help implement the agreement smoothly. We believe that our presence in these areas will serve the interests of both parties and will demonstrate that both sides are capable of signing and implementing future agreements.*
- 3. We accept that certain issues are still pending and need to be solved, since they are of supreme importance, such as Jerusalem.*
- 4. We hop that at this stage each side will take into consideration the interests and positions of the other when proposals are drafted. We require genuine compromise that will not adversely affect the interests of either side. We trust this spirit prevail when we discuss controversial future issues such as arbitration, regional issues, the role of the two sponsors in supervising the implementation of the agreements, and the nature of the international presence which will be agreed upon later.*
- 5. I understand Israel's request for guarantees concerning our commitment to the implementation of the agreements, and we are ready to discuss the nature of such guarantees with an open mind. However, the implementation of initial steps will in itself be the best indication of our intentions. We are nevertheless ready to discuss any ideas you may suggest. I am sure we can reach understanding in this*

*respect. We would like to reassure you that we are ready to continue with our efforts through this channel, which has already attained a degree of credibility sufficient to achieve a real peace agreement.*²²⁵

The tenth round of talks

11 - 12 July, 1993

From this moment on, the two delegations seemed very confident about the possibility of improving the agreement, they understood wholly the other side's position in terms of real possibilities and limitations. *"I was a little tense, since I felt we might be approaching a critical point."*²²⁶

The venue was once more changed, as Borregaard was not available, that round of talks was held at the Halvorsbole Hotel, a modern hotel became popular for the summer retreatments, which was totally booked for the two teams. But what became soon clear for the interlocutors, was the idea that even though the gaps remained were few and not too deep, they represented a hard obstacle to cross.

The Israelis presented a document, which contained three further issues that resulted of direct Rabin's instructions:

- a) Guarantee of the security of the settlements;*
- b) Precise definition of the border of the occupied territories from which the Israelis would withdraw;*
- c) Guarantee of the safety of the Israelis moving between settlements within the Palestinian areas.*²²⁷

The Palestinian responded with the introduction of twenty-five amendments, created by Abu Ala, which represented a sort of verbal changes and refinements that did not obtain Israeli agreement, or better, caused Savir's

²²⁵ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

²²⁶ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

²²⁷ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

anger. *‘He accused us of deliberately crossing the red lines of what might be acceptable, and asked us to withdraw the new draft.’*²²⁸

Palestinian aim was to return the Israelis a kind of game they did several times, which corresponds to the presentation of a new document that had not obtained the agreement of the Palestinian side. *‘By July 12 we had an integrated picture of each side’s demands, the basic parameters of the negotiations were also clear.’*²²⁹ Ala did not really want to destabilize the talks, and, in order to make less tense the situation, he decides to read an important letter which had been written by Chairman Yasser Arafat. It contained the definition of the sincere Palestinian commitment to the Oslo channel, and it declares what follows:

The PLO will exert every effort to reach an agreement of comprehensive nature that will reflect the spirit of historical reconciliation between the PLO and the government of Israel. Such an agreement will be the cornerstone on which relations between our two peoples will be built, in accordance with the principles of good neighborly relations, peaceful coexistence, and equality in rights and obligations. The PLO has declared its commitment to the principles and goals of the peace process, as proclaimed in Madrid, and especially objective of these ongoing negotiations. Furthermore, the PLO regards the recognition of the right of all parties including Israel, to live in peace, as a central part of this Resolution. However, Israel must also recognize the other parts of the Resolution, namely the withdrawal from the territories occupied in 1967, and finding a just solution to the refugee problem.

The contractual arrangements between the two parties, in the framework of the final solution, must include this recognition and its practical implementation, and should include effective measures to reaffirm these principles, in the framework of the agreements that will encompass the comprehensive and balanced solution between the two parties. The PLO wishes these agreements to include the end of hostilities between the

²²⁸ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

²²⁹ Uri Savir, *The Process*.

two peoples, the cessation of all hostile acts against individuals, properties and rights, and a halt to all kind of terrorism.

In this context, and as an expression of good intentions and confidence building, the PLO repeats once more its declaration renouncing terrorism, and calls upon the other party to halt all military measures and settlement activities which could perpetuate the cycle of violence.

To reconfirm our position, the PLO will not support any part that commits or incites any terrorist actions, against the terms of the peace process and its requirement. The PLO looks forward to the early implementation of these agreements and to the exercise of its authority by the elected Palestinian council. The PLO believes the peace agreements and the mutual commitments will lead to the establishment of normal and balanced economic relation between the two parties and will have its positive influence on the relations in the area, as will be agreed between Israel and the concerned parties.

It is understood that these measure, and the fundamental changes in the relationship between the two parties, the Palestinians and the Israelis, will supersede all previously existing documents, if they contradict the final peace agreements.²³⁰

Even after the reading of this relevant letter, Israeli approach remained rather hostile and nervous for the Palestinian presentation of their new draft. What basically happened during that meeting was the Israeli attempt to convince their interlocutors to go through a modification on the document they had created, and to return to the text, which was previously accepted that represented mainly an Israeli initiative. *"I felt they should remember that while we were seeking land, they were just as eagerly seeking peace."*²³¹ But after long discussions, it was clear to both teams that they were going nowhere, that a deadlock was finally come and they felt ready to leave Norway in order to meet their leaderships and try to find a common solution.

²³⁰ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

²³¹ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

“In this round our Norwegian hosts had played a bigger role than ever before and that they were changing their role, from mediators into partners.”²³²

Starting from that moment, the Norwegian Foreign Minister, Johan Hoergen Holst, took direct action on negotiations, in fact he flew to Tunis where he met with Arafat, and at the same time Mona Juul and Terje Larsen where in Israel to discuss with Shimon Peres.

The document below is what the Norwegians got from that meeting:

- 1. The Norwegians said they had conveyed to Israel assurances that the PLO is very serious in its efforts to reach an agreement, and had stressed how eager the PLO is to achieve a breakthrough in the Oslo negotiations.*
- 2. The Norwegians told us that Israel would also like to reach an agreement through the Oslo channel, because it seems most likely to succeed.*
- 3. The Norwegians reassured us that what is taking place in Oslo is direct negotiation between Israel and the PLO.*
- 4. Either we can seize the opportunity to reach a direct agreement now, or lose everything.*
- 5. The Israelis are prepared to enter another round of negotiations between 24 and 26 July 1993, in other words after a gap of about two weeks. They are willing and ready to reach an agreement and sign it in the next session.*
- 6. Shimon Peres has assured the Norwegians that he speaks both for himself and for Rabin. They both understand the Palestinian with respect to Jericho, and they are ready to be flexible and reach an agreement on this issue.*
- 7. They are ready to cooperate with the PLO in its intention of recruiting a security force from within and outside the occupied territories. With respect to Jerusalem, however, Israel has many red lines. Norway*

²³² Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

*therefore suggests the problem should be dealt with through what Holst called "constructive ambiguity".*²³³

Almost at the same moment, Holst got back from Tunis, where he could create what can be considered as an official response to the previous Israeli document:

- a) An historical breakthrough, mainly for Gaza and Jericho, was needed.*
- b) If the will exists, if there are obstacles, then we must overcome them, and a solution will be found to any outstanding problems in the final stage.*
- c) We need a corridor between Gaza and the West Bank, and we are receptive to the idea of Benelux style economic cooperation with them and Jordan.*
- d) Only our Palestinian forces will be able to bring security to the Palestinian territories, and we wish them to be the principal force, and to come from both inside and outside the occupied territories.*
- e) As for Jerusalem, we have to find the way to include it in the Declaration of Principles, which we urgently need.*
- f) At a later stage, Rabin will have the opportunity to reach agreements with Jordan, and perhaps with Lebanon and Syria.*²³⁴

Important events of the diplomatic front did finally take place between the two delegations, that was mainly thanks to the fundamental support, provided by the Norwegians staff, which made possible the realization of the eleventh round of talks. *'During this middle stage of the Oslo talks, however, it was our Norwegian hosts who not only served as "environmental architects" but advances the process itself.'*²³⁵

The eleventh round of talks

²³³ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

²³⁴ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

²³⁵ Uri Savir, *The Process*.

24 - 26 July, 1993

*“This eleventh round of the Oslo talks was to be the third stage of what had begun to seem like an epic battle over the text of the Declaration of Principles. Both parties, unwilling to compromise, appeared to be heading for a final showdown, and perhaps for the failure of the talks.”*²³⁶ We can say that basically two main factors contributed to the boost of the diplomatic meetings, during the month of July: a) a major involvement of the Norwegian Foreign Ministry in the negotiation process, his determination to get finally to a successful conclusion of those talks; b) the Israeli determination, at the same time, to reach an agreement before a leakage would have compromise the process.

The diffused sensation of anger was the direct consequence of the previous two rounds: during the ninth round, which took place at Gressheim, the Israeli delegation brought a text which was totally changed compared to the draft previously agreed, but during the tenth, at Halvorsbole, were the Palestinians to introduce the same trick, which was mainly a psychological one.

*“We opened the first session by presenting once more the same Draft Declaration of Principles we submitted in the last round, introducing only slight and insignificant changes.”*²³⁷ During that phase of the negotiations, the Palestinians were trying to overdo, to safeguard their interest at the maximum extent even to the detriment of Israeli interests. *“Oslo had now reached a moment of truth, and if we arrived expecting swifter progress and a readiness for compromise, we were promptly disabused of those notions – for this time the Palestinians reiterated their positions, in full and in an entirely new document.”*²³⁸ In the end the Israeli delegation did not seem ready to accept the Palestinian document at all, and Savir started to accuse Ala of being the cause for that impasse. So what seemed to be necessary to do at that moment, was to find a common ground, a compromise between the Israeli document of 6 July, and the Palestinian one of 12 July.

²³⁶ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

²³⁷ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

²³⁸ Uri Savir, *The Process*.

A real “war of the documents” started, but the two delegations kept an overwhelming desire of take advantage of the Oslo channel, to finally find the agreement that would have changed the Middle Eastern balances. The Israelis and the Palestinians felt the weight of their responsibilities, they knew well that they stand as symbol of their own population.

Although they realized the uniqueness of that occasion, an unprecedented crisis seemed certain now, “*the session ended in a shouting match, with angry accusations, and barbed comments.*”²³⁹ The Palestinians kept on stating that the Israelis were not willing to grant them full civil rights, neither recognition of national rights or a halt to the settlements; vice versa the Israelis said that they did not want to abandon their security, and that the negotiation could be considered dead now. The leaders of the two teams exchanged some sentences of respect and high esteem between each other, and, in a general atmosphere of sadness and general unbelief, the two delegations prepared to leave Norway: the Oslo channel seemed really over.

But one man decided not to surrender: Terje Larsen, after he assisted at the recent developments, immediately went to approach Abu Ala, and succeeded in convince him to do a last try, in do not give up and to do it for him. So Ala did accept the request of Larsen to talk to Savir, “*Uri had certain points he would like to discuss with me alone, then Larsen tactfully withdrew, leaving Uri and me together.*”²⁴⁰ The two men agreed that both their leaderships were too intransigent and did not really understand the importance offered by the Norwegian channel.

“*If we cannot heal an illness, he said, we should seek its causes. What is your opinion on direct negotiations between Israel and the PLO on the issue of mutual recognition?*”²⁴¹ Savir were making a proposal to Ala, he was not even sure its leadership would have eventually accepted that proposal, but he understood that they talked about mutual recognition, as separated from the DOP, then they could keep the dialogue for a while longer, and Ala got that

²³⁹ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

²⁴⁰ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

²⁴¹ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

point too. Moreover that represented a huge opportunity for the PLO, and Ala knew that Tunis would never have lost that train: Israeli recognition of the PLO would have meant a lot of changes for the Palestinians, including their right to self-determination and to establish an independent state.

Savir decided anyway to leave, in order to avoid questions on his repeated absence, but Singer remained in Oslo with Abu Ala to talk about the new chapter of mutual recognition, putting forward seven points:

1. *Israel's right to live in security and peace.*
2. *Acceptance of UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338.*
3. *Commitment to the settlements of the conflict by peaceful means.*
4. *The settlement of any differences in position through negotiations.*
5. *The renunciation of terrorism.*
6. *Halting the Intifada.*
7. *The cancellation of the articles in the Palestinian National Charter which call for the destruction of Israel or contradict the principles of the peace process.*²⁴²

So surprisingly, after a deadlock that seemed definitive, the two teams were able to keep the door open for further contacts, to make some progress in the dealing: at least controversial points were now identified. They had to find a compromise over those issues, but first of all it was necessary to define the main differences between the position of the two delegations:

1. *Article 1 of the latest text of the Declaration of Principles, paragraph 2:*

(Israeli proposal) It is understood that the transitional arrangements are an integral part of the whole peace process, and that the final status negotiations will lead to the implementation of Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, as will be agreed upon by the two parties in the final status agreement.

²⁴² Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

(Palestinian proposal) It is understood that the transitional arrangements are an integral part of the whole peace process, and that the final status negotiations will lead to the implementation of the Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 in all their aspects.

2. Article 5 of the Declaration of Principles, paragraph 3:

(Israeli proposal) It is understood that in the course of the final status negotiations, each party can raise any issues for discussion. The Palestinian representatives mentioned that they will raise the issues of: Jerusalem, refugees, settlements, security arrangements, borders and cooperation with other neighbors, while Israeli said it would raise the issues of the final status of the West Bank and Gaza Strip and their relations with the neighbors.

(Palestinian proposal) These negotiations will cover the remaining issues including: Jerusalem, the refugees, settlements, security arrangements, borders, relations and cooperation with other neighbors, and any other issues of mutual interest.

3. Article 7 of the Declaration of Principles:

(Israeli proposal): After the formation of the Council, the civil administration will be dissolved.

(Palestinian proposal): After the formation of the Council, both the civil administration and the military government will be dissolved.

4. Article 8 of the Declaration of Principles (on security and public security): the article read as follows: to guarantee public security and internal Palestinian security in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, the

Council will form a strong police force, while Israel will continue to carry all responsibilities...

(Israeli addition): Defence against any outside threats or threats of terrorism against Israelis, and public security for Israelis.

(Palestinian addition): While Israel will continue to carry defence responsibilities against any external threat.

5. Article 12 of the Declaration of Principles (concerning the relationship and cooperation with Jordan and Israel):

(Israeli proposal) The government of Israel and the Council will invite the governments of Jordan and Egypt to participate in establishing a liaison office for cooperation among Israel, the Council, Egypt and Jordan, to discuss, among other matters, ways of cooperation and solving problems, and arrangements for the return of persons displaced in 1967.

6. Article 14 of the Declaration of Principles (concerning the Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and Jericho):

(Israeli proposal): Israel will implement a gradual withdrawal of its military forces from the Gaza Strip and Jericho District (as will be agreed upon), and as shown in the second attachment. The headquarters of the Council will be based in Jericho or Gaza until the inauguration of the Council.

(Palestinian proposal): Israel will withdraw from the Gaza Strip and Jericho District as shown in the second attachment.

7. Attachment 1 (on the text of the elections):

Paragraph number 3: the future situation of the displaced Palestinians who were registered on June 4, 1967, will not be jeopardized.

(Israeli proposal): because they could not participate in the elections for practical reasons.

*(Palestinian version): if they could not participate in the elections for practical reasons.*²⁴³

So what seemed pretty clear to the eyes of Ala, was that Israel wanted to keep alive Oslo channel at least as much as his delegation wanted: the Israelis needed to find a way for peace, but far away from the public eye. Finally the two delegations remained in contact with each other, the channel was still standing mainly thanks to last-minute Larsen intervention. "Abu Ala," I said in a formal tone, "it seems to me that we are no longer making progress. I suggest we each inform our principals that a crisis has developed."²⁴⁴

The twelfth round of talks

13 – 14 August, 1993

The main aim of this round was to find a solution for those gaps which basically separated the two delegations, who at least now demonstrated to share some views. Although the interlocutors felt isolated living in the Norwegian atmosphere, time and events were running absolutely fast in the outer world, and mainly in the Middle East. As for example the deportation of 400 men to Marj al-Zuhour in southern Lebanon, which started together with the Oslo channel, was something that could not be ignored. Moreover, many Palestinians were operating against Israel, in response they suffered harsh Israeli reprisals.

After the eleventh meeting, Ala remained in Oslo in order to take advantage of the time he had, remaining in contact both with Israelis and Norwegians. Contemporarily Warren Christopher, the American Secretary of State, was conducting a visit in the Middle East region bringing messages between Syrians and Israelis. "The Israelis seemed as keen as I was to resolve the

²⁴³ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

²⁴⁴ Uri Savir, *The Process*.

remaining problems, and little by little we broke through. The near collapse of the eleventh round had rattled him."²⁴⁵

Meanwhile, a meeting in Paris, between Israelis and Palestinians, was held on 6 August 1993: it is not considered as a negotiating round because it did not take place in Norway. So the aim was to make final decisions, which concerned those points that were still considered controversial by both sides, during a meeting that lasted for seven hours in the French capital. But finally a real final agreement was not reached, even though the diplomatic channel seemed reopen.

'After the Paris meeting, I returned to Oslo to prepare for the next round of talks. On 13 August 1993 we met again at Borregard, where it had all started.'"²⁴⁶ The two teams decided previously that it was to be the penultimate meeting for that channel, so several problems had to be solved and settled before the final document for the DOP could be considered achieve. As a conclusion for the Oslo channel seemed to be quite close now, an agenda on mutual reservations and opposing views was set, moreover it was also necessary to confirm the agreement which was achieved on the seven points concerning the mutual recognition.

The leadership in Tunis had also introduced small changes in their version of the mutual recognition document and the Declaration of Principles, act that was much appreciated by the Israelis who saw it as a consequence of growing flexibility of the Palestinians. Although the good will that was demonstrated by both sides, *'the differences between our view and the elements of mutual recognition, were beginning to compromise the possibility of reaching an agreement on both documents.'*"²⁴⁷ Each single point seemed too important to each delegation, that the two teams could not overcome those issues of detail, or neither set it apart: so the time was running out, and the number of problems seemed growing.

'When Peres saw that Oslo was on the brink of failure because of his last minute impasse, he decided to make his personal intervention. Peres simply

²⁴⁵ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

²⁴⁶ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

²⁴⁷ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

refused to accept that his scheme might collapse."²⁴⁸ Then he coordinated a telephone call, which in the end took to some important improvements: Peres with Singer and his assistant Avi Gil on the one side, while Holst flanked by Larsen and Mona on the other, tried to finalize the agreement via telephone. Moreover Holst kept the contact with Arafat, and Savir who was in Jerusalem ready to intervene: the telephone moment was probably the most relevant of the whole history of the Oslo channel. Through this expedient, which lasted about six hours, all the remaining issues were resolved, mainly thanks to the high authority of Peres and Arafat, who worked together achieving crucial outcomes.

'The Palestinian leadership had no option that night but to seize its opportunity to make a historic agreement.'"²⁴⁹ We can say that the most relevant factors that influenced that moment were the following ones: a) Peres strong will to go through the issues considered obstacles in order to find an agreement; b) the necessary presence of Holst as a mediator of decisive role.

Those five points, which were in the end discussed and settled were:

1. *Article 1: the controversy on this article focused on the commitment to implement Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338. The Israeli viewpoint was that the two parties would agree on implementation at the final stage, while the Palestinian version insisted that implementation should be clearly mentioned from the start. In the end, the Palestinian viewpoint was accepted, and the following text was adopted: "the negotiations will lead to the implementation of UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338."*
2. *Article 5, paragraph 3: this concerns the issues to be covered in the final status talks. The Israelis wanted to exclude any mention of the agenda of the final status negotiations. They proposed that each side could put forward any item for discussion. The Palestinian side insisted on a clear definition of the agenda now. According to the Palestinian version, both the parties should be committed to discuss the items*

²⁴⁸ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

²⁴⁹ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

specified for the agenda of the Declaration of Principles, and to find solutions for them when the final status negotiations begin. Again the Palestinian view was accepted, and the paragraph read: "It is understood these negotiations will cover the remaining issues, including Jerusalem, the refugees, the settlements, security arrangements, borders, relations and cooperation with other neighbors and other issues of mutual interest."

3. *Article 7, Paragraph 5: here Israel agreed to abolish the civil administration in the occupied territories, but insisted on retaining the military government, pointing to the security of the settlements as their justification. We insisted that both the civil administration and the military government should be removed, because it is not conceivable to have two administrations in the West Bank and Gaza (a Palestinian transitional temporary government and an Israeli military government). After long discussion, the following formula was reached: "After the installation of the Palestinian Council, the civil administration will be dissolved and the Israeli military government will be withdrawn."*
4. *Annex 2, paragraph 4 (on Gaza and Jericho): since we had agreed on the withdrawal from Gaza and Jericho area, we asked to have control over the crossing points leading to these two areas from Egypt and from Jordan. The Israeli side refused even to discuss this issue and claimed that control over these points was part of external security, which it had been agreed would remain in Israeli hand during the transitional period. They also argued that having control over these passages would endow the Palestinian National Authority with some of the functions of sovereignty, though the negotiations were intended only to achieve self-rule. The Palestinian side insisted on finding a compromise on this issue. A deliberately ambiguous formula was finally accepted, reading as follows: "The above agreement will include arrangements for coordination between the two sides concerning the crossing points between Egypt and Gaza and between Jericho and Jordan."*
5. *Annex 2, paragraph 4: a long discussion took place on this article. We insisted that the Palestinian National Authority should have offices in the*

*Gaza Strip and Jericho, and offices in the Gaza Strip and Jericho, and offices elsewhere in the West Bank later. We also said that the seat of the Palestinian National Authority should not be confined only to Gaza and Jericho, but could be installed in any place in the West Bank, especially after the elections. In the end, the following text was accepted: "The offices responsible for implementing the responsibilities of the Palestinian National Authority... will be located in the Gaza strip and in the Jericho area pending the inauguration of the Council."*²⁵⁰

After the important episode of the telephone call, it was then possible to officially define the most important matters in three points, and the two delegations could eventually find the right formula for each of those issues:

- 1. On the final status negotiations, we agreed on a flexible formula which allowed the time frame to be shortened by specifying that these negotiations could start as soon as might be possible, but the delay should not exceed the beginning of the third year.*
- 2. The negotiations on both the transitional and final stages should not continue for more than five years.*
- 3. On the international presence, on which we insisted but which was totally rejected by the Israelis, the following formula was agreed: "the temporary and agreed upon international presence."*²⁵¹

One last point which was discussed and defined by the two team was about the timetable: a) the withdraw of Israeli military presence from Gaza and Jericho would start in December 1993, and will end in April 1994; b) the Palestinian Council would be elected in mid July 1994, later the Israeli civil administration competence would be transferred to the elected council; c) the withdrawn military units from Gaza and Jericho would be redeployed to unpopulated areas in the West Bank.

²⁵⁰ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

²⁵¹ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

*“In December 1995 negotiations on the final status would start, with their pre-defined agenda, and were to be completed by the end of 1999.”*²⁵² It was finally stated that the document would have been signed in Oslo, on 19 August: it was now official, the agreement had been achieved in the end. *“Constructing a peace agreement means striking a balance in which side can preserve its vital interests.”*²⁵³

The thirteenth round of talks

19 August, 1993

The aim of this meeting was to conclude the talks on mutual recognition between PLO and Israel, moreover it was necessary to initialize the final agreement: the last step would be to make it public, and the Oslo Plaza Hotel would have been the scene of that ceremony. The atmosphere of this round of talks was unique, as all issues and hard questions had already been solved earlier, and what was necessary to do now was just to put a sign on the Declaration of Principles. Neither of the two delegations was authorized by its leadership to go through any changes on the document.

The Norwegians prepared that solemn moment in a particular way, in fact *“We would sign our document in the very room where Norway’s independence treaty separating it from Sweden was signed in 1905, and our ceremony would take place at the very same antique wooden table.”*²⁵⁴ So the locals were in a sense putting that agreement on a par with the one that will officially concern the destiny of two people from the Middle East. During the signing ceremony the whole personnel who took part in the negotiation was present, and in their presence the “Declaration of Principles on Temporary Self-Rule Arrangements” was signed by the most notable persons of each delegation. *“The mood was strange, it was more of anxiety and trepidation than of joy.”*

²⁵² Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

²⁵³ Uri Savir, *The Process*.

²⁵⁴ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

Fear for the future and awe at the historic nature of what we had done overcame us all. Silence reigned the room, there was no celebration."²⁵⁵

The fourteenth round of talks

20 August – 9 September, 1993

On this occasion, Ala had the opportunity to meet Shimon Peres, that was basically the first time that it happened: Peres said that he was ready to fly back to Israel in order to brief Rabin, and then to the United States, where he would have discussed the negotiation's conclusions with Warren Christopher, and to prepare the announcement of that event to the whole world. "*Peres's plan was that we had accomplished in Oslo would be announced as an American initiative. That was, the Americans would take credit for it, and so they would not feel they had lost face because of the failure of the talks in Washington.*"²⁵⁶ The Israeli said also that the crucial importance of the agreement, for the PLO, was that it would be signed by the PLO itself, and not by the negotiating team in Oslo, or by the Washington negotiators.

They were both aware of the fact that the agreement would have then faced a strong opposition, coming from the radical Palestinian and Israeli religious factions. That is why support from both the United States and the Arab states was necessary in order to make possible the accomplishment of the Oslo objectives. So it was necessary that the PLO could resume its relationship with the United States, and it should be a great achievement if the Palestinian citizens on the streets could immediately feel some improvements coming from the agreement. These were the outcomes of the first meeting, which was ever held between a senior PLO official and an Israeli minister.

'By the time I arrived in Tunis, rumors of an agreement in Oslo were widespread.'"²⁵⁷ From that moment on, the Norwegian story was on the front pages of the main newspapers of the world, they described Mahmoud Abbas and Shimon Peres as the initiators of that channel, without even mentioning all

²⁵⁵ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

²⁵⁶ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

²⁵⁷ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

those persons that had actually conducted the talks. News about that event kept on spread very quickly, but the leaderships of the two delegations responded with strong denials.

In the end, negotiations on the mutual agreement issue had still to be solved, in fact the Palestinians did not accept the idea of mutual recognition as they expect, in return of Israel recognition, at least an independent Palestinian State. *'Israel should accept the PLO as the recognized and legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. Peres and Rabin were prepared to take the risk that recognition of the PLO might bring trouble for the Labor government.'*²⁵⁸

On 30 August, Ala met Savir and Singer in Oslo, where the two Israelis had brought with them an amended draft, which appeared to be different from the one that was submitted earlier. It stated what follows:

1. *The PLO recognizes Israel's right to exist in security and peace.*
2. *Both sides accept UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338.*
3. *Both sides agree to negotiate on the transitional and finals stages, and recognize that negotiation is the only way to reach a political settlement.*
4. *Terrorism must be renounced.*
5. *There must be a halt to all acts of violence and terrorism.*
6. *The Palestinian National Charter must be amended, and all articles that contradict Israel's right to exist must be removed.*
7. *Yasser Arafat, as chairman of the PLO, must be ready to meet any Israeli official.*²⁵⁹

Warren Christopher agreed also that the operation for a mutual recognition between Israel and Palestine, could pave the way for the re-establishment of relations between USA and the PLO. He also made official the decision that the agreement would be signed, during a remarkable ceremony, in Washington DC, but this could happen only after that an agreement on mutual recognition was found. Peres, together with Christopher and Holst, created the

²⁵⁸ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

²⁵⁹ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

procedure that would be followed in order to lead up to the official announcement of an agreement, stating what follows:

1. *The Palestinian delegation would return to Oslo as soon as possible to conclude the mutual recognition agreement.*
2. *Chairman Arafat would send a letter to Yitzhak Rabin, assuring him that the PLO was committed to work for reaching a mutual recognition agreement, according to the draft proposed previously.*
3. *Simultaneously the Americans would announce that Israel and the Palestinians, with the assistance of Norway, had reached an agreement. This announcement would also say that President Clinton's administration had encouraged both parties to achieve this result, and expressed its thanks and appreciation to the government of Norway. The statement would also stress that the United States was committed to support this agreement and would work for the success of the accords reached in Oslo.*
4. *After the American announcement, the Israeli government would issue an official statement that it had reached an agreement with the PLO. Yitzhak Rabin would also announce that he had received a message from Yasser Arafat and would reveal its contents. Rabin would also announce that he had sent a reply to Chairman Arafat, recognizing the PLO.*
5. *The PLO would declare that it had reached an agreement with Israel, that it denounced violence, and that it accepted UN Security Council Resolution 242 as a basis for ending the conflict. The PLO would call on all Palestinian to work hard at rebuilding the Palestinian society and for developing the Palestinian economy.*
6. *The American administration would, at a later stage, issue a statement about resuming its own relations with the PLO.²⁶⁰*

²⁶⁰ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

In Israel, the official announcement by the Israeli cabinet of the agreement achieved arrived on 29 August 1993. Moreover, the Israeli team said that its leader, Yitzhak Rabin, wanted a strong declaration concerning the renunciation of terrorism and violence from the PLO. He even talked about the necessary amendments to the Palestinian National Charter, and asked that the PLO make direct appeal for an end to the Intifada.

Anyway, the hardest achievement ever was the signature of the Declaration for mutual recognition, which would have *“implied a profound transformation in the relationship between two old adversaries, who had perpetuated distorted stereotypical images of each other throughout the generations.”*²⁶¹

The response of the Middle Eastern populations to those new events was as previewed, in fact many protests and statements of public condemnations did take place. Meanwhile, 13 September had been confirmed as the date for the formal signing of the agreement in Washington DC.

The meetings between the Israeli and the Palestinian delegations were still going on, as no compromise was reached on two main points, that were: a) the modification of the Palestinian National Charter, b) the renunciation of violence. Only after long discussions, Arafat accepted *“a text that would recognize Israel’s right to exist within secure recognized frontiers, and in peace.”*²⁶² In order to solve the issue of the National Charter, Ala with Savir, Singer, Holst and Larsen as eternal mediator, could all talk together. A compromise was reached on the morning of 9 September, creating a text that would have not contained the sentence “renunciation of terrorism”, but rather “rejection of terrorism”, because the Palestinians did not want to be described as terrorism of course.

The Executive Committee of the PLO approved what was needed to for the necessary documents, it happened in Tunis in the evening of 9 September 1993. *“The documents included the PLO’s recognition of Israel, Israel’s recognition of the PLO, and Yasser Arafat’s message to the Norwegian Foreign Minister concerning the Intifada.”*²⁶³ What was important to the

²⁶¹ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

²⁶² Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

²⁶³ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

Palestinians was not the fact that they were not going to receive much from the mutual recognition, but at least that document gave the PLO an official recognition, after almost fifty years of riots and struggles. This meant at the same time, the international recognition of the PLO, mainly by the United States of America as the only superpower remained, '*ending the effective international isolation of the PLO since the Gulf conflict of 1990-'91: the cornerstone for a Palestinian political entity had been laid*'.²⁶⁴

²⁶⁴ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

Declaration of Principles

13 September, 1993

*"The future that we look for will not materialize unless we together overcome the fears of the past and learn from the past lessons for our future."*²⁶⁵

After the mutual recognition agreement was signed, Chairman Yasser Arafat decided to go to Washington for the signing the final agreement, as he did not want Mahmoud Abbas to take the stage. On the other side, Rabin was ready to reach the American capital: *'If Rabin and Arafat signed the agreement, it would be a bonus for the Americans, which Clinton welcomed.'*²⁶⁶ In Arafat's mind, such an official ceremony would have basically meant the end of Palestinian international isolation, and consequently the opening of many doors, which were, until that moment, still keeping closed.

After a starting optimism, thanks to the big official welcome enriched by a huge presence of medias, the atmosphere changed when the Palestinians had the chance to review the text of the agreement: the PLO was never mentioned, but it only made reference to the Palestinian delegation. Of course Arafat, and the whole Palestinian delegation, were furious for that, but then Warren Christopher promised they would have obtained what they wanted, before the beginning of the ceremony. *'The ceremony was staged like shooting a scene from a Hollywood film, the size of the audience added to the grandeur of the moment.'*²⁶⁷ So the idea of Clinton administration was to send a worldwide message, and mainly it meant that relations between PLO and the USA would be restored.

*'Minutes later, at 11.10, the ceremony started, guarded very carefully by the marines.'*²⁶⁸ The text was finally restored as agreed, a few minutes before the

²⁶⁵ Uri Savir, *The Process*.

²⁶⁶ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

²⁶⁷ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

²⁶⁸ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

official start: Mahmoud Abbas, Shimon Peres and President Clinton made the official signing of the agreement in front of television cameras.

After Rabin and Arafat concluded their speeches, President Clinton brought Arafat and Rabin closer to each other and, after some hesitation, the two were shaking hands, an act that meant much more than a signature. The official document states what follows:

THE OSLO DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES

(Final Draft, 19 August 1993)

Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government arrangements

The government of the State of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization team (in the Jordanian-Palestinian delegation to the Middle East Peace conference) (the Palestinian delegation), representing the Palestinian people, agree that it is time to put an end to decades of confrontation and conflict, recognize their mutual and political rights, and strive to live on peaceful coexistence and mutual dignity and security, and achieve a just, lasting and comprehensive peace settlement and historical reconciliation through the agreed political process. Accordingly the two sides agree on the following principles:

Article I

Aim of the negotiations

The aim of the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations within the current Middle East peace process is, among other things, to establish a Palestinian Interim Self-Government Authority, the elected Council (the "Council") for the Palestinian people in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, for a transitional period not exceeding five years, leading to a permanent settlement based on Security Council Resolution 242 and 338.

It is understood that the interim arrangements are an integral part of the overall peace process and that final status negotiations will lead to the implementation of Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338.

Article II

Framework for the interim period

The agreed framework for the interim period is set forth in this Declaration of Principles.

Article III

Elections

- 1. In order that the Palestinian people in the West Bank and Gaza Strip may govern themselves according to democratic principles, direct, free and general political elections will be held for the Council, under agreed supervision and international observation with the Palestinian police will ensure public order.*
- 2. An agreement will be concluded on the exact mode and conditions of the elections in accordance with the protocol attached as Annex 1, with the goal of holding the elections not later than nine months after the entry into force of this Declaration of Principles.*
- 3. These elections will constitute a significant interim preparatory step toward the realization of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people and their just requirements.*

Article IV

Jurisdiction

Jurisdiction of the Council will cover West Bank and Gaza Strip territory except for issues that will be negotiated in the permanent status negotiations. The two sides view the West Bank and the Gaza Strip as a single territorial unit whose integrity will be preserved during the interim period.

Article V

Transitional period and permanent status negotiations

- 1. The five-year transitional period will begin upon the withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and Jericho area.*
- 2. Permanent status negotiations will commence as soon as possible, but not later than the beginning of the third year of the interim period between the Government of Israel and Palestinian people representatives.*
- 3. It is understood that these negotiations will cover remaining issues, including: Jerusalem, refugees, settlements, security arrangements, borders, relations and cooperation with other neighbors, and other issues of common interest.*
- 4. The two parties agree that the outcome of the permanent status negotiations should not be prejudiced or preempted by agreements reached for the interim period.*

Article VI

Preparatory transfer of power and responsibilities

- 1. Upon the entry into force of this Declaration of Principles and the withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and the Jericho area, a transfer of authority from the Israeli military government and its civil administration to the authorized Palestinians for this task, as detailed herein, will commence. This transfer of authority will be of preparatory nature until the inauguration of the Council.*
- 2. Immediately after the entry into force of this Declaration of Principles and the withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and the Jericho area, with the view promoting economic development in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, authority will be transferred to the Palestinians in the following spheres: education and culture, health, social welfare, direct taxation and tourism. The Palestinian side will commence in the building the*

Palestinian police force as agreed upon. Pending the inauguration of the Council the two parties may negotiate the transfer of additional powers and responsibilities, as agreed upon.

Article VII

Interim Agreement

- 1. The Israeli and Palestinian delegations will negotiate an agreement on the interim period (the "Interim Agreement").*
- 2. The Interim Agreement shall specify, among other things the structure of the Council, the number of its members and the transfer of powers and responsibilities from the Israeli military government and its Civil Administration to the Council. The Interim Agreement shall also specify the Council's executive authority, legislative authority in accordance with Article IX below, and the independent Palestinian judicial organs.*
- 3. The Interim Agreement shall include arrangements to be implemented upon the inauguration of the Council, for the assumption by the Council of all the powers and responsibilities transferred previously in accordance with Article VI above.*
- 4. In order to enable the Council to promote economic growth upon its inauguration, the Council will establish among other things a Palestinian Electrical Authority, a Gaza Sea Port Authority, a Palestinian Development Bank, a Palestinian Export Promotion Board, a Palestinian Environmental Authority, a Palestinian Land Authority and a Palestinian Water Administration Authority and any other authorities agreed upon, in accordance with the Interim Agreement that will specify their powers and responsibilities.*
- 5. After the inauguration of the Council, the Civil Administration will be dissolved and the Israeli military government will be withdrawn.*

Article VIII

Public order and security

In order to guarantee public order and international security for the Palestinians of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, the Council will establish a strong police force, while Israel will continue to carry the responsibility for defending against external threats, as well as the responsibility for overall security of the Israelis to protect their internal security and public order.

Article IX

Laws and military orders

- 1. The Council will be empowered to legislate in accordance with the Interim Agreement, within all authorities transferred to it.*
- 2. Both parties will review jointly laws and military orders presently in force remaining spheres.*

Article X

Joint Israel-Palestinian Liaison Committee

In order to provide for a smooth implementation of this Declaration of Principles and any subsequent agreements pertaining to the interim period, upon the entry into force of this Declaration of Principles, a joint Israeli-Palestinian Liaison Committee will be established in order to deal with issues requiring coordination, other issues of common interest and disputes.

Article XI

Israeli-Palestinian cooperation in economic fields

Recognizing the mutual benefit of cooperation in promoting the development of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and Israel, upon the entry into force of this Declaration of Principles, an Israeli-Palestinian Economic Cooperation Committee will be established in order to develop and implement in a cooperative manner the programs identified in the protocols attached as Annex III and Annex IV.

Article XII

Liaison and cooperation with Jordan and Egypt

The two parties will invite the Governments of Jordan and Egypt to participate in establishing further liaison and cooperation arrangements between the Government of Israel and the Palestinian representatives on the one hand, and the Government of Jordan and Egypt on the other hand to promote cooperation between them. These arrangements will include the constitution of a Continuing Committee that will decide by agreement on the modalities of the admission of persons displaced from the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1967, together with necessary measures to prevent disruption and disorder. Other matters of common concern will be dealt with by this Committee.

Article XIII

Redeployment of Israeli forces

- 1. After the entry into force of this Declaration of Principles, and not later than the eve of elections for the Council, a redeployment of Israeli military forces in the West Bank and Gaza Strip will take place, in addition to withdrawal of Israeli forces carried out in accordance with Article XIV.*
- 2. In redeploying its military forces, Israel will be guided by the principles that its military forces should be redeployed outside the populated areas.*
- 3. Further redeployments to specified locations will be gradually implemented commensurate with the assumption of responsibility for public order and internal security by the Palestinian police force pursuant to Article VIII above.*

Article XIV

Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and Jericho area

Israel will withdraw from the Gaza Strip and Jericho area as detailed in the protocol as Annex II.

Article XV

Resolution of disputes

- 1. Disputes arising out of the application or interpretation of this Declaration of Principles, or any subsequent agreements pertaining to the interim period, shall be resolved by negotiations through the Joint Liaison Committee to be established pursuant to Article X above.*
- 2. Disputes, which cannot be settled by negotiations, may be resolved by a mechanism of conciliation to be agreed upon by the parties.*
- 3. The parties may agree to submit to arbitration disputes relating to the interim period, which cannot be settled through conditions. To this end, upon the agreement of both parties, the parties will be established an Arbitration Committee.*

Article VXI

Israeli-Palestinian cooperation concerning regional programs

Both parties view the multilateral working groups as an appropriate instrument for promoting a "Marshall Plan", the regional programs and other programs, including special programs for the West Bank and Gaza Strip, as indicated in the protocol attached as Annex IV.

Article XVII

Miscellaneous provisions

- 1. This Declaration of Principles will enter into force one month after its signing.*
- 2. All protocols annexed to this Declaration of Principles and agreed minutes pertaining thereto shall be regarded as an integral part hereof.*

Done at Washington D.C., this thirteenth day of September 1993

For the Government of Israel (signed) Shimon Peres

For the Palestine Liberation Organization (signed) Mahmoud Abbas

Witnessed by:

The United States of America (signed) William J. Clinton

The Russian Federation (signed) Andrei Kosyrev.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁹ David Makovsky, *Making peace with the PLO*.

Conclusions

‘Every American administration since Lyndon Johnson’s had declared that it was the role of the parties in conflict to reach a solution, not the job of the United States to impose one.’²⁷⁰

After the signing ceremony, still more had to be done for Israelis and Palestinians: *‘now the time was come for concrete changes, people from the Middle East, and from the whole world, were expecting to see the real improvements of the Oslo channel.’²⁷¹* Chairman Yasser Arafat took definitely the lead over issues and decisions, often without even consulting Ala and in general the Palestinian interlocutors who basically made that possible. Even worse, he nominated Abu Koush as PLO liaison officer with Israeli faction, rather than Abu Ala: *‘I read into this strange development a further attempt to exclude me from the negotiating process and perhaps to exclude others as well.’²⁷²*

Moreover, when Arafat had to choose his deputy, as Chairman of the Council, he asked for Farouk Qaddoumi. What seemed even stranger, was that Qaddoumi had publicly expressed his opposition to the Oslo accords: he basically thought that these were a contradiction to Palestinian national rights, and to the national charter. So what we can assume is that internal strains at the highest level of the Palestinian authority were a matter of fact: as said before, the protagonists of Oslo, as Abu Ala and Mahmoud Abbas for example, were totally excluded from any further duty concerning the framework of the Oslo Charter.

On 22 September 1993, the Israeli Knesset completed the ratification on the Oslo Agreement, but, on the Palestinian side, political differences were actually deadlocking the official acknowledgment of the Norwegian document

²⁷⁰ Uri Savir, *The Process*.

²⁷¹ David Makovsky, *Making peace with the PLO*.

²⁷² Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

as required. It happened only on 10 October, after a two days meeting of the Palestinian Council.

Abu Ala was officially excluded to the continuation of the negotiations, when Dr Nabil Sha'ath was nominated as head of the Palestinian delegation: '*the Oslo atmosphere was finally evaporated.*'²⁷³ On 4 May 1994, the self-rule agreement was signed, but Yasser Arafat decided not to sign the maps, which were attached to that document.

*'Oslo gave Israelis and supporters of Israel a sense that the Palestinian problem had been solved, once and for all.'*²⁷⁴ Edward Said is extremely critical of the Oslo accords, he does not understand how the PLO, and the Arab states in general, agreed to sign such a peace dealing with Israel without an improvement of the UN Resolutions 242 and 338. He defines their position after the Norwegian talks as "an extremely stupid" one. Said states that Palestinians have been tricked, as Israel promised them to negotiate the details of settlements and Jerusalem later.

Mainly after Rain's dead, and the beginning of a new Likud lead government, Israel has continued to add new land, to increase the size of its state to the detriment of Palestinian land. *'The last now total about 40 percent of the "autonomous" area, and in the West Bank and Jerusalem, confiscated land amounts to 75 percent of the whole, all of it earmarked for Jewish use exclusively.'*²⁷⁵ He does not understand how the Palestinians could have accepted to sign the Oslo accords, which did not include guarantees on settlements, on Jerusalem, or self-determination. Said speaks about Israeli go back on a promise, who officially said they would have considered those central issues later, but actually they did not.

*'The first step therefore is to admit that such a process is indeed reversible and that in order to achieve it there has to be real mobilization and preparation.'*²⁷⁶ Said realizes there was no alternative to Oslo, that such an

²⁷³ Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*.

²⁷⁴ Edward Said, *The End of the Peace Process*.

²⁷⁵ Edward Said, *The End of the Peace Process*.

²⁷⁶ Edward Said, *The End of the Peace Process*.

event was mandatory and necessary, but he defines as a “disgrace” what basically occurred consequently. He criticizes the Palestinian authority for not being capable of comprehending the real Palestinian condition, he feels that authority criticism is a moral duty, and that the contrary would be immorality.

*“Each side hailed the agreement as a historic step. Each spoke of the great hope it inspired for its people, but neither expressed a true change of feeling toward its erstwhile enemy.”*²⁷⁷ Uri Savir blames mainly the leaderships of the two peoples for the negative consequences of the Oslo accords, accusing their decision to present the agreement as something that could turn “mortal enemies” into “hopeful confederates”, trying to avoid the feeling of self-defeat. He also remarks the difficulties that were faced by the Palestinian leadership, in order to obtain the PLO’s Executive Committee approval of the agreement: in Savir’s opinion, Arafat was basically ignoring the details of the Norwegian agreement, selling to its people as a guarantee of a Palestinian state. *‘After the signing ceremony in Washington, Arafat distanced Abu Mazen and Abu Ala from the center of decision making: they had received far too much international attention for his taste.’*²⁷⁸ What consequently happened was that Abu Mazen decided to seclude himself in Tunis for one year, instead Abu Ala tried to conclude an agreement with Jordan as privileged member in the brand new Palestinian economy, but he got stopped by Arafat. *‘The sharp contrast between the PLO’s routine hostility to Israel and its sudden entry into an agreement with it confused the Palestinians and slowed their preparations to carry out the agreement.’*²⁷⁹

Even on the other hand after the Oslo events Rabin’s government, which is recorded as the most homogeneous in the Israeli past, had some internal discussions. In fact Yossi Beilin provoked Peres reaction by saying that he was not the real pioneer of Oslo, but he described himself, together with Hirschfeld and Pundak, as the real protagonists of that deal: Beilin was then excluded by the post Oslo operations. *‘We were thus at the point of declaring an end to the*

²⁷⁷ Uri Savir, *The Process*.

²⁷⁸ Uri Savir, *The Process*.

²⁷⁹ Uri Savir, *The Process*.

Israeli Palestinian conflict and transforming our ties into permanent political relations.”²⁸⁰

“Peace does not lie in charters and covenants alone. It lies in the hearts and minds of the people.” John F. Kennedy

²⁸⁰ Uri Savir, *The Process*.

Bibliography:

Paper sources:

Books:

- Title: *From Oslo to Jerusalem, The Palestinian story of the secret negotiations;*
Author: *Ahmed Qurie.*

- Title: *The Middle East and the Peace Process, The impact of the Oslo Accords;*
Author: *Robert Freedman.*

- Title: *The end of the peace process;*
Author: *Edward Said.*

- Title: *Yitzhak Rabin, from soldier to peacemaker,*
Author: *Libby Hughes.*

- Title: *Track to Diplomacy, Lessons from the Middle East;*
Author: *Agha, Feldman, Khalidi, Schiff.*

- Title: *Making peace with the PLO, The Rabin Government's Road to the Oslo Accord;*
Author: *David Makovsky.*

- Title: *Through Secret Channels, The Road to Oslo;*
Author: *Mahmoud Abbas.*

- Title: *The process, 1.100 days that changed the Middle East;*

Author: *Uri Savir*.

Web sources:

Links:

- www.mfa.gov.il
- www.alzaytouna.net
- www.tari.org
- www.usembassy-israel.org
- www.21stcenturysocialism.com
- www.mideastweb.org
- www.meforum.org
- www.wikipedia.com

Reviews:

- International journal of Middle East studies (www.esaim-cocv.org)
- International security (www.mitpressjournals.org)
- Foreign affairs (www.foreignaffairs.com)
- Palestine-Israel journal (www.pij.org)
- Limes (<http://temi.repubblica.it/limes>)

ABSTRACT

La scelta di esaminare da vicino le dinamiche del Processo di Pace d'Oslo, è dettata dal mio personale interesse nella comprensione delle dinamiche interne di questa trattativa, che rappresenta il momento di massima cooperazione tra Israele e Palestina. Potremmo dire che, il valore assoluto di quest'operazione diplomatica, è quello di riconoscere a livello ufficiale un'autorità palestinese, nella figura dell'OLP (Organizzazione Liberazione Palestina).

Solo grazie al Processo di Pace di Oslo, l'OLP perde lo status di organizzazione terroristica, per guadagnare quello di entità politica, rappresentante del popolo palestinese, e in possesso di diritti e doveri nei confronti di quest'ultimo.

Il mio progetto è stato quindi quello di esaminare le premesse storiche che hanno portato a Oslo, analizzare origine e sviluppi dell'OLP e studiare la fase politica israeliana in atto. Mi sono prevalentemente concentrato sul percorso diplomatico *in ipse*, dal mero aspetto tecnico di "Track-II diplomacy", al resoconto dei fatti in forma di cronaca, arricchito da importanti documenti ufficiali, testimonianze e resoconti.

L'idea che si sviluppa quando ci si trova a esaminare la questione israelopalestinese è quella di un conflitto senza fine, in cui estremismi religiosi s'intrecciano a violenza quotidiana, fanatismi e giochi di potere. Nel mio lavoro non cerco di entrare nelle trame di tale conflitto, ma mi propongo di studiare una soluzione di pace, come quella conseguita grazie a Oslo, quale unica vera strada per arrivare a un miglioramento reale di tale situazione.

Nel primo capitolo si trova un'analisi degli eventi storici che hanno, di fatto, portato i due popoli, quello israeliano e quello palestinese, a comprendere quanto fosse divenuto indispensabile concepire un percorso di cooperazione. La guerra tra Israele e Libano, nel periodo compreso tra 1982 e 1985, porterà all'esilio del quartiere generale dell'OLP nella città di Tunisi, causando un importante spostamento degli equilibri che avrà rilevanza nel processo scatenante la prima Intifada (letteralmente "sussulto") nel 1987.

Il fallimento degli accordi di Londra, quello stesso anno, segna un altro punto di svolta verso l'inizio a tutti gli effetti del movimento dell'Intifada. La scintilla è generata da un episodio, in cui un camion investe un taxi palestinese, causando morti e feriti: le celebri immagini dei sassi lanciati dagli abitanti palestinesi contro i soldati israeliani, che rispondevano con armi da fuoco, faranno il giro del mondo. Un po' come per il Vietnam, i media hanno in questo caso un merito fondamentale, quello di far sì che le violenze e i soprusi non fossero più ignorati dalla comunità internazionale, ma anzi, si cominciasse a porre il discorso palestinese all'interno dell'agenda globale.

L'Intifada segna anche il fallimento dei metodi israeliani adottati fino a quel momento: l'occupazione non stava portando ai frutti sperati, non era cioè riuscita a convincere i palestinesi ad abbandonare la propria terra, ma anzi li aveva ancor più caricati di un forte spirito di appartenenza alla terra, di attaccamento alle proprie radici.

Altro evento fondamentale è stato il crollo della coalizione targata Likud, al potere in Israele da lungo tempo oramai: Shamir e il suo partito non furono infatti più in grado di ottenere il sostegno popolare, né tantomeno quello diretto dello Knesset.

Rabin e Peres, inaugurano una nuova era del Laborismo, rilanciando la problematica palestinese e manifestando la volontà di scendere a patti, di provare a raggiungere un compromesso con la controparte. Rabin si rende conto che l'unico modo per tentare di calmare gli scontri generati dall'Intifada, sorta spontaneamente e non per comando dell'OLP, è appunto la trattativa, argomento che era da sempre stato tabù per entrambi i popoli.

Il secondo capitolo rappresenta una parentesi storica, una connessione più che un'entità a se stante, che ci porta al terzo capitolo, dedicato invece all'analisi del movimento dell'OLP, dalla nascita nel 1973 fino agli incontri di Oslo. Mi concentro fondamentalmente sul rapporto tra OLP e autorità israeliana, su come si passi da "rejectionism" vale a dire alla negazione della possibilità di concepire una trattativa con gli israeliani, a "revolutionary realism". In questa fase, avrà sicuramente grande peso, il fatto che la sede dell'OLP non si trovasse in Medio Oriente, ma a Tunisi come anticipato, in modo che le pressioni degli Stati arabi fossero percepiti in modo molto minore, lasciando più spazio per la conduzione di una riflessione più razionale. Sicuramente, all'interno delle gerarchie dell'OLP, non mancarono gli scontri tra conservatori e nuovi riformatori, in un dibattito che ci porta a un momento storico importante, come quello del post Guerra del Golfo (1990-'91), che sposta momentaneamente l'attenzione sull'Iraq di Saddam Hussein.

Tuttavia, il protrarsi dell'Intifada, avrà sicuramente un valore assoluto all'interno delle dinamiche che porteranno alla trattativa di Oslo: la manifestazione di una volontà di libertà e indipendenza, che non poteva più essere ignorata dal mondo occidentale.

Il quarto capitolo è dedicato all'analisi del momento politico israeliano, inaugurato con la vittoria del partito Laborista, guidato da Yitzhak Rabin, nel 1992. Sicuramente l'intransigenza, la chiusura a qualsiasi possibilità di trattativa con la parte palestinese, era stata, nel passato, conseguenza delle politiche abbracciate dall'opposta fazione del panorama israeliano, il Likud. Identificabile come estrema destra, tale partito fa proprie l'intransigenza, la rigorosa centralità della religione e l'anteposizione dei dettami dell'ebraismo alle necessità della realtà quotidiana. Il forte collegamento con il movimento Sionista aveva fatto sì che, per i precedenti leader appartenenti al Likud, l'ipotesi di scendere a patti con i palestinesi, o eventualmente di cedere loro parti di quella che era concepita la "Gerusalemme storica", era qualcosa d'inconcepibile.

Sicuramente fondamentale è l'accettazione ufficiale, da parte di Rabin, del concetto di "Land for peace", già espresso nella Risoluzione ONU 242. Questo ha concretamente il merito di riuscire a introdurre nell'immaginario israeliano, l'eventualità di scendere a patti col nemico, di sacrificare la terra in cambio di pace.

La centralità della figura di Rabin, all'interno del nostro dibattito, giustifica paragrafo dedicato allo stesso, nel quale si tracciano le linee generali della formazione del personaggio, da soldato a primo ministro dello Stato israeliano.

Nel quinto capitolo faccio un passo indietro, per studiare lo stallo della trattativa di Madrid, in seguito spostata a Washington, iniziativa fortemente voluta da

George H. W. Bush, che voleva riuscire ad attuare nei fatti le risoluzioni ONU che imponevano pace in Medio Oriente. Quindi l'idea era di passare a trattative multilaterali, cui avrebbero partecipato i rappresentanti di diversi Stati medio orientali. Tuttavia, a questi buoni propositi, non corrisponde poi una reale attuazione nei fatti: la delegazione palestinese è scelta a tavolino, senza aver riconosciuto uno status autonomo ma comparando come delegazione mista assieme a quella giordana. Chiaro come questo fattore avrebbe annullato l'effettività di tale iniziativa, che si dimostrò una farsa, ed ebbe come unico merito quello di portare alla trattativa di Washington, che servirà da copertura ufficiale per il canale di Oslo.

Il sesto capitolo è finalmente dedicato all'Oslo Peace Process. Nel primo paragrafo troviamo un'introduzione al processo, nel quale si parla della nascita dello "spirito di Oslo", della sua natura che potremmo definire spontanea, essendo diretta conseguenza di un'iniziativa concepita proprio dai vertici israeliani. Perciò non il risultato di coercizione esterna, com'era stato per Madrid, ma il frutto di un reale sentimento di necessità a percorrere la strada della pace. Appoggiandosi alle Risoluzioni ONU 242 e 338, che riporto in versione integrale in modo da permetterne la lettura integrale, si cerca di dare forma a un documento che dovrebbe generare la creazione ufficiale dell'entità politica palestinese, di dare speranza al suo popolo.

Nel secondo paragrafo esamino invece l'aspetto tecnico del concetto di "Track-II diplomacy", com'è ufficialmente riconosciuto, quali sono le varie fasi, gli attori coinvolti, e come tali concetti siano applicabili per la trattativa di Oslo. Nel terzo paragrafo mi occupo di analizzare i cosiddetti "Early contacts", vale a dire tutti quegli incontri non ufficialmente riconosciuti, che precedono la trattativa norvegese, e che in un certo senso la rendono possibile. Il susseguirsi di svariati conflitti tra mondo arabo e Israele, fa maturare, nei circoli degli intellettuali di entrambi i popoli, progetti di cooperazione volti all'ottenimento della pace. Il terzo e il quarto paragrafo sono la vera e propria analisi del processo di pace, dall'analisi dei personaggi coinvolti, al resoconto effettivo dei quattordici incontri che porteranno al celebre incontro a Washington, tra Rabin, Arafat e Bill Clinton, per la firma della dichiarazione dei principi del periodo d'interim di self government.

Il settimo capitolo è interamente dedicato alla Dichiarazione, riportata in forma integrale in modo da poterne esaminare gli articoli che la compongono, e quindi la sua reale natura.

L'ottavo capitolo è quello delle conclusioni, nel quale tiro le somme della trattativa, riportando due voci autorevoli in proposito, prima di quella di Edward Said, stimato studioso e personalità di spicco nel mondo palestinese e non, e poi quella di Uri Savir, uomo della politica israeliana, che prenderà parte alla trattativa di Oslo, e ci fornisce importanti considerazioni sugli eventi. La frase che riporto a chiusura del mio lavoro credo racchiuda un po' il senso del percorso di Oslo: la volontà delle persone per il raggiungimento della pace, viene prima delle carte e degli accordi, ne è anzi condizione indispensabile al che essi esistano.