

The Oslo Debacle

30 Years to The Accords that Changed Israel



הביטחוניסטים IDSF

ISRAEL'S DEFENSE & SECURITY FORUM

Research Department

September 2023 / Elul 5783

About the IDSF

IDSF-Habithonistim is a movement with over 20,000 members - commanders, officers, and former members of the Israeli defense and security forces. It was founded for the purpose of defending Israel's defense needs in a manner that ensures its existence and prosperity for generations to come.

We follow a clear line: We uphold Israel's right to exist, within its safe borders – the borders of the Land of Israel. We believe that Israel's defense needs are at the top of the national agenda, and believe that the State of Israel cannot afford to lose any war. The IDF must operate freely throughout the territory to fulfill its responsibility and defend the State of Israel.

We would like to make it clear that we are not a political movement, but one that is guided by the values and vision that define it.

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Signing ceremony of the Oslo Accords – Declaration of Principles, September 13, 1993, between Israel and the Palestinians, in the White House, Washington DC | In the photo, Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres signing the agreement. In the back (left to right), Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, US President Bill Clinton, PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat, US Secretary of State Warren Christopher, Mahmoud Abbas | Credit: Avi Ohaion, GPO

Suicide attack in bus line 5, Dizengoff street, Tel Aviv, October 19, 1994, which claimed the lives of 22 Israelis with 104 injured | Photo: Shaul Golan

■ Our Research Department

IDSF-Habithonistim's research department has made its mission to serve as a resounding, forthright and relevant voice in the public debate in Israel, which through actionable research provides the public and the decision-makers with the necessary tools to tackle an evolving political-security reality, while instilling the State of Israel's principles and values of national security to ensure prospers for generations to come as the nation state of the Jewish people.

We promote a substantive, professional and inviting dialogue that views the principles and values of Zionism and Israel's national security as an unquestionable point of departure. These include Israel's identity as a Jewish and democratic state; its basis in the Zionist vision; national security that is built inside-out and from which the principles of governance and sovereignty are derived; full Israeli security command of the entire territory; peace through strength; the cultivation of human capital, and a people's army model.

The department operates on two complementary planes: research and its communication. We provide reports, research and position papers concerning our core issues, combined with professional recommendations. This research is made accessible to the public and to decision makers alike, on various platforms – from meetings with decision-makers through media appearances to open lectures and social media posts.

We see the illumination and training of the public – and the young generation in particular – as our guiding light.

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Director of Research: Brigadier General (Res.) Yossi Kuperwasser

Among our researchers: Maj. Gen. (res.) Gershon Hacohen, Brig. Gen. (res.) Oren Solomon, Col. (res.) Ronen Itzik, Lt. Col. (res.) Maurice Hirsch, Lt. Col. (res.) Dr. Mordechai Keidar, Dr. Martin Sherman, Maj. (res.) Lilach Ashtar, Dr. Omer Dostri, Yoram Ettinger, David M. Weinberg, Adv. Eli Kirschenbaum, Atar Porat, Yadin Amiel, Ahikam Himmelfarb.

Oslo: Calamity and Mendacity – How the political echelon ignored all the warning lights on its way to the Nobel Prize

Or Yissachar **25**

“For their part, the Israeli political and security echelons fell into a recurrent optical adjustment of the reality before their eyes and refused to perceive reality correctly for fear of “spoiling the party”. Thus, indirectly, they allowed the security situation to deteriorate at the cost of thousands of Israeli casualties. both the Palestinians and senior Arab officials elsewhere were astonished that Israel trusted Arafat and brought him in from abroad rather than relying on local leadership. None of the telltale indications stopped the Israeli government on its way to initiating self-imposed disaster. In the period following the Oslo Accords, there were 9.3 times as many Israelis killed and injured in terror attacks as there were during the entire period from Israel’s foundation to Oslo.”

What does the Israeli public think? A special poll on the 30th anniversary of the signing of the Oslo Accords

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“64% of Israelis believe that the Oslo Accords caused damage to state security. Just 11% of Israelis believe that the Oslo Accords brought Israelis and Palestinians closer. 53% of Israelis believe that interim solutions exist that are somewhere in-between ‘two states for two peoples’ and a ‘binational state’. 77% of Israelis believe that stopping incitement against Israel must be a precondition for any peace process with the Palestinians. Just 11% of Israelis are ready to accept Israeli civilian casualties resulting from terrorist attacks perpetrated while efforts are being made to reach a permanent agreement with the Palestinians.”

The Road to Oslo - On the National Decision-Making Process

Brigadier General (res) Oren Solomon **43**

“The Prime Minister did not involve the Intelligence Corps in the negotiation process. He even kept them out of the loop. Even when the Accords had been reached and the IDF and Intelligence Corps presented their assessment regarding implementation of its provisions, their opinion was rejected while disregarding their claims outright, not always based on a reasoned explanation or argument, but rather based on translating their wishful thinking into an agreement.”

Developments in the Israeli Society’s Regard of the Palestinians – Qualitative Research on a Focus Group

Colonel (res) Ronen Itsik **50**

“How does Israeli society regard the effects of the Oslo Process from a 30-year perspective? The Oslo process left a considerable impact on Israeli society, most of which regards control of the Judea and Samaria territories to be a definite security imperative, and regards the residents to be a legitimate population forming an important pillar of principles and security. This perception is a significant change compared with opinion toward a peace process with the Palestinians in the 1990s.”

Shards of Oslo: Reminiscences from the Palestinian Architect of the Oslo Accords, Abu Alaa

Lieutenant Colonel (res) Baruch Yedid **63**

“In Abu Alaa’s view, many of Israel’s leaders ‘wanted to cut the ribbon’ concluding the Oslo process... Israelis and Palestinians should have been left to negotiate directly, without American mediation... Per Arafat, This is the first time in history that Palestinians are changing direction.”

30 Years Since Oslo: The Settlement Enterprise and the Expansion of the Jewish Population of Judea and Samaria

Major (res) Lilach Eshtar **69**

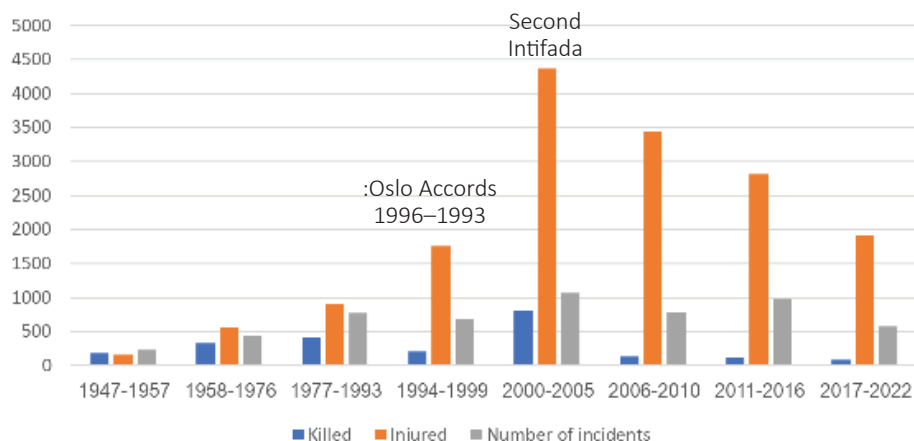
“The construction of a system of transportation from Judea and Samaria to the centers of employment in Israel was the primary cause that stimulated population growth and serves until today as the most significant factor motivating people to move to these areas. There are even those who would say that the physical linkage of Judea and Samaria to central Israel was the first phase of the slow process in which the settlement enterprise made its way into the Israeli public consensus.”

Three Decades Post-Oslo Accords: Israel's Approach to Combating Terrorism in Judea and Samaria

Dr. Omer Dostri **73**

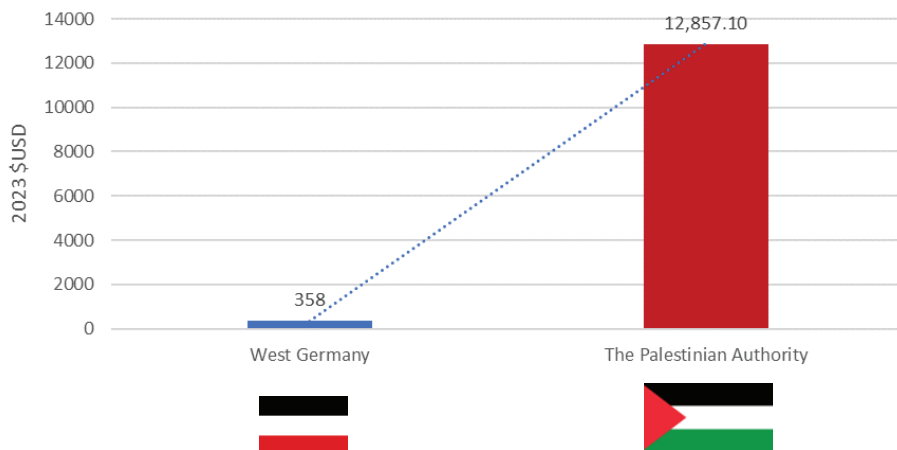
“Despite the continuing terrorist attacks, the IDF did not alter its course of action. the IDF and the security apparatus faced considerable challenges in countering terrorism and establishing a favorable tactical and operational position. This difficulty arose because the IDF and security organizations lacked a significant presence and control on the ground. it is only in extensive military operations, where the IDF can effectively encircle the area and respond swiftly, that there is a realistic chance of substantially dismantling most of the terrorist organizations' military infrastructure, disrupting the senior leadership, and neutralizing the leadership and operatives who form the core of the enemy's strength.”

Civilians killed and wounded by enemy action, and number of incidents since the state's founding, by period



“The statistics reveal a sharp uptick in the annual quantity of fatalities and injuries following the Oslo Accords. The figures are shocking: During the 11 years following the Oslo Accords — that is to say, the years of the 1990s during and after the agreements, plus the Second Intifada — 1,018 Israelis were murdered in terrorist operations, amounting to 2.4 times as many as in all the 15 years preceding the Accords. **between 1994 and 2022 there were 9.3 times as many Israelis killed and injured in terror attacks as there were during the entire period between the foundation of Israel until Oslo.**”

International contributions per capita to West Germany under the Marshall Plan vs. international contributions to the Palestinian Authority since the Oslo Accords (in 2023 US dollars)



“The Palestinian Authority was rewarded with a series of amenities for the sake of fulfilling its original purpose. International legitimacy, good will, and even perceptible eagerness from the Israeli side for enabling it to succeed, alongside unprecedented financial support. The Palestinians received 35.9 more international financial aid per capita than West Germany after World War II. But while Germany today is a thriving country, with the world’s fourth largest economy, and is Europe’s economic leader, ranked ninth in the global human development index, the Palestinian Authority has left the Palestinians far behind.”

"Israel found itself falling into line with the international community, which has drawn so much fire — largely justified — for analyzing the Israeli–Palestinian conflict unrealistically, instead of initiating a local process while diagnosing an appropriate leadership and standing firm on Israel's security interests and a decision-making process worth of such a historic decision. Oslo is in fact an excellent example of a sharp, rapid paradigm shift, a possibly unprecedented swing of the State of Israel's pendulum from legally prohibiting contacts with the Palestine Liberation Organization to embracing it as the nation's partner for peace. Worse yet, when it emerged beyond any doubt that Arafat was not peace-minded, the Israeli government slipped into confirmation bias 'on steroids'. Rather than slowing as it neared the precipice, it stepped on the gas."

Or Yissachar



Washington, DC. USA, 13th September, 1993. Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin of Israel (left) and Palestine Liberation Organization chairman, Yasser Arafat (right), with President Bill Clinton (middle), shake hands after signing the Peace Accords

Photo: Mark Reinstein, Shutterstock.com

“Those close to Rabin testified that he ‘considered withdrawing from the Oslo Accords when the nature of the Palestinian Authority became clear to him, as well as for other reasons.’ Abu Alaa said to his own people that ‘he never encountered any such indication and it never occurred to him that Rabin sought to withdraw from the Accords.’”

Lt. Col. (Res.) Baruch Yedid



Left to right: Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat and US Secretary of State Warren Christopher trying to convince Arafat to sign the maps of the Cairo Agreement | Credit: Tsvika Israeli, GPO

The real story in my opinion, however, can be found in Ariel Sharon’s understanding, when serving as Housing and Construction Minister, that transportation in Judea and Samaria is not important just for settler safety but also for ensuring Israel’s hold of the territory. The Rabin government essentially adopted the plans that had already been approved, completed projects that had already begun, and even planned new roads using the same platform that had been initiated under the Shamir government. The swift construction and the fact that certain roads already existed directly contributed to the rapid population growth during those years. There are even those who would say that the physical linkage of Judea and Samaria to central Israel was the first phase of the slow process in which the settlement enterprise made its way into the Israeli public consensus.”

Maj. (res) Lilach Eshtar



Road 60 – dubbed “Tunnel Road” above the Gilo Stream, May 2022

The Oslo Accords aimed toward the idea of a “New Middle East”, in which peace and good neighborly relations would prevail with a robust Palestinian Authority having a monopoly on power and which would be demilitarized. This would be the case while denying the Palestinian demands for an independent state, division of Jerusalem and return of refugees. However, and not only in hindsight, as early as the negotiations themselves, senior members of the Israel security forces expressed doubts as to the ability to fulfill the expectations expressed by Peres and Rabin and to make them a reality.

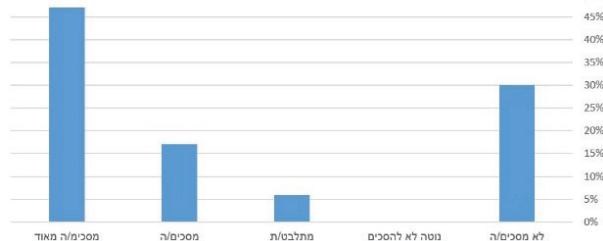
Brig. Gen. (res) Oren Solomon



The bus line 5 suicide bombing attack in Dizengoff street, Tel Aviv, October 19, 1994. The attack claimed the lives of 22 people and injured 104 | Photo: Shaul Golan

“The relations between the Palestinians and Israelis could be characterized by the fact that in reality the two communities became physically separated: from a borderless reality in which Israelis had visited Palestinian cities and many Palestinians worked in Israel’s cities¹, to a state where mutual trust had hit rock-bottom, murderous terrorist attacks were increasing in their ferocity, de-facto borders had physically separated the populations including a formidable obstacle being built and reduction of the IDF presence within the Palestinian territories compared to the past.”

Col. (res) Ronen Itsik



Eretz. A, 2023, <https://www.globes.co.il/news/article.aspx?did=1001444173> 1

“Firstly, the agreements allowed significant figures associated with terrorism, including Yasser Arafat, chairman of the Fatah movement, to gain influence and control over these territories. This occurred instead of fostering and developing local leadership, whether centralized or rooted in tribal and district structures within Gaza and Judea and Samaria. Secondly, the IDF's withdrawal from these territories weakened its ability to prepare, respond, and take proactive measures against terrorism aimed at Israel. This withdrawal left a security gap. Thirdly, the influx of Palestinian terrorists, combined with the IDF's withdrawal, significantly bolstered the military and terrorist capabilities of Palestinians, both in the cities of Judea and Samaria and the Gaza Strip.”

Dr. Omer Dostri



The “Defensive Shield” Operation that led to demolition of terrorism infrastructure around PA-controlled territories by the IDF. In the photo – IDF troops operating in the Jenin Refugee Camp

Photo: IDF Spokesperson

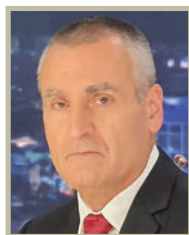
About the authors



Brigadier General (res) Oren Solomon served as Head of Division for Israel's Security Doctrine and Use of Force at the National Security Council in the Prime Minister's Office. He held a broad range of senior command positions at the IDF's operational core, among them: Head of Office of northern command commander (Maj. General in Res) Benny Gantz; Commander of the Southern Arena of the Operations Brigade; Commander of the 11th Armored Brigade; Division Chief of Staff and Deputy Commander of the National Training Center of Ground Forces. He currently serves in a senior operational position in the Gaza Division. Brig. Gen. (res.) Solomon is national-level a researcher and expert on national security, strategy and decision-making processes. Academic Education: PhD studies in Political Science, Israel's Security Doctrine, Bar Ilan University, Israel Graduate Diploma, Directors & Executives Training Program, Ben Gurion University, Israel; Masters, Security and Diplomacy, Tel Aviv University; LLB., The College of Management.



Colonel (res) Ronen Itsik is the former commander of the Reserve Armored Brigade (Harel), and the author of the book, "The Man in the Tank." He paved his military career by climbing the ranks of the IDF Armored Corps, among others, as commander of the 77th Battalion in the 7th Armored Brigade, and commander of the Harel 10 reserves Armored Brigade, which he continued to command during his reserves service. During his command, the brigade was awarded the Chief of Military Staff's Award for outstanding performance. In his last permanent service position, Col. Itzik served as chief of staff over the Pillar of Fire ("Amud HaEsh") division – a Northern Command division – and during Operation Protective Edge he served in reserve duty as part of the 7th Armored Brigade. After completing his service with the IDF, Col. Itzik became a research fellow at the Menachem Begin Heritage Center, as well as a lecturer on management sciences at the Academion Intellect College. Later he became a civics and history teacher at the Gaon Ha'yarden high school in Northern Israel, and the director of the Etgarim educational program for the leadership and empowerment of teachers. Academic degrees: B.A. in economics from the College of Management; M.A. in political science from the University of Haifa; PhD studies in social sciences from the University of Haifa.



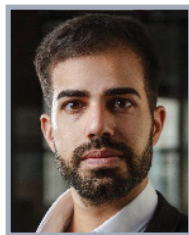
Lieutenant Colonel (res) Baruch Yedid is former commander and advisor to the Civil Administration and the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories Unit (COGAT), and currently a commentator for Channel 14. Lt. Col. Baruch Yadid speaks fluent Arabic and his written work draws on his extensive experience in the Palestinian arena, including ongoing contact with sources on the ground as well as with senior Palestinian officials. He graduated the IDF Command and Staff College with distinction, and holds a BA degree in History and Middle East Studies from the Bar Ilan University.



Major (res) Lilach Eshtar is among the founders of the Nimrod community in the Golan Heights. She used to be a political strategic advisor, and in this capacity she played a central role in campaigns led by government ministries and authorities. Serves as an Area Defense officer in the northern border, was appointed as the Hiram Formation – Brigade 769 Area Defense officer, and the Ghajar village's barrier commander.



Dr. Omer Dostri is a specialist in defense strategy, military, and national security. He has served as a research assistant at the Center for Middle East Studies at Ariel University, the Institute for National Security Studies, and the Yuval Ne'eman Workshop for Science, Technology and Security at Tel Aviv University. Dostri holds a Ph.D. in Political Studies from Bar-Ilan University and previously completed a master's degree in political studies from Tel-Aviv University.



Or Yissachar is a national security researcher and team lead in the Israeli high-tech industry, serving as IDSF-Habithonistim's Head of Research Department and Director of Content. Or has served in the Intelligence Corps' elite 8200 unit and speaks 5 languages, including French and Persian. Or's researches focus on Iran, Israel's security strategy vis-à-vis the Arab World, and the Palestinian front. Furthermore, he researches the European Union's and the United States' security strategies. Or believes in integrating divine and earthly, and on top of his research work and high-tech career he is a concert pianist and a composer. Academic qualifications: MA, the International Security Program from the Paris School of International Affairs (PSIA), Sciences Po; BA, Piano Performance and Musicology, the Buchmann-Mehta School of Music, Tel Aviv University.

Yitzhak Rabin's Outline of Principles for the Oslo Accords

Gershon HaCohen

As opposed to Ben-Gurion, Yitzhak Rabin left no diary behind, no detailed documentation of the considerations in play as he lead the Oslo Accords process. However, on October 5, 1995, in his last address to the Israeli Parliament ahead of approving the Oslo II Accord, he presented a conceptual outline with emphasis on four principles:

1. Working to achieve “a State of Israel as a Jewish State, with a minimum of 80% Jewish citizens”.
2. “Jerusalem, unified and including Ma’ale Adumim and Givat Zeev as the Capital of Israel under Israeli sovereignty”.
3. “The security border for defending the State of Israel will be demarcated in the Jordan Valley in the broadest sense of this term”.
4. Regarding a Palestinian state: “This is going to be an entity that falls short of being a state, but which will independently manage the lives of the Palestinians under its jurisdiction”.

These principles were a manifestation of Rabin's loyalty to the legacy of his erst-while commander, Yigal Alon. Along the unresolved faultline between Jewish affinity to the Biblical Lands, with their inherent indispensability in terms of security, and the desire to end Israeli domination of Palestinians living in these lands, Rabin remained true to the best of MAPAI traditions when he presented a compromise outline consisting of “some of this and some of that”. Efforts to retain Jewish settlement blocs in the Gaza Strip and Judea and Samaria, while also aiming to transfer a sizable portion of the region to Palestinian Authority control. Readiness to grant the Palestinians space for sovereign rule, while at the same time insisting that the Palestinian Authority will ultimately be an “entity that falls short of being a state”.

Under the guidelines of this concept, the bulk of the territories in which most of the Palestinian population was living got handed over to the Palestinian Authority. As early as May 1994 the IDF withdrew from all the territories in the Gaza Strip with the exception of the Jewish settlements, and this space was handed over to the newly-established Palestinian Authority's rule. In January 1996, all the Palestinians living in Judea and Samaria, who were in Areas A and B, were also transferred under Palestinian Authority rule. Yitzhak Rabin was murdered, however within three months of the Knesset's approval of Oslo II, Rabin's vision of ending Israeli control over most of the Palestinians had been fulfilled in its entirety. Ever since, the vast majority of the Palestinians between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea are no longer under Israeli rule. With the establishment of the Palestinian Authority

and the transfer of 90% of the residents of Judea and Samaria to its control, Yitzhak Rabin eliminated the demographic threat that had jeopardized the future of the State of Israel as a Jewish democratic state. Those who seek further withdrawals in Judea and Samaria in the name of disengagement, ignore what Yitzhak Rabin had achieved as early as January 1996, by which time he had completed the entirety of possible disengagement.

From then on, the dispute over East Jerusalem has persisted, as well as the region within Judea and Samaria which has been designated as Area C. This region includes all the Jewish settlements, IDF bases, the main roads, the vital dominating areas, and the open space descending toward the Jordan Valley. These spaces, which had been outlined personally by Yitzhak Rabin, constitute the space Israel requires for its existence and defense. Any further concession will undermine the territorial fundamentals necessary for defending the State of Israel.

■ Abandoning the Rabin Principles

The underpinning of Yitzhak Rabin's approach was that the Oslo Accords should be perceived as a process between Israel and the Palestinians, which was taking place with the expectation of reciprocal rewards. However on the Palestinian side, both in the Palestinian Authority and in Hamas, the realization of the power of blackmailing they possessed gradually solidified: The more urgent it became for the State of Israel to disengage as a matter of national interest, the better the Palestinians were positioned to exact an ever more exorbitant price, and of course to reject any agreement to the trajectory of the Rabin Outline.

Thus did all of Rabin's principles implode in Camp David, in the summer of 2000, when Prime Minister Ehud Barak strove to reach a final settlement with the Palestinians, and all the more so in Taba later on. The Rabin Outline was supplanted by the Clinton Outline, which set forth new, far-reaching principles for a "two-state solution", which included: division of Jerusalem, relinquishing of Israeli control of the Jordan Valley, land swaps in exchange for the "settlement blocs" which, cumulatively, amount to no more than 3-6 percent of the entire territory of Judea and Samaria and the Jordan Valley, and Israeli agreement to a fully-sovereign Palestinian state. This new baseline also underpinned the map proposed by Prime Minister Ehud Olmert at the Annapolis Conference of November 2007. Anyone that had, on the other hand, endorsed the outline presented by Rabin in October 1995, would surely have found it hard to agree to any further steps leading to the Clinton, Barak and Olmert outlines.

■ Collapse of the Hope for Global Peace

Meanwhile, in the thirty years that have passed since then, everything has changed. At the core of Yitzhak Rabin's agreement to enter into the Oslo process were assumptions which, while not having been given official wording, nonetheless shaped the consciousness of the leaders of the free world at the time. Over the years all these assumptions have been debunked.

The atmosphere pervading those early days of Oslo indeed brought historic good tidings. The Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact had disintegrated. The threat of the Cold War had been lifted from Europe. Germany had been reunited. The United States attained an unprecedented status of hegemony as a world power and the world seemed to be heading into a period of stability and prosperity, into a global order.

The Arabs at the time were mired in crisis and inferiority, accentuated by the American victory over Iraq in the First Gulf War of winter 1991.

Under these conditions there was room for hopes of a regional peace in the Middle East as well. But since then, everything has changed. Iran's power is in ascendance. Radical Islamic forces from Afghanistan to Yemen, from Syria to Libya have learned how, despite their inferiority, they possess sufficient fighting potential to perpetually disrupt any move toward stability the West so desperately seeks.

The outbreak of the Russian war in Ukraine has rekindled existential anxieties in the heart of peaceful Europe. With the re-emergence of war in the West's consciousness, the hope for world peace has been shaken and replaced with doomsday scenarios.

With all this as a backdrop, the weakening of the United States' standing in the Middle East over this past decade has undermined one of the key pillars on which the entire Oslo process had relied. Under such circumstances, Yitzhak Rabin would most likely have recommended that the entire set of assumptions underpinning the Oslo accords be re-evaluated.

■ The Rabin Outline as a strategy for the Netanyahu governments

There is a common Arab saying that “nothing is better than what is”. The saying teaches that even in a situation that appears to be a crisis situation, reality is also a driver for good. This is what we see, for example, when considering how Jewish settlement in Judea and Samaria has developed since Oslo. Within a single decade, Jewish settlement there doubled from 116,500 in 1993 to 230,000 in 2003. The Rabin government’s unprecedented efforts in building the road network in Judea and Samaria were a critical factor driving the settlement momentum. Roads included the Tunnel Route to Gush Etzion and the bypass roads- the “lifelines”: Ramallah bypass, Halhoul bypass, and the main road to Ari’el. In this sense, the legacy Rabin left behind is a far cry from the image the radical Left sought to paint of him as a “prophet of peace”.

With a view to the present and the future, the Rabin Outline, as presented in October 1995, with the demarcations of Area C and designation of the settlements spread throughout it as being vital to Israel’s security, has effectively become the basic outline dictating strategy for the Netanyahu governments in the Palestinian arena.

Oslo: Calamity and Mendacity

How the political echelon ignored all the warning lights on its way to the Nobel Prize

Or Yissachar

This compilation throws light on angles that have not been heard of, regarding a topic that has been endlessly heard and echoed: the Oslo Accords. The bafflement that Oslo arouses is real: How could the State of Israel have entered into such a destructive adventure at its own instigation, through a decision-making process so inadequate, with consequences that we feel clearly to this day? How could it be that after the drug of illusion and the atmosphere of peace quickly wore off among bus explosions and attacks of gunfire — and despite all the clear indications, the stop signs and warning signals — Israel's government proceeded past the bright red light and forced itself into a diplomatic-strategic, societal, and security disaster on a national and historic scale?

The diplomatic process with the Palestinians is not a zero-sum game. Navigating a historic process in compliance with Israel's security interests and national needs requires leadership and deep understanding of the reality facing us, not pursuing a scenario disconnected from that reality. The choice is not between "continuing to control another people" and inviting a diplomatic and security disaster for both Israel and the Palestinians. The process required here is one of systematic and well-informed decision-making, while preparing the Israeli public's attitude regarding a topic, so critical and historic, that touches on personal and national security in the deepest way. It is no less important to initiate and expect a process of preparing the Palestinian public to choose a different leadership, comprising people of good will — or at least negotiators who may be tough but are not murderous.

It must be noted that the decision-makers' diagnosis pointed in the direction that most Israelis favor — administrative and civil separation between Israelis and Palestinians with a view to creating an avenue toward a future permanent arrangement that will end the interim phenomenon of martial law for millions of Palestinians but will not take the form of a state. Those were the principles that Yitzhak Rabin outlined in his vision of a permanent agreement, during his last speech at the Knesset, on October 5, 1995, a month before his assassination: a united Jerusalem, control over strategic stretches of Judea and Samaria, Israeli sovereignty in the inclusive sense over the Jordan Valley. The situation of "limping along" as we are, with the Arabs of Judea, Samaria, and Gaza managing their own lives at the local level but subject in practice to the approval of the IDF's heads of the central and southern commands, as well as the Civil Administration, was untenable.

Consider the prognosis, though. Oslo was a process so completely dissociated from the situation in the field as to surprise local Palestinians, Jordanians, and Americans. The international community proceeded to embrace Arafat, and he became the recognized representative of the Palestinian people in Europe's halls of power and in international forums. Maj. Gen. (Res.) Yaakov Amidror, who headed the Research Division in the Intelligence Corps and was involved in the discussions of the Oslo Accords, testified that both the Palestinians and senior Arab officials elsewhere were astonished that Israel trusted Arafat and brought him in from abroad rather than relying on local leadership. In his book, Efraim Karsh relates that a two-thirds majority of the Palestinian people would have preferred Jordan's King Hussein as ruler rather than Yasser Arafat¹. But in another book, Vincent Nouzille describes the pressure applied by France on the Israeli government in favor of accepting Arafat, who was already a welcome visitor in all the states of Europe, as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people². Instead of initiating a locally based process and firmly defending its security interests, Israel found itself falling into line with the international community, which has drawn so much fire — largely justified — for analyzing the Israeli–Palestinian conflict unrealistically.

Oslo is in fact an excellent example of a sharp, rapid paradigm shift, a possibly unprecedented swing of the State of Israel's pendulum from legally prohibiting contacts with the Palestine Liberation Organization to embracing it as the nation's partner for peace.

■ An optical adjustment of reality: How the State of Israel stepped on the gas instead of the brakes

Since its establishment in 1994, the Palestinian Authority — created by the Oslo Accords with the intent that as administrator of Palestinian self-rule it would prevent violence and promote peace — received every opportunity to fulfill its purpose. In fact, however, it proved in a number of ways that it is not inclined toward peace and certainly not toward improving the lives of the Palestinians. For their part, the Israeli political and security echelons fell into a recurrent optical adjustment of the reality before their eyes and refused to perceive reality correctly for fear of “spoiling the party”. Thus, indirectly, they allowed the security situation to deteriorate at the cost of thousands of Israeli casualties.

1 Efraim Karsh, The Oslo Disaster (Hebrew edition), Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, 2016, p. 15.

2 Histoires Secrètes: France-Israël (1948-2018), Les Liens Qui Libèrent.

The Palestinian Authority was rewarded with a series of amenities for the sake of fulfilling its original purpose. International legitimacy, good will, and even perceptible eagerness from the Israeli side for enabling it to succeed, alongside unprecedented financial support. In fact, if we calculate only the American aid to the Palestinian Authority through USAID, without UNRWA and other pipelines, then between 1994 and 2018 the USA invested 2.6 times as much per capita in the Palestinians as it invested in the Germans under the Marshall Plan in 1945–1952 to rehabilitate West Germany after World War II³. While total contributions to West Germany under the Marshall Plan reached 17.9 billion dollars, the Palestinian Authority has already received roughly 45 billion dollars — 35.9 times as much per capita!⁴

But while Germany today is a thriving country, with the world's fourth largest

3 German population according to the West German census of 1950, which counted 50 million people after a wave of at least 8 million German refugees from East Europe increased the population by approximately 20%. The previous census, from 1946, is considered insufficiently reliable. Source: Rainer Münz and Ralf E. Ulrich, "Changing Patterns of Immigration to Germany, 1945-1997," Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, <https://migration.ucdavis.edu/rs/more.php?id=69>

Palestinian population: Yoram Ettinger, "Palestinian demographic inflation and the Jewish demographic momentum" (in Hebrew), <https://www.xn--7dbl2a.com/2021/06/02/יורם-אטינגר-ניפוח-דמוגרפי-פלסטיני-ומו-#sthash.xPipevUS.Kc7U8pMG.dpbs>

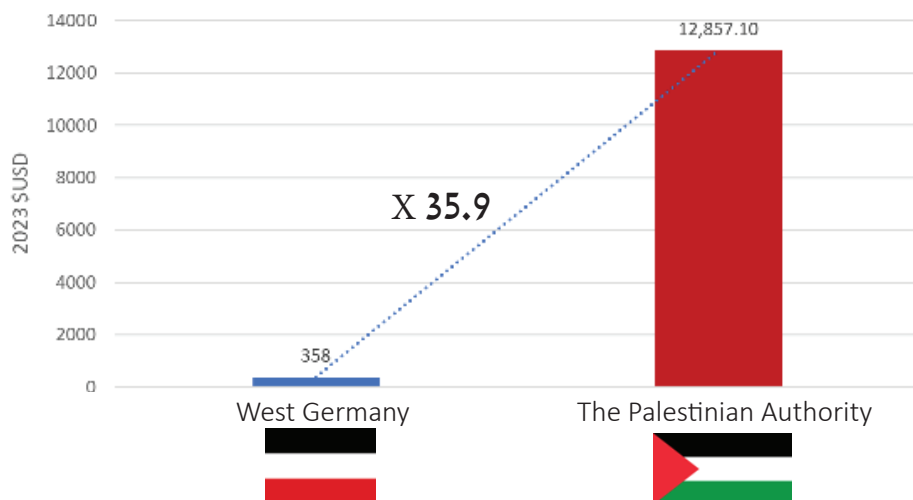
The USA contributed 4.3 billion dollars to West Germany, amounting to a value of 29.6 billion dollars as adjusted to 2005, during the years of direct martial law (1945–1949), and during the overlapping years of the Marshall Plan (1948/1949–1952). The sum comes to \$592 per capita. Source: EveryCRSReport, U.S. Occupation Assistance: Iraq, Germany, and Japan Compared, updated to 29 January 2008, <https://www.everycrsreport.com/reports/RL33331.html>

The USA contributed more than 5.2 billion dollars to the Palestinians through the USAID program between 1994 and 2018, not including contributions under other auspices such as UNRWA. The sum comes to \$1542.8 per capital. Figures were originally published by the American Consulate in Jerusalem. Source: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/how-much-aid-does-the-us-give-palestinians-and-whats-it-for/>, <https://palwatch.org/page/13734>

4 Total contributions to West Germany under the Marshall Plan are calculated at 1.448 billion dollars. Source, ResearchGate, in Jose Carrasco-Gallego, "The Marshall Plan and the Spanish postwar economy: A welfare loss analysis," February 2012, https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Countries-included-in-the-Marshall-Plan-and-amounts-of-aid-received-NotesAmounts-in_fig14_227373030; converted to 2023 dollars, 17.9 billion dollars; from <https://www.in2013dollars.com>, updated to August 2023; the sum comes to \$358 per capita.

All the international contributions to the Palestinians, including contributions to the Palestinian Authority's budget, to UNRWA, to development projects, and through other channels, came to approximately 45.02 billion dollars between 1993 and 2021. From the OECD figures <https://stats.oecd.org/qwids/#?x=2&y=6&f=3:51,4:1,1:1,5:3,7:1&q=3:51+4:1+1:1,2,25,26,77+5:3+7:1+2:1,134+6:1993,1994,1995,1996,1997,1998,1999,2000,2001,2002,2003,2004,2005,2006,2007,2008,2009,2010,2011,2012,2013,2014,2015,2016,2017,2018,2019,2020,2021> — the sum comes to \$12,957.1 per capita.

International contributions per capita to West Germany under the Marshall Plan vs. international contributions to the Palestinian Authority since the Oslo Accords (in 2023 US dollars)



None of the telltale indications stopped the Israeli government on its way to initiating self-imposed disaster. In Johannesburg, roughly half a year after the September 1993 understandings were signed, Arafat declared in a speech that Jerusalem in its entirety is the eternal capital of Palestine — a stand echoed even today by senior Palestinian Authority officials who are labelled moderate — and that jihad must continue until Jerusalem is conquered. He likened the Oslo Agreements not to a sincere peace process but to the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah — a temporary ceasefire between the Prophet Muhammad and the tribe of the Quraysh following which Muhammad slaughtered them.

When Arafat entered Jericho in 1994, members of Fatah and the PFLP confronted him over détente with Israel but he promised them that the Palestinian Authority would be a "sulta muharriba" ("fighting authority"). In his Arabic-language speeches, Arafat called for sending "a million martyrs to Jerusalem." In his speeches at the White House, in his Nobel Prize speech at Stockholm, and in interviews with the English-language media, Arafat sounded like a completely different leader, a peaceful one.

Arafat's very arrival in Gaza included a violation of the Oslo Accords. He was hiding a wanted terrorist in his car. Prime Minister Rabin seethed with anger but continued with the Accords: "We will proceed toward peace as if there were no terror, and fight terror as if there were no peace process." Even Arafat's founding of the Tanzim organization in order to blur the traces of his ties to terrorism, even the green light he gave to Hamas and to the PFLP for terror attacks, and even the repeated warnings from the security establishment were no help, at that time, in improving the Israeli government's understanding.

Worse yet, when it emerged beyond any doubt that Arafat was not peace-minded, the Israeli government slipped into confirmation bias "on steroids." Rather than slowing as it neared the precipice, it stepped on the gas. Lacking a majority in the Knesset, the minority government persuaded two legislators to switch sides in return for political bribes. In the absence of broad popular approval, media such as Channel 7, which pointed out the trouble with the peace process, were shut down. When the Oslo Accords were in danger because a Supreme Court ruling threatened to break the government apart — the Meatrael ruling of 1993, which declared that a ban on the import of non-kosher meat violates the Basic Law: Freedom of Occupation — an override clause was enacted that bypassed the Supreme Court ruling. Permits to import non-kosher meat would have endangered the religious Shas party's presence in the government, and so the override clause was used and later Judge Aharon Barak ratified the override. No cow remained sacred⁵.

5 <https://mida.org.il/2023/07/13/ללמוד-מרבין-וברק-איך-להתגבר-על-בגץ/>

A senior military officer related that, while conversing with Abu Alaa and Shimon Peres, he asked whether Abu Alaa would be willing to recognize Israel as a Jewish state. Peres angrily hushed the officer: "Don't ask him such questions!" Among the leaders of the peace process, it was, and remained, typical behavior. They continued stressing that the process was creating a favorable reality, it was necessary, it was called for, it was one step away from a permanent arrangement. But the results speak for themselves, and they were generated not by the applause and smiles in front of the cameras on the White House lawn in Washington but rather in the number 5 bus on Dizengoff Street, at Beit Lid, in the number 18 bus in Jerusalem, and at many more deadly terrorist attacks. Blood was running in the streets of Israel.

In retrospect, the Israeli government can only be wondered at. Its leader and its Foreign Minister let nothing stand between them and the Nobel Prize. They did make history, but not necessarily in the praiseworthy sense.

Multidimensional flaws

On the political plane, lessons were not learned even after it became obvious that Arafat and his followers were not peace-minded. Implementation of the "Gaza and Jericho First" agreement was intended as a test, under laboratory conditions, of whether Arafat was serious about peace and whether the process was viable, but it led to the entrenchment of breeding grounds for terrorism under Palestinian control and a sharp uptick in the number of terrorist attacks, fatalities, and injuries. Nonetheless, the Israeli side continued into the Oslo II Accord with a view to completing the process and compounded the problem many times over.

This blindness characterized the entire decision-making process among Israel's diplomatic echelon with respect to Arafat and the PLO, even regarding the "cancellation" of the Palestinian Charter. Even when the Prime Minister saw clearly (as testified by military figures who were in the room with him) that the clause that called for eliminating Israel had not been removed from the Charter and that the toned-down English-language version differed from the ambiguous Arabic, the Israeli preference was to ignore reality and continue the process.

Arafat, in contrast, consolidated his gains. A recently released cabinet meeting protocol reveals Prime Minister Rabin as convinced that the Accords can be reversed if it emerges that Arafat is not complying. "With the Palestinians, the developments may be favorable but they may also be unfavorable. Everything is reversible..."⁶

But as Maj. Gen. Amidror testified, Arafat knew that his entry into the territory was irreversible whereas his promises to the Israeli government could be reversed without consequences.

6 <https://www.ynet.co.il/news/article/byqs300itn>

On the governmental plane, the decision-making process was too centralized and secretive. The Oslo Accords were the most significant diplomatic decision since the state was founded — they were a milestone similar in magnitude to 1948 when the state was proclaimed and Israel fought for its life, and to 1967 which brought the Six Day War. Nonetheless, no serious cabinet discussion was held. The IDF, including the Military Intelligence Corps, was completely out of the loop. Only with the final decision to sign the Accords, and after Shimon Peres and Mahmoud Abbas signed them on August 20, 1993, did the government convene to discuss the Accords. On August 30 there was a discussion — a discussion, not a thoroughgoing professional process. Such a decision should have gone through expert analysis by all the professional offices and passed the test of popular and legislative opinion. From first to last, "no professional was involved in it," Maj. Gen. (Res.) Amidror testified. "The process was faulty all the way down the line." But the government continued to enthusiastically promote the process even when the results were obviously far from certain. At a meeting, Minister Yossi Sarid expressed what was publicly apparent regarding the optical adjustment and the rush toward the Accords: This was "much bigger than the fate of a government because if this project collapses, then I don't see any further prospect of peace. In my opinion, if we don't enthusiastically defend this agreement, then it will be enthusiastically destroyed".⁷



And to top it off, the process was led by people with a liberal worldview facing counterparts whose backgrounds were conservative, religious, and Islamist, who clung to the fundamentalist vision of "freeing the entirety of Palestine", and whose underlying beliefs were adamant. For effective negotiations, should the only values addressed be the "transactional" ones such as technical details, rather than "protected" values such as belief in the indivisibility of the land and attachment to religions? That question invites a separate discussion.

On the political plane, the Oslo Accords awakened a deep division and the Israeli public still feels the results today. Oslo I barely passed the legislature, by a vote of 61 Knesset members against 50 opposed and 8 abstaining, while Oslo II scraped through with even more difficulty, with 61 in support and 59 opposed but only after the coalition "turned" two members of the opposition. The importance of that historic decision can hardly be overemphasized, but it passed in the Knesset by a paper-thin majority. A year before the Oslo Accords, in 1992, the Basic Law: The Knesset was amended to stipulate that the Knesset's term cannot be extended by a majority of less than 80 members. Such a fateful historic step as the Oslo Accords was ratified by a much smaller majority, and a questionable one.

⁷ <https://www.ynet.co.il/news/article/byqs300itn>

Note in addition that from the founding of the state until Oslo, Israel's political system was relatively stable; but since then, **every Knesset has dissolved prematurely rather than serving out its term**⁸.

Knesset	Early elections?	Knesset's term (months)
1	Yes	30
2	No	47
3	No	51
4	Yes	21
5	No	50
6	No	47
7	No	50
8	Yes	40
9	Yes	49
10	Yes	37
11	No	51
12	Yes	43
13	Yes	47
14	Yes	35
15	Yes	44
16	Yes	38
17	Yes	34
18	Yes	47
19	Yes	25
20	Yes	48
21	Yes	4

 More than four years
 Less than four years

* The 32nd government, the 2nd Knesset, the 6th Knesset, and the 18th Knesset lasted 47 months. The 2nd and 6th Knessets completed their intended terms whereas the 18th Knesset dissolved before finishing its term. Accordingly, the 32nd government also finished its term before that. They have been categorized as "more than four years" because the difference in time is relatively negligible. As of this writing, the 34th government is a transitional government. The length of its term is calculated as of the end of October 2019.

Knesset	Government	Prime Minister	Government's term (months)
1	1	David Ben-Gurion	19
	2	David Ben-Gurion	11
	3	David Ben-Gurion	14
2	4	David Ben-Gurion	13
	5	Moshe Sharett	17
	6	Moshe Sharett	4
3	7	David Ben-Gurion	26
	8	David Ben-Gurion	23
	9	David Ben-Gurion	22
4	10	David Ben-Gurion	19
	11	Levi Eshkol	17
	12	Levi Eshkol	12
5	13	Levi Eshkol	21
	14	Golda Meir	8
6	15	Golda Meir	50
	16	Golda Meir	2
	17	Yitzhak Rabin	36
7	18	Menachem Begin	49
	19	Menachem Begin	26
	20	Yitzhak Shamir	11
8	21	Shimon Peres	25
	22	Yitzhak Shamir	26
	23	Yitzhak Shamir	17
9	24	Yitzhak Shamir	25
	25	Yitzhak Rabin	40
	26	Shimon Peres	6
10	27	Benjamin Netanyahu	36
	28	Ehud Barak	20
	29	Ariel Sharon	23
11	30	Ariel Sharon	38
	31	Ehud Olmert	34
	32	Benjamin Netanyahu	47
12	33	Benjamin Netanyahu	25
	34	Benjamin Netanyahu	

On the societal plane, mistrust between the Israeli public and its leadership reached new depths. The government did not calm the public, did not call up the reserves and raid the pockets of terrorism, but instead waved a dismissive hand and sided with Arafat's supposed honesty and commitment to the peace process. The expression "peace victims" evoked anger among the Israeli public, which mounted demonstrations with slogans such as "I don't want to be the next in line." Rabin wrote off the settlers: "Let them spin like propellers."

⁸ From Shakuf, "Governmental instability: Only 1 out of 34 governments finished its full term: A special visual project" (in Hebrew), <https://shakuf.co.il/9346>

" There were artists who exerted themselves to infuse peace- process spirit into the public, and the "Song to Peace" became the unofficial anthem of the "peace camp" in defiance of the "warmongers." For those who'd lost loved ones, this was hardly a consolation.

The figures for the " peace victims": 9.3 times as many fatalities and injuries from enemy action after the Oslo Accords as in all the preceding years since the founding of the state.

The spectrum of Israeli public opinion provides conflicting answers to the question of whether the Oslo process was a failure or a success. In order to bridge the gap and assess the matter as objectively as possible, the statistics are what provide the best and most relevant answer to whether, following the Oslo Accords, the Israeli public experienced improved security or a security disaster.

In this section, we consider the number killed and injured and the number of terror attacks against Israel before and after the Oslo Accords.

We emphasize that those attacks were perpetrated by terrorists who emerged from a Palestinian society whose leaders remained committed to the armed struggle against Israel while conducting relations with Israel. The core of nationalism within the motivation to send a terrorist off to an attack is connected inextricably to incitement on the part of Palestinian leaders and to ideas that take hold among the populace, to their clear public support for terrorism, to the huge salaries promised in advance to terrorists, and to the feeling that the armed struggle is successfully forcing concessions from Israel. The very re-imposition on the Palestinian populace of a leadership that had been expelled from Jordan and from Lebanon to Tunisia, a leadership with a rich record of terrorist innovation on a global scale — snatching airplanes and sportsmen, attacking by gunfire, dispatching the world's first human bombs, navigating boatloads of weaponry, and setting up terrorist training camps — and the bestowal, on that leadership, of wide-ranging governmental responsibilities, weaponry, and administrative independence in a territory where they can create training grounds for terrorism without being disturbed are all closely connected with the success of that terrorist "project" that was established, astoundingly, by the Israeli government itself.

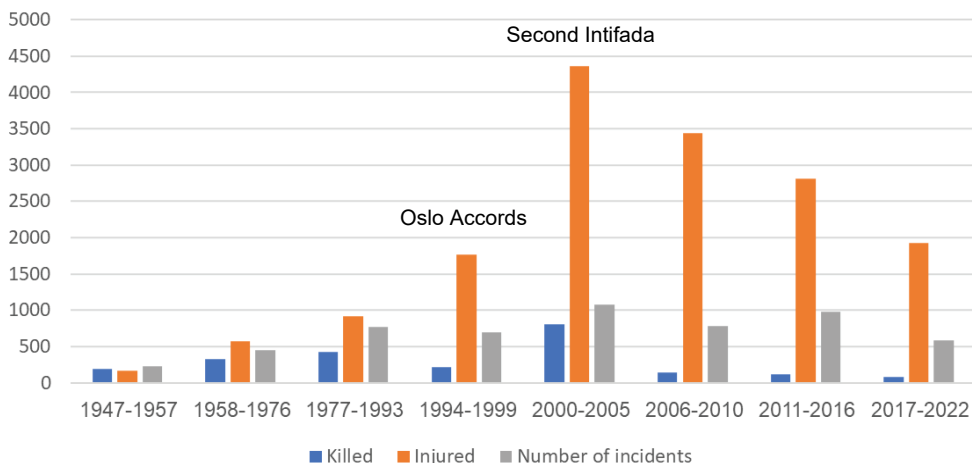
The statistics reveal a sharp uptick in the annual quantity of fatalities and injuries following the Oslo Accords. The figures are shocking: During the 11 years following the Oslo Accords — that is to say, the years of the 1990s during and after the agreements, plus the Second Intifada — 1,018 Israelis were murdered in terrorist operations, amounting to 2.4 times as many as in all the 15 years preceding the Accords. During the 2000s, there were 938 Israelis murdered in terrorist operations whereas during the 1990s there were 348 and during the 1980s there were 174. From the day the Oslo Accords were signed until the day the Labor government

fell in May of 1996, there were 210 Israelis murdered — almost 3 times as many as the annual average over the preceding 26 years. Almost two thirds of the victims were murdered in Israel, within the Green Line, amounting to 6 times the average number of victims there over the 6 preceding years when the violence of the First Intifada was concentrated outside the Green Line.

Taking the annual average, we find that between 1994 and 2022 there were 9.3 times as many Israelis killed and injured in terror attacks as there were between 1947 and 1993 (that is, all the years between the founding of the state and the Oslo Accords). From the founding of the state until the Oslo Accords, 2,579 Israelis were killed and injured by enemy action, an annual average of 56.06, whereas 15,656 were killed and injured after the Oslo Accords for an annual average of 521.8.

The results indicate that the Oslo Accords brought no improvement in security and no boost to the chance of peace, but rather the opposite. The example of Oslo may provide a lesson about Israel's faulty process of political-level decision-making, about the lack of public involvement, and about the optical adjustment made by a leadership determined to achieve results even while it is obvious, in real time, that the leadership is heading toward strategic disaster. Oslo has thus become an important lesson for the Israeli public in critical thinking regarding the way decisions on the historic scale are made that directly affect its personal safety. It is to be hoped that those lessons will be absorbed in the future.

Civilians killed and wounded by enemy action, and number of incidents since the state's founding, by period



Source: The Knesset Research and Information Center

* The table divides the spans of years according to figures presented in the study by Uri Yanay et al., Victims of Enemy Action in Israel: Injuries, needs, legislation, and administration of treatment and help, Jerusalem, National Insurance Institute (in Hebrew). The study divided the attacks into periods according to the nature of the operations.

** Each of the days on which missiles were fired on the area neighboring Gaza, and during the Second Lebanon War, was defined as a separate incident.

What does the Israeli public think? A special poll on the 30th anniversary of the signing of the Oslo Accords.

IDSF Research Department

Upon the 30th anniversary of the signing of the Oslo Accords, the IDSF research department, under the statistical supervision of Dr. Haggai Elkayam, conducted a special poll of the Israeli public regarding the decision-making process of the past, the decision-making process of the future, and how the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is now viewed with the perspective of 30 years.

The poll was conducted among 1,057 adult respondents (ages 18 and older) in Israel who use the internet and was controlled for factors such as age, gender, nationality, religiosity, and political self-identification.

For the combined sample size (1,057 respondents), the maximum margin of error is 3.01%± with a confidence level of 95%.

For the sample of Jewish respondents (858 respondents), the maximum margin of error is 3.35%± with a confidence level of 95%; for the sample of Arab respondents (199 respondents), the maximum margin of error is 6.95%± with a confidence level of 95%.

Executive Summary

■ The prospects for a future peace agreement

- 71% of Israelis agree that the State of Israel should **conduct a referendum** before signing a peace agreement with the Palestinians.
- 85% of Israelis believe that **there is no real chance of reaching a permanent arrangement** between Israel and the Palestinians (45% no chance; 38%- small chance)
- 75% of Israelis believe that there is no real chance within this generation, in any scenario, that a majority of the Palestinians will recognize Israel as the state of the Jewish people (43%- no chance; 32%- small chance)
- 13% of Israelis believe that **there is currently a partner** on the Palestinian side with whom peace negotiations could be held.
- 81% of Israelis agree that any entity that represents the Palestinians in a future peace process with Israel must represent a majority of the Palestinians in good faith and be politically stable.

There is actually confusion regarding the question of the extent (rated from 1-7) to which each of these entities represents the Palestinians (below percentages represent respondents giving a rating of 5-7)

- Hamas: 58%
- Palestinian Islamic Jihad: 39%
- Fatah: 31%
- Palestine Liberation Organization: 30%

■ A retrospective – the Oslo Accords

- 64% of Israelis believe that the Oslo Accords **caused damage to state security**.
- 63% of Israelis believe that the Oslo Accords **hurt the chances of reaching a peace agreement**.
- Who is responsible for the agreements not having moved forward the chances of reaching a permanent arrangement:
 - The Palestinian Authority: 91%
 - The Palestinian terrorist organizations: 89%
 - The international community: 79%

- The Palestinian public: 78%
 - The Israeli political echelon: 58%
 - The Israeli military echelon: 37%
 - The Israeli public: 30%
 - The settlers in Judea, Samaria, and Gaza: 20%
- 11% of Israelis believe that the Oslo Accords brought Israelis and Palestinians closer.
 - 36% of Israelis believe that the Oslo Accords contributed to the security coordination between Israel and the Palestinian Authority and helped to prevent terrorist attacks.
 - 66% of Israelis believe that the State of Israel was honest in its intentions to use the Oslo Accords as a step towards a comprehensive and continual peace agreement with the Palestinians.
 - 63% of Israelis agree that the Palestinians view the Oslo Accords as another tactical step in the campaign against the existence of the State of Israel.
 - 19% of Israelis agreed to the statement: "The Oslo Accords contributed to political stability and economic prosperity in the Middle East."

■ A Palestinian state at any cost?

- 53% of Israelis believe that **interim solutions exist** that are somewhere in-between "two states for two peoples" and a "binational state."
- 52% of Israelis believe that it is better to avoid establishing a Palestinian state, even if that means that the State of Israel will face a permanent threat to its security.

■ Preconditions for Peace

- 77% of Israelis believe that stopping incitement against Israel must be a precondition for any peace process with the Palestinians.
- 35% of Israelis believe that stopping construction in settlements must be a precondition for any peace process between Israel and the Palestinians.
- 66% of Israelis believe that Israel must stop making any payments to the Palestinian Authority as long as it keeps financing terrorists and their families.
- 75% of Israelis believe that a future peace agreement with the Palestinians must

resolve the core issues, such as the status of Jerusalem and refugees, rather than leaving them for a later agreement.

- 11% of Israelis are ready to accept Israeli civilian casualties resulting from terrorist attacks perpetrated while efforts are being made to reach a permanent agreement with the Palestinians.

Analysis of the Results

■ A Peace Agreement Only in Exchange for Security

First the “why” and then the “how”

Various questions are brought up when discussing a peace agreement with the Palestinians, such as what the agreement will include, how consensus can be reached, how much needs to be demanded from the other side, and to what extent compromises can be made.

However, there is one question that is not really discussed, and that is the most important one: “Why should a peace agreement be made?” It is the most important question because its answer serves as the foundation for the answers to the other questions.

This is the reason why the ISDF-Habithonistim poll conducted upon the 30th anniversary of the Oslo Accords asked the Israeli public whether a peace agreement with the Palestinians should be attempted at any cost. In other words, is a peace agreement a means towards the objective of improving Israel’s security or is it an end in and of itself, even at the cost of damage to the country’s security.

The results show **that 80% of the Israeli public believe that Israel needs to reach a peace agreement with the Palestinians only if doing so will contribute to Israel’s security** and its existence. On the other hand, only 20% believe that Israel should reach an agreement with the Palestinians in any case, even if doing so will place Israel in an inferior security position.

One way or the other, the Israeli public has declared clearly that reaching a peace agreement with the Palestinians is not a goal but a means to the end of improving



Israel's security. The significance of this is that an agreement that leaves Israel with indefensible borders is not one that the Israeli public is willing to accept.

■ An Agreement with a Politically Stable Entity

In the poll, we dealt with agreements that were signed three decades ago but also with potential future agreements, and we asked the public with whom it thinks a peace process should be conducted.

Most of the Israeli public (81%) agrees that any entity representing the Palestinians in a future peace process with Israel must represent a majority of the Palestinians in good faith and be politically stable.

The next question in line is: does such an entity exist? The poll illustrates that the Israeli public does not believe that one does. When we asked the public how much it believes any of the following entities represents the Palestinian public, we found that each of them provides representation only in a certain way. The PLO, which was responsible for establishing the PA, is at the bottom of the list, at 30%.

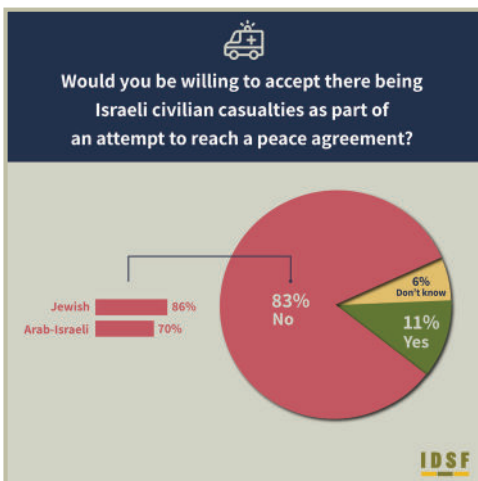


■ Willingness to Tolerate "Peace Victims"

"Peace Victims" is a term that was prevalent after the signing of the Oslo Accords and described the victims of those murdered in Palestinian terror attacks.

Upon the 30th anniversary of the signing of the Oslo Accords, we clarified with the Israeli public whether it would be willing to accept something similar, i.e., whether during an attempt to reach a peace agreement, there would be Israeli civilian casualties from terrorist attacks. The results show that a clear majority, 83%, of the public would not be willing to accept such a thing, while 11% would be willing to do so (and 6% could not decide).

The data shows that most of the Israeli



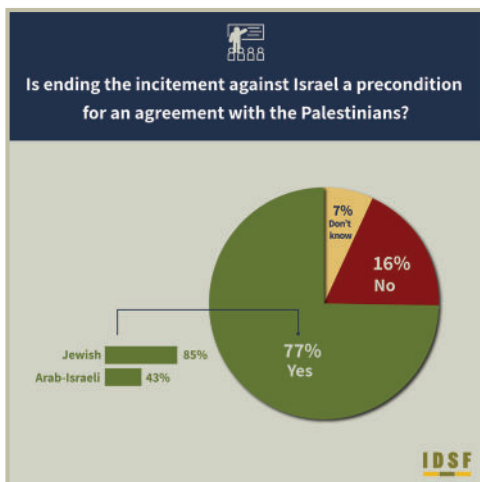
public simply understands that it is inconceivable that innocent civilians be harmed in terrorist attacks during a process that is supposed to create peace.

■ Ending incitement as a precondition

Before we even begin to talk, there is one condition that must be met. While conditions made both by the State of Israel and by the Palestinians must be discussed and gaps between the two parties must be bridged, the question must be asked, however, whether the State of Israel should insist upon certain conditions even before sitting down to talk or to sign a peace agreement?

In the poll, we asked the Israeli public whether ending the incitement against Israel should be a precondition for an agreement with the Palestinians. Most of the Israeli public (77%) believes that it should.

Segmentation by nationality shows that a significant majority, 85%, of Jewish respondents, believes that the ending of incitement should be a precondition for a peace agreement versus 43% of Arab Israelis who believe so.

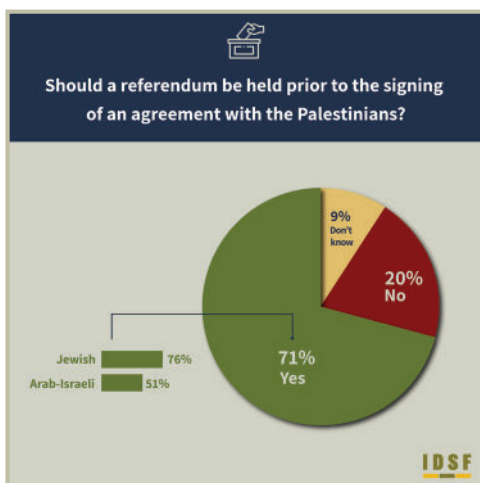


The data shows that most of the public believes that Palestinian society must change the way it thinks about Israel before the sides even sit down to talk about the content of the agreements, which would include various compromises, conditions, and obligations.

■ Referendum

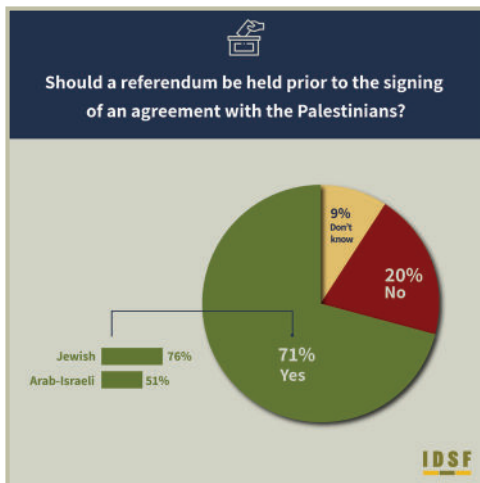
Some political decisions are irreversible. The Oslo Accords were approved by the Knesset 30 years ago with a small majority. However, while legislation and other decisions made by an elected body can be changed, repealed, or re-legislated, giving away territory is not reversible.

In the poll, we examined what the Israeli public stance would be on a future peace agreement with the Palestinians. One of the questions we asked was



whether a referendum should be conducted when making a move as controversial as giving away territory. A total of 71% believe that a referendum should be conducted, versus 20% who does not believe so (9% are undecided).

That is an interesting piece of data that could lay the groundwork for the public's willingness to speak about a peace agreement. If a final agreement were to be put up for a referendum in theory, it would ensure consensus, both from the right and the left.



The Road to Oslo - On the National Decision-Making Process

Oren Solomon

■ Abstract

The Oslo Accords¹ aroused great hopes, which ultimately ended in disillusionment for all parties. Paradoxically, although both parties - Palestinian and Israeli - blame each other for the collapse of the accords and violation of its provisions, the agreement itself has to this day maintained the convoluted relationship between Israel and the Palestinians in general, and with the Palestinian Authority that governs them. A lot has been written about the reasons for the Accords' failure and about the inability to move forward through negotiations toward greater political achievements, however this paper presents the national decision-making process perspective during the formation of the Accords, its signing, the failures which beset the process, the lessons learned and the recommendations to be made.

The Oslo Accords aimed toward the idea of a "New Middle East", in which peace and good neighborly relations would prevail with a robust Palestinian Authority having a monopoly on power and which would be demilitarized. This would be the case while denying the Palestinian demands for an independent state, division of Jerusalem and return of refugees. However, and not only in hindsight, as early as the negotiations themselves, senior members of the Israel security forces (besides objections within the political system) expressed doubts as to the ability to fulfill the expectations expressed by Peres and Rabin and to make them a reality. Thus said the then Head of Research Division in the Intelligence Corps, Brig. Gen. Yaakov Amidror²: "There was severe frustration from the fact that it was immediately obvious that part of what had been written in the Accord would not materialize in the Middle Eastern reality, and this was the observation we immediately conveyed to the Minister of Defense (Rabin)". But worse than that, as described by the Head of the Intelligence Corps at the time, General Uri Sagi³: "I had better first say that the Prime Minister did not share with me what was happening between him and Foreign Minister Peres, but several weeks beforehand I managed to find out and even understand from my sources that negotiations were underway between certain Israelis and certain Palestinians... When the first reports came in, I updated the Chief of Staff, and at first opportunity I also updated the Prime Minister".

1 A set of agreements, the first and foremost among them being the "Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements", which also became known as Oslo I Accord, which was signed in 1993 in Washington.

2 Berkowitz, A. Interview with Amidror, Yedioth Ahronoth, April 24, 1998.

3 Uri Sagi, **Lights in the Mist**, Yedioth Ahronoth Publishing, Hemed Books, 1998, pp. 186.

From these sources, one can arrive at two key insights. One the Prime Minister did not involve the Intelligence Corps in the negotiation process. He even kept them out of the loop (according to the Head of Intelligence). The second insight is that even when the Accords had been reached and the IDF and Intelligence Corps presented their assessment regarding implementation of its provisions, their opinion was rejected while disregarding their claims outright⁴, not always based on a reasoned explanation or argument, but rather based on translating their wishful thinking into an agreement.

This issue reflects the core of the research subject and the paper, namely the national decision-making process in the Oslo Accords. In this paper I will clarify the terms relevant to the study, including: National security, strategy and security concept, national decision-making process, and of course its key conclusions, the ten main ones being:

1. A peace agreement is a core issue in Israel's national security and its national security concept.
2. Between late 1992 and August 1993, Dr. Yair Hirschfeld and Dr. Ron Pundak held secret meetings with official leadership figures in the PLO.⁵
3. The principles outlined in Oslo by Pundak and Hirschfeld presented the Israeli leadership with the need to make a strategic decision.⁶
4. The Israeli leadership had no strategy for achieving the stated goal of bringing peace to the two peoples. It lacked a holistic, coherent concept defining the required overriding goal, along with the appropriate courses of action in order to achieve the goal.
5. Rabin did not involve the Security Establishment in the negotiation process⁷.
6. Even when the Security Establishment was eventually included in the negotiations, their opinion was rejected⁸. Not only that, their claims were dismissed outright, and no suitable solution was provided for the issues and problems they raised⁹.

4 Ephraim Inbar, **Rabin and Israel's National Security**, Ministry of Defense Publishing, 2004, pp. 209.

5 Dr. Ephraim Lavi, Preface, **20 Years to the Oslo Accords**, published by the Tami Steinmetz Center for Peace Research, S. Daniel Abraham Center for Strategic Dialog, 2013

6 R. Pedatzur, **20 Years to the Oslo Accords**, published by the Tami Steinmetz Center for Peace Research, S. Daniel Abraham Center for Strategic Dialog, 2013.

7 See Note 3 above.

8 See Note 2 above.

9 Ephraim Inbar, **Rabin and Israel's National Security**, Ministry of Defense Publishing, 2004, pp. 209.

7. The signing of the Oslo Accords, after the first Intifada, was tantamount to a “reward” for the terrorism and went contrary to Israel’s security concept (“despair from every round”).
8. Peace and national security were not Yitzhak Rabin’s only considerations. His political survival and his desire at least to go down in the history books¹⁰, were additional considerations in his overall set of calculations, even if they were not chief among them.
9. As part of the strategy gaps, and the avenues of action the State lacked the “tools” at the national level to prop up the accomplishments in the Accords, in the form of the required “national efforts”¹¹.
10. The decision-making process mechanism was lacking, and official state representatives were absent in the negotiating process. Besides this, no in-depth cabinet debates were held¹² to deal with risk and opportunity analysis, and the solutions for the gaps in the Accords that were taking shape.

Indeed at the time¹³, the term national decision-making process had not been defined and codified with orderly meanings and content and it had no permanent mechanism, however Rabin understood this well already from the second phase of the Accords- above and beyond the expectation that even according to the accepted norms at the time the Accords were taking shape, one could have expected and assumed that the process would be conducted differently.

The bottom line: one cannot escape the conclusion that had there been an orderly decision-making process at the national level, on such a fundamental question of national security, including formation of a comprehensive strategy, involving the various arms of the system and a national solution for the numerous inherent risks, perhaps the accords would not have matured as far as the signing stage, or at least we would have arrived at a better set of accords.

¹⁰

¹¹ National efforts is a term used to describe the abilities of a country, which are intended to prop up and advance the chosen strategy and policy. See details below.

¹² Ephraim Inbar, **Rabin and National Security**, Ministry of Defense Publishers, pp. 203.

¹³ The term decision-making process developed in Israel over the years, primarily as a consequence of lessons-learned reports following wars.

■ The outcome

Ultimately the Oslo Accords failed to achieve a permanent solution, they did not result in a two-state situation of two countries coexisting peacefully side by side. The accords helped in part to bring Israel closer to some of the other Arab countries (Jordan, improved, albeit informal relations with other Arab countries), and on the other hand it substantially degraded Israel's security situation from the terror aspect (withdrawal from Lebanon, Second Intifada and Operation Defensive Shield, the disengagement from the Gaza Strip, and unending waves of terrorism ever since). The questions arising from this therefore are, whether the negotiations, had they been managed differently, had they included the qualified authorities from within the political system, would have resulted in an agreement on improved terms, and even more than that, if a better decision-making process would have been followed, one that would analyze the risks and implications, maybe the Prime Minister and the government would not have accepted the accords as is, with the terms that were presented.

Not only that; the understanding that the negotiations were run by just two individuals (under the leadership of Yossi Beilin, Deputy Foreign Minister)- Dr. Yair Hirschfeld and Dr. Ron Pundak, who were academics with an Israeli, modernist, secular, liberal and individualistic outlook¹⁴, while excluding professional and strategic authorities with the appropriate background, is in part the reason for this non-starter of a result.

■ The strategy gaps, the disparate goals

Examination of the nature of the decisions made by the Israeli leadership in the context of the Oslo process, indicates that the Israeli leadership had no overall strategy¹⁵ for achieving the stated goal of bringing peace to the two peoples. Israel lacked an overall, coherent concept that was supposed to define an overriding goal for the process, along with appropriate avenues for achieving that goal. The parties opted to postpone discussion of the core issues until future negotiations, assuming (baselessly) that the dynamic that would develop could be conducive to the buildup of trust between the parties, and would produce an agreed-upon solution. A national strategy means a plan in which there is support from the "national endeavors"¹⁶, all for the sake of supporting the policy goals, in this case- advancing the accords.

14 Mordechai Kedar, **30 years later: the basic assumptions of the Oslo Accords faltered**, Makor Rishon, August 6, 2023

15 See note 5, page 4.

16 Yaakov Amidror, **Recommendations of the Committee on the Work of the State Security Cabinet**, 2016.

Although the term national endeavors has been taken from the report submitted by the Amidror Committee that evaluated the work of the State Security Cabinet during Operation Protective Edge (2014), however this is merely a new definition for the classic strategy components.

As mentioned earlier, within the process of reaching the Accords, national endeavors were not analyzed - such as: encirclement of Jewish towns by Arab villages, handing out weapons to Palestinian policemen - weapons that could be turned against IDF soldiers and Israeli civilians, surrendering of full security control to the Palestinian Authority, etc. State endeavor - this endeavor was active, in one direction - support and strengthening Israel vis-à-vis the rest of the world, however without involvement or guarantees from the international community, and in particular the United States¹⁷ for the possibility of violation of the Accords and the resultant sanctions on the Palestinian Authority. In fact, this was an irreversible agreement. As for the rest of the endeavors (economic, legal, advocacy, hearts & minds) rudimentary processes were rolled out, however these were not thorough enough and they failed to produce a suitable, adequate solution for the reality and difficulties it poses (the fundamental issue of incitement, roads and transport including infrastructures, difficulty in enforcing Israeli court rulings on Palestinian Authority residents without an offsetting or mitigating mechanism, creation of economic monopolies such as gas, energy, telecommunication etc., inadequate solution for attending to heritage and historic sites, environmental problems, pollution and water issues, etc.).

Even if the anticipated gaps and problems were analyzed, they were not given an adequate solution. This is true of the security issue, the handing out of weapons to the Palestinian Authority policemen was dismissed by Rabin with no proper military solution¹⁸, simply relying on the IDF in general and its ability to operate unhindered at any given moment¹⁹. This is an issue which was indeed proven to be highly problematic - see Amidror's warning²⁰, during the severe clashes during the period of the second Intifada and the horrific terrorist attacks it spawned. The IDF was unable to operate freely and failed to provide an appropriate security response to this difficult circumstance.

17 Yossi Goldstein, **Rabin - A Biography**, Schocken Publishers, pp. 412.

18 See Note 12 above.

19 Ibid, pp. 202.

20 See Note 2 above.

■ Israel's Security Concept

Israel's Security Concept seeks peace with its enemies and the countries surrounding it, or as a minimum it seeks recognition of the fact of the existence of the State of Israel and deterrence against going to war with Israel. Indeed, Rabin tried to make the dream of our Zionist founding fathers come true, in the form of reconciliation with the Arabs of Palestine²¹. The warning from Army Chief of Staff Ehud Barak that "the security arrangements in the Oslo Accords are like Swiss cheese- more holes than cheese". The retort to that was that, if we find that terrorism has not ceased, we can always go back into the Territories"...

The Oslo Accords flew in the face of Israel's Security Concept in one of its most important fundamentals- the deterrence component. The cumulative deterrence states that the enemy has to sustain such a painful beating, that they will lose its appetite for another round²². In reality, the Oslo Accords, which were reached after the years of the first Intifada, which had kindled hope among Palestinians (and later in Hezbollah with our withdrawal from Lebanon²³) and even created a new paradigm: terrorism erodes Israel's resilience from within, which lead to the well-known spider web theory²⁴: "Israel might appear powerful, but it suffers a severe internal weakness, due to the fact that it is a prosperous society, whose sons are unwilling to put themselves in danger to ensure its existence. If you make Israel bleed, it retreats." The bottom line is that that very deterrence, which is such a key pillar of Israel's security concept, that "despair from every round" on the part of our enemies- had been breached. Instead of the Palestinians sustaining a severe blow that would strip them of their ambitions and send them into retreat, they were given a "reward" in the form of the Oslo Accords.

■ Summary

It seems that the Oslo Accords were a mistake. The picture emerging from descriptions of the national decision-making process is cause for concern in terms of negotiating while totally ignoring any responsibility on such a purely national security issue, with no strategy, no ultimate goal, no national program for national support and efforts to support policy, and without a broad mechanism that engages appropriate professional and government authorities, and without any real debate even at the political echelon. This critical analysis should not be regarded merely as 20-20-hindsight.

21 Yitzhak Ben-Israel, **The Crisis in the Oslo Process In Terms of Israeli Deterrence, 2002.**

22 Ibid, pp. 29.

23 Ibid, pp. 29-30.

24 Moshe Yaalon, **The Long Short Road, Yedioth Books, pp. 233.**

Lessons could have been learned from other, similar processes that had taken place just one decade earlier (the peace treaty with Egypt). Analysis of the motives that might have driven the late Yitzhak Rabin shows that considerations of Israel's internal resiliency were also a substantial factor in his considerations, and we would be well-served to drill down into this issue, particularly these days.

■ Recommendations

The issues occupying the political echelon, that deals with Israel's national security, war and peace, are among the most special and important roles of this echelon. Today also, the importance of conducting a proper, far-reaching decision-making process is a necessary imperative - a process that combines the national process mechanism thoroughly and systematically. Suffice it to read the following reports to get an idea for the future: the Agranat Committee on the 1973 War, the lessons learned from the Oslo process as presented in this study, the Vinograd Committee for the Second Lebanon War (2006), and also the State Comptroller's report from Operation Protective Edge (2014), all for the sake of drawing the conclusions and implementing when engaging with these issues.

■ The main recommendations

1. Convene the State Security Cabinet and conduct in-depth debates.
2. Define a long-term, broad-perspective strategy including political goals.
3. Define the national endeavors for supporting the strategy.
4. Discuss strategic alternatives and provide solutions for the emerging gaps.
5. Define a mechanism for the decision-making process, in which most of the relevant system authorities are involved.

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30 Years After the Oslo Accords

Colonel (Res.) Ronen Itsik

■ Background

Ever since 1993, when the Gaza and Jericho Agreement was signed as the first phase in the Oslo peace process, Israeli society has undergone a series of formative events - the more time passed and as the process gained momentum, including the Oslo II Accord and the withdrawal from the centers of Palestinian cities, Israeli society has been experiencing an ambivalent reality- on the one hand the desire, sometimes yearning, to bring the conflict to its closure through peaceful means, while on the other hand a reality of terrorist outrages which profoundly undermined people's sense of security on the street and diminished any trust there may have been in the Palestinian side¹.

The dynamics between 1990 and 2000 created a situation in which besides the process underway with the Palestinians, Israel's social and security situation escalated- large numbers of victims in terrorist attacks, increasing social polarization, with controversial territorial concessions as the background for it all.

In fact, the relations between the Palestinians and Israelis could be characterized by the fact that in reality the two communities became physically separated: from a borderless reality in which Israelis had visited Palestinian cities and many Palestinians worked in Israel's cities², to a state where mutual trust had hit rock-bottom, murderous terrorist attacks were increasing in their ferocity, de-facto borders had physically separated the populations including a formidable obstacle being built and reduction of the IDF presence within the Palestinian territories compared to the past.

The generation of that time underwent further transformations that affected public mood within Israeli society- a dramatic increase in the number of settlers in Judea and Samaria, creation of two de-facto Palestinian territories- Gaza and Judea and Samaria, each with its distinct characteristics, including the magnitude of friction with the IDF and the way the Palestinian threat was being perceived, and the ability to persist with continuation of the process in the foreseeable future with all it entails.

1 Beck, A., 2018, <https://www.israelhayom.co.il/article/586559>

2 Eretz. A, 2023, <https://www.globes.co.il/news/article.aspx?did=1001444173>

Israeli society is split with regard the relationship with the Palestinians³ - some support continuation of the disengagement and support establishing a Palestinian state- while others distinguish between their attitude toward Gaza, which in their view is an enemy state, and toward Judea and Samaria, which is a region within which some kind of settlement can be reached. Other parts of society have totally lost any trust in the Palestinians, they regard them as an enemy, and in their minds there is no way to deal with this challenge other than having the IDF maintain its presence on the ground despite the difficulties this arouses in the international arena, where Israel is being portrayed in some Western countries as an actual Apartheid State.

This ambivalent perception of reality has also led to a different perception of the settlers who, over time, have gained more and more recognition from Israeli society, to the extent that even the term “settlers” (“mitnachalim”) has been softened and replaced by “residents” (“mityashvim”). Accordingly, the “settlements” (“hitnachaluyot”) have been renamed “communities” (“hityashvuyot”)⁴. The resident population gained increasing acceptance within the Israeli public with the passage of time- a public which, in the previous generation of the 1970’s, regarded them as a separatist religious group (see “Gush Emunim”, the Sebastia incidents, etc.).

Beginning in the 1990’s, concurrent with the advent of the Oslo Accords, Israeli society underwent yet another shift due to the influence of post-modernist processes arriving from the West. These included ascendance of values such as individualism, liberalism, erosion of the security ethos, increased desire to improve one’s personal well-being, etc. This also had an influence on Israeli society’s cohesion, on the consensus around national values, including national symbols. This state of affairs raises questions regarding national aspects which had previously enjoyed virtual wall-to-wall justification: Jerusalem’s unification, respect for Biblical landmarks and holy places.

3 Hirschberg, G., 2019, <https://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-5488427,00.html>

4 Rosenthal, R., 2014, <https://www.ruvik.co.il/%D7%A1%D7%99%D7%A4%D7%95%D7%A8%D7%99-%D7%9E%D7%99%D7%9C%D7%99%D7%9D/%D7%94/%D7%94%D7%AA%D7%99%D7%99%D7%A9%D7%91%D7%95%D7%AA.aspx>

■ The research question:

How does Israeli society regard the effects of the Oslo Process from a 30-year perspective?

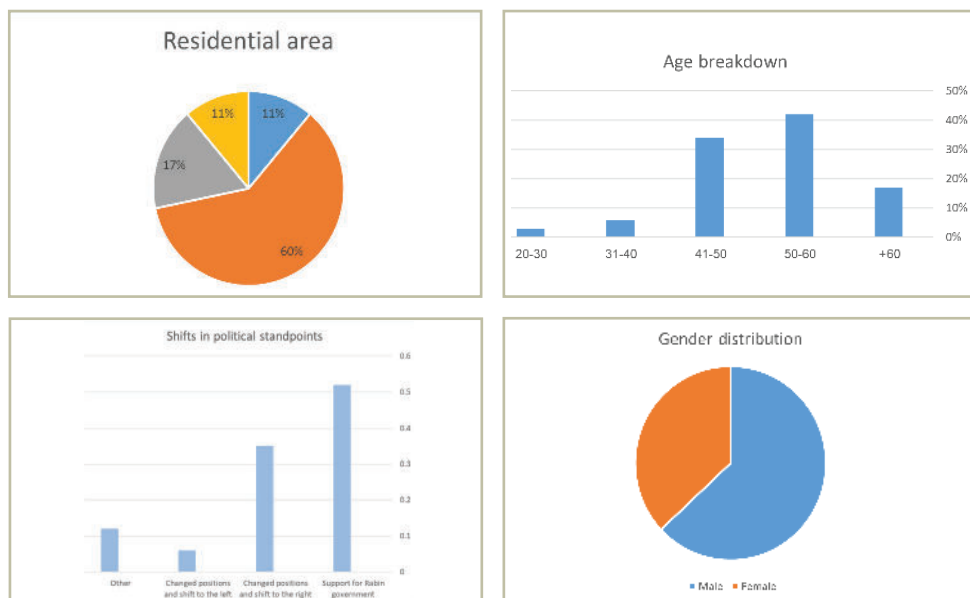
Further Questions:

1. How is the battle against Palestinian terrorism interpreted with regards the Oslo Accords?
2. If and how has the Oslo Process influenced Israeli public opinion regarding the "land for peace" concept, including the townbuilding in Judea and Samaria?
3. How have the accords affected the level of trust of the Palestinians?
4. What are the prevailing sentiments in Israeli society regarding the division of Jerusalem?

■ Research method:

The study was based on the qualitative method. Primarily it analyzes in-depth interviews with 50 random subjects. The subjects filled in a preliminary questionnaire to generally characterize their positions, and as an indicator for a semi-structured telephone interview.

■ Characteristics of the study subjects



The study subjects were randomly selected out of a group of hundreds. The vast majority of them are familiar with the Palestinian arena from “eye-level”: most had been in their 20’s and 30’s in the 1990s, they were familiar with the Palestinian street, Palestinian society in Gaza and in Judea and Samaria, they had been conscript soldiers and reservists, and had been in the company of settlers and had spent time in the various modes of settlement. This group has a long-term perspective of life both before and after the Oslo Accords, including during the current generation. They have experienced all the processes described.

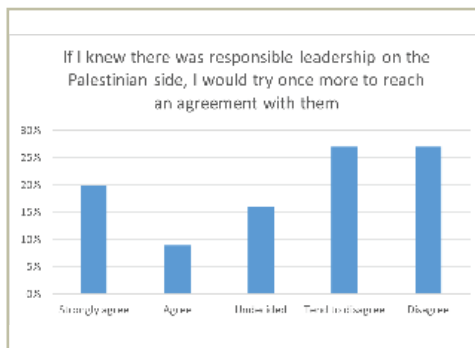
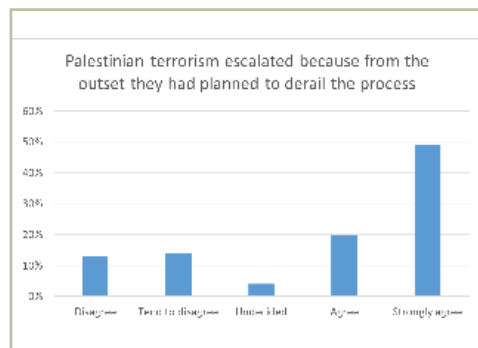
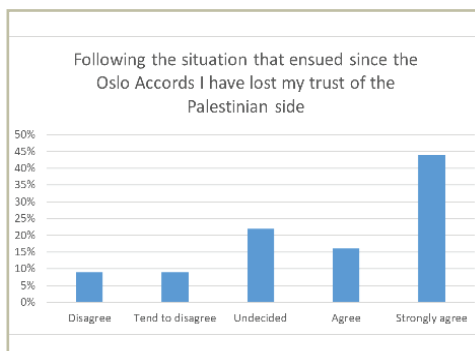
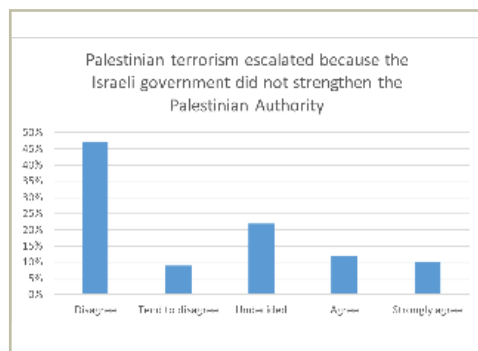
This group is of particular interest for investigation, since life itself has transformed before their very eyes, and many among them have changed their attitudes toward the Palestinian population, including during this most recent generation⁵. Thus, more than half of them had supported the creation of the Rabin government in 1992, supported the attempt to build life based on peace with the Palestinians within the framework of the Oslo process. Many in this group had lived with the hope that the process would positively alter life between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea and, therein, would also have a favorable effect on the economy, society, and even on military contexts, particularly on the periods of military service on the Palestinian streets, which they remembered as a burden⁶.

5 Amal. J. (editor), 2020, https://social-sciences.m.tau.ac.il/sites/socsci.tau.ac.il/files/media_server/social/walter%20libach/AmalJamallyunim_7.pdf

6 Dahan. A., 2021, <https://www.regthink.org/the-hamas-long-path/>

Research findings:

■ Level of trust of the Palestinians



■ Quoting the interviewees:

“When I voted for Rabin in 1992 I believed we had to give peace a chance - but everything that happened from the outset of the process and until the (Rabin) murder was to my mind intolerable. I gradually realized there was nobody we could trust, that they don’t really want peace. Ever since I never vote Labor (the party Yitzhak Rabin had lead)”.



“I come from a Likud home, I have always voted Likud. This whole (Oslo) process didn’t make sense to me. On the ground there was no readiness for this at all but I thought maybe I’m wrong, maybe it is time to embark on a process of reconciliation with them. What Arafat did (the terrorist attacks) after the process is proof that they never really wanted peace with us).

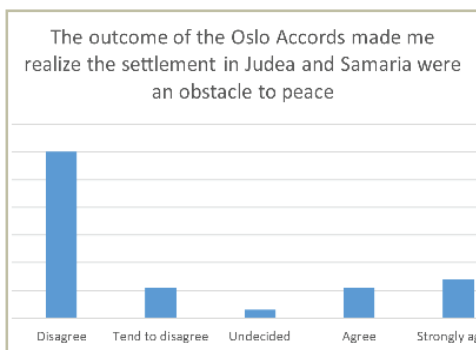
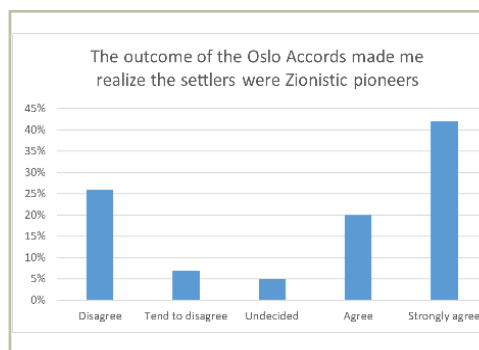


"The reality the media reflected for us throughout the process and this talk of 'peace victims' really got to me. The blood in our streets and the fear of venturing outdoors were just too much. It seemed as if we were insisting on reaching out to them and they were persisting in slaughtering us. It just didn't make sense".



"I supported the Oslo Accords, they never worked! Perhaps there might be someone we can talk to in Judea and Samaria, but in Gaza? Gaza is being lead by a gang of cold-blooded assassins. Besides, they never really did anything on their part to reach a peace deal with us. they are continually investing in and invested in fighting against us".

■ Attitudes toward settlement in Judea and Samaria:



■ Quoting the interviewees:

"I have known the settler community from childhood. I always respected them, but after the periods of terrorist attacks and the attempt to sue for peace- they paid extremely high prices for their beliefs. They are out there for their faith, they are being grossly misrepresented, including this stigma around the 'hilltop youths'."



"I was unfamiliar with the settlers in the early 1990s. Nowadays I know that because of media bias we were all fed this image of Messianic, war-mongering fanatics constantly harassing (the Palestinians)".

"I respect and appreciate the settlers, they put their lives on the line for themselves and for us, I too wouldn't object to living out there with them". They are in constant danger- on the one hand terrorism, on the other hand the threat of evacuation, it's a complicated existence fraught with uncertainty. They are our real Iron Dome- this has always been my opinion".

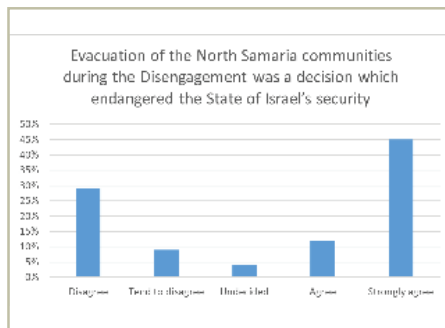
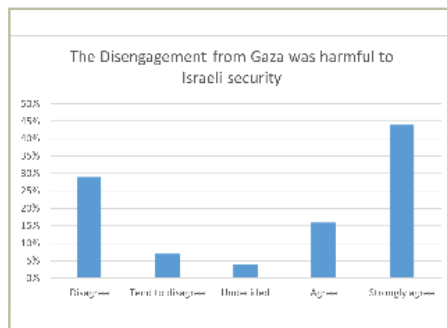
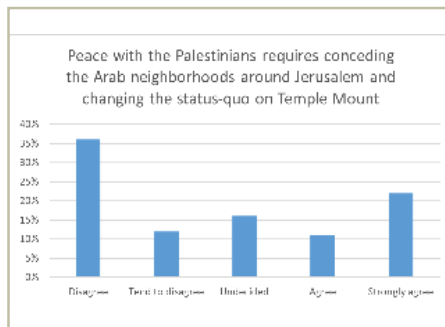
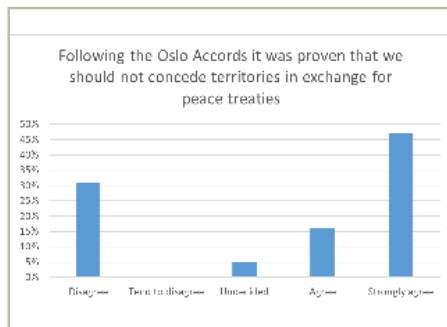


"Residents living along the Trans-Samaria Road, Ari'el, Gush Etzion, Ma'ale Adumim - in my mind that's Zionism, for all intents and purposes, plus these territories are of strategic importance. But all those illegal remote outposts are a serious problem. Those people take the law into their own hands- I simply don't accept that".

"This is a super-principled population. I know many of them from my military service. Outstanding individuals, laudably educated for love of country. They are an asset for Israel, they are doing a truly pioneering deed".

"It's a fabulous group. There's no hate there, they are Israel-lovers in the purest sense of the word. In some ways I really envy them, maybe I would even want to be more like them, perhaps even live there (in Judea and Samaria)".

■ Attitudes toward territorial concessions



■ Quoting the interviewees:

"The wheel can't be turned back - there's a reality on the ground and an entire living fabric by Israelis on the ground. This model of evacuating communities blew up in our faces in Gaza - there's no way territorial concessions are going to lead to anything good here and the status in Jerusalem must most certainly not be changed and handed over to the Palestinians".



"I lived in Jerusalem for many years already back in the 1970s. Jerusalem is unified, there's no way in the world we're going to be able to change that - certainly not for the sake of a nation of terrorists - how exactly is that going to help? This equation has only bred terrorism. If the Palestinians will ever want to work toward a peace deal, then certain compromises can be made in areas like Nablus and we certainly ought to evict whatever is illegal, but nothing beyond that".



"I think we are ripe for letting go of villages in East Jerusalem - de facto we already have given them up. There's no real Israeli sovereignty there - but the whole issue of the Temple Mount and the Wailing Wall is taboo, we must never concede an inch there".

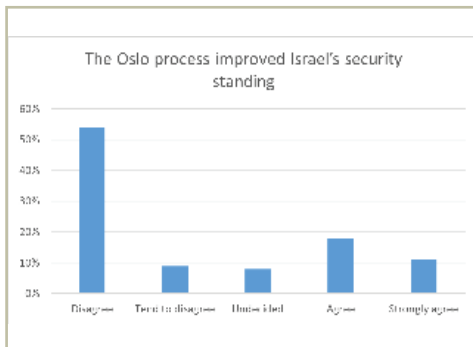
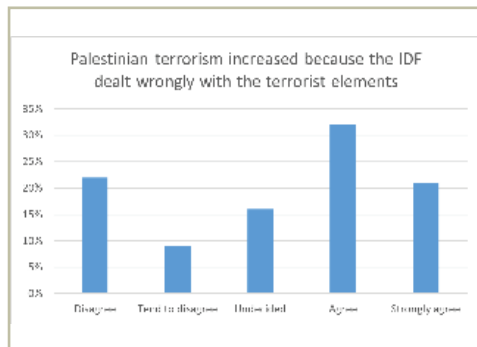
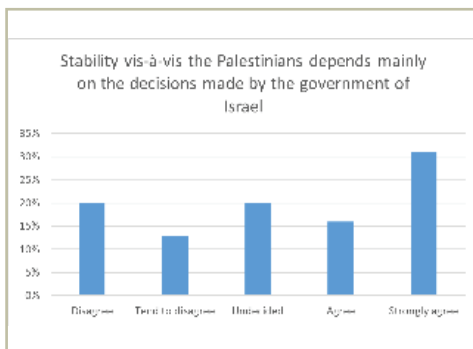
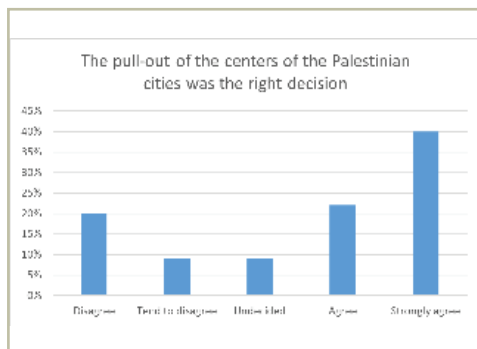


"I would like to have a clear border between them (the Palestinians) and us - if I could be sure this would pacify the region, I would concede territories and create an international boundary separating us. We ought to concentrate in the settlement blocs. Jerusalem is a highly-problematic issue. I personally think we can forego part of the eastern side, but I know there are many who do not accept this, I understand this".



"I'm in favor of autonomy to the degree of a 'state minus', to give them territorial contiguity in Judea and Samaria, to evacuate isolated communities - but this state would be surrounded by an Israeli security belt - the Jordan Valley, the Gilboa, the protective wall along Highway 6 and in the south. In Jerusalem we must make no concessions - this is a symbol of surrender".

■ Attitudes toward security



■ Quoting the interviewees:

"The Second Intifada and the Disengagement are irrefutable proof of what the Palestinians want. We withdrew, we redeployed in an unmistakable defensive manner, and terrorism only increased. I don't want to imagine what is going to happen if we withdraw from Judea and Samaria- Highway 6 will become the new 'Gaza Envelope'. This is totally intolerable. Now there are even Katyushas (rockets) being launched toward the Gilboa (a region in northern Israel adjacent to Judea and Samaria)- it's a replay of what happens when we 'get up and run' from any territory. It's a nation of terror. It's never going to end".



"I look at it also from the Israeli society perspective, because regarding the Palestinians there's no dilemma at all- they're terrorists. But in all matters concerning Israeli society, every attempt to reconcile with them only serves to exacerbate our internal divisions. This is exactly how I felt after Rabin was assassinated. We are tearing ourselves apart from within in our attempts to make peace with the devil".

“Israel ought to think strategically. Security is a technical issue in the service of strategy. The Jordan Valley, the main roads traversing eastwards toward the Valley, including Gush Etzion- our accessibility for rapid action in the Palestinian cities, all these must be kept in our hands”.



“We don’t have a security problem, we do have a problem inside our heads. Total hysteria with every terrorist attack and a never-ending cycle of ‘action-reaction’. Some places we can do without and have no worries about them, whatever strengthens Israel and prevents spreading our military efforts too thin is right for us”.

■ Discussion

Nature of our hold in Judea and Samaria:

The majority of subjects regard the Judea and Samaria territories to be a security imperative, a handful regard this at the Motherland level. The subjects’ words frame control of the territory as a “necessary evil”⁷ without which security west of the Green Line would deteriorate and become intolerable. Furthermore, it is evident that most of the subjects do not reject in principle, they even support territorial concessions in future, partly due to the need to concentrate the military effort, and partly due to non-recognition of the importance of isolated communities, including the outposts, non-recognition of their security importance.

The conversation is primarily about the tactical concept. This can be interpreted as the Judea and Samaria territories as a security buffer, and the territory west of the Green Line as the vital space to be kept and held. In tactical terminology as well, one has leeway in the security sphere, some of the lands do not have to be kept, while in the lands that must be kept, vital spaces must not be conceded. This is a fundamental security concept, there is no actual ideological thinking behind it. This being said, most of the subjects noted that there are strategic necessities within the Judea and Samaria territories, lands which are vital for maintaining control over the main traffic arteries, the Jordan Valley and Gush Etzion. These interviewees believe that beyond the necessity to maintain this spatial control, residency therein is vital and the number of residents (residing in the community blocs) preclude change in these lands.

7 Ha'Etsni-HaCohen. S, 2021, <https://myisrael.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/%D7%97%D7%95%D7%91%D7%A8-%D7%AA%D7%9B%D7%A0%D7%99%D7%95%D7%AA-%D7%99%D7%A9%D7%A8%D7%90%D7%9C-%D7%A9%D7%9C%D7%99-%D7%A2%D7%91%D7%A8%D7%99%D7%AA.pdf>

The term “concession” can be divided into two aspects- conceding the “territories” (i.e., withdrawal to the June 1967 line) is unacceptable to the majority, however a “tactical” concession is viewed as being legitimate. In this context one can say that the Gaza disengagement, and realization of the difficulties in evacuating residents have been etched into many people’s psyche in its potential context vis-à-vis Judea and Samaria - it is evident that virtually nobody believes it is actually possible to withdraw from lands on which thousands have made their homes. This all means that in the public mind, withdrawal to the June 1967 line is a non-existent scenario - a reality which in the 1990’s was not all that clear.

■ The residents’ status:

The terms “settlement” (“hitnachalut”) and “settlers” (“mitnachalim”) are gradually being replaced by “community” (“hityashvut”) and “residents” (“mityashvim”). The settlements have trickled down into the Israeli consensus, in particular those areas referred to as “community blocs”. This terminology had been non-existent until the Bush Roadmap⁸ was released, addressing the status of the community blocs in Judea and Samaria. The residents who had in the past been referred to as “settlers” are perceived within the general public as a legitimate population and, in view of the perception that they and their adopted lifestyle serve a certain security rationale, the Judea and Samaria residents have been apportioned a highly-prominent status associated with values.

The majority of respondents make the distinction between the population of “normative” Judea and Samaria residents and the lawless elements, which refer mostly to the “hilltop youths”. Most respondents understand that these lawless individuals are not representative of the Judea and Samaria residents, and therefore the latter are, as a rule, respected and appreciated by most of the respondents. Terms such as “messianic”, and “deranged” are absent from the conversation. These terms are commonly used by the media- however they were not mentioned by the subjects at all.

■ Status of Jerusalem:

Most interviewees accept a tactical settlement in the East Jerusalem space with emphasis on the Arab neighborhoods, which are not perceived to be an integral part of the city- most respondents are unfamiliar with these neighborhoods, and have never visited them either. This being said, when it comes to the “Holy Basin”, in other words the Temple Mount, the Wailing Wall and the Old City, there is a broad consensus that these must under all scenarios remain under Israeli sovereignty.

8 Ben-Horin. J., 2006, <https://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0.7340.L-3322105.00.html>

Etched in Minds:

One cannot overestimate the reality created by the waves of terrorist attacks which have ensued following the Oslo Accords, and in particular following the Disengagement and the second Intifada. The vast majority of subjects in this study believe the Palestinians are intent on war, not peace. This issue reflects on the degree of trust in these interlocutors, in whose minds the traumatic experiences of the horrors of terrorism and all its aspects have been etched, with special emphasis on loss of a sense of security- this is a form of PTSD.

■ Absence of political conversation:

Painfully absent is political conversation - none of the subjects spoke of one government or another, or of any specific politician. The conversation was mostly about the reality that has emerged in the course of the post-Oslo Accords generation. Another matter that comes up is the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. Some of the subjects regard that trauma to be a watershed, signaling that we had gone too far toward the Palestinians to the extent of severely undermining the social cohesion and consensus, placing the very existence of the country in danger.

The subjects do not regard the Palestinian issue to be political⁹. Instead it is regarded as a substantial issue ranging from religious war to a war between nationalities- however the operative word is “war”, or at least bloody struggle. This issue, which in the past had been in the realm of the right and left debate, which had been a very clear dividing line within the political system, is no longer regarded as such¹⁰. It can be said that the Oslo Process and the events that followed it lead, according to this study, to a situation in which there is no significant divergence of opinion regarding the Palestinian issue across a substantial majority of the Israeli public.

■ Summary

The findings from this study indicate a very broad range of agreement among the subjects- clear lack of trust toward the Palestinian side among Israelis, as opposed to readiness for certain territorial concessions, although this readiness does not come close to concessions in the form of the June 1967 borders. Add to this the realization that the community blocs have got to remain under Israeli rule, including Jerusalem and the Holy Basin.

9 Adam. R., 2021, <https://www.haaretz.co.il/opinions/2022-11-03/ty-article-opinion/.premium/00000184-3da8-ddfc-a3b6-fdfe39570000>

10 Lichtman. M., 2013, <https://www.globes.co.il/news/article.aspx?did=1000863635>

The Oslo process left a considerable impact on Israeli society, most of which regards control of the Judea and Samaria territories to be a definite security imperative, and regards the residents to be a legitimate population forming an important pillar of principles and security. This perception is a significant change compared with opinion toward a peace process with the Palestinians in the 1990s. This being said, one cannot say that the majority of Israelis regard the territories of Judea and Samaria as an ideological imperative, or feel any sense of attachment to them that has a natural affinity component to it.

Even today, a generation after the Oslo Accords, a sizable proportion of Israeli society believes that if responsible Palestinian leadership was to emerge, which would prove itself over time, it would be appropriate to move forward with them in a process, perhaps different in form and content. Effectively they do not rule out such a process, including the establishment of a Palestinian State¹¹.

11 Itsik, R., 2020. Compulsory military service as a social integrator. *Security and Defence Quarterly*, 30 (3), 65–80.

Shards of Oslo: Reminiscences from the Palestinian Architect of the Oslo Accords

Lt. Col. (Res.) Baruch Yedid

Ahmed Qurei, known as Abu Alaa (1937–2023), was a diplomat and public figure who served as Prime Minister of the Palestinian Authority. He was also the architect of the Oslo Accords on behalf of the Palestinian side. I met some confidants of his, who had accompanied him through many years, and they all said he was “lucid until his dying day.” They shared a number of surprising revelations with me regarding Israeli and Palestinian leaders and how they operated during the formulation of the Oslo Accords.

Abu Alaa wrote multiple books, and many of them were published, but his memoirs, a book about his personal life, and nine other books that he wrote about Fatah have yet to see publication. His confidants, while declining to expose his memoirs, hinted that the revelations in them are representative of his life’s journey — from Oslo to Ramallah to Abu Dis. It must not be ignored that the fragmentary stories related in this article are authentic testimonies, albeit unofficial, because they have been published in various ways in the past and they may refute or confirm other previous publications.

The Declaration of Principles, known as the Oslo Accords, was parented at a meeting of academics and on the sidelines of meetings of the multilateral negotiations steering committee, by Dr. Yair Hirschfeld and Abu Alaa, with the help of the PLO representative in London and of Feisal Hussein. The Accords form a series of agreements signed as part of the peace process between Israel and the PLO. Their purpose was to delineate a permanent solution and advance mutual recognition between Israel and the PLO.

Abu Alaa’s confidants testify that at the same time, the Foreign Ministry’s Director General Uri Savir and Deputy Minister Yossi Beilin were involved in the process of dialogue. Foreign Minister Shimon Peres and Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin were informed at a later stage. **During the initial, secret contacts in advance of the agreement, Abu Alaa asked Hirschfeld to try to obtain approval from official sources in Israel.**

During the start of the process Yasser Arafat, head of the Palestine Liberation Organization and chairman of the Palestinian Authority, met a number of prime ministers, including Rabin, Netanyahu, Barak, and Sharon. Abu Mazen, his successor, met Sharon, Barak, Olmert, and Netanyahu. Abu Alaa describes the leaders’ doings in his memoirs.

The late Yitzhak Rabin: Those close to Rabin testified that he “considered withdrawing from the Oslo Accords when the nature of the Palestinian Authority became clear to him, as well as for other reasons.” Abu Alaa said to his own people that **“he never encountered any such indication and it never occurred to him that Rabin sought to withdraw from the Accords.”**

On October 6, 1993, Rabin was with Arafat in Cairo and asked the PLO Chairman to accelerate the formation of teams to advance the negotiations; but there was no progress. Rabin consequently, as a gesture in compliance with a request from Arafat, agreed to return exiled Palestinians and release prisoners. The PLO Chairman demanded that prisoners released by Israel include Hamas operatives, in order to separate moderate elements from extremists within that organization.

On October 13, 1994, the Joint Liaison Committee opened its discussions in Cairo, led by Peres and Abu Mazen. The agenda included a timetable for Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza and Jericho areas, establishment of a Palestinian police force, agreement on safe passage, among other topics. Abu Alaa contended that at one of the early meetings between Rabin and Arafat, at the Erez Crossing, **Rabin agreed to fence the settlements in, so as to prevent their expansion.**

The late Shimon Peres: Peres was serving as Prime Minister in 1996 when, following the targeted killing of Yahya Ayyash (also known as “The Engineer”), a wave of suicide terror attacks began in Israel, including a fatal attack on bus line 18 in Jerusalem that took 19 Israeli lives (March 3, 1996) followed the next day by an attack at Dizengoff Center, in Tel Aviv, that took 13 Israeli lives.

Abu Alaa recounts in his memoirs that **Peres begged Arafat, “Stop the Hamas terrorism. I’m going to face Netanyahu in a decisive election and the attacks will hurt my chances.”**

Ehud Olmert: Abu Alaa believed that Barak and Netanyahu were far from accepting the Oslo Accords as written, whereas Olmert hoped to be remembered for a breakthrough in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and therefore he showed great political generosity that surprised Abu Mazen.

At the Annapolis Conference in November 2007, held in Maryland, participants included Israel, the PLO, the Quartet, the EU, and the USA. Israel’s delegation was led by Prime Minister Olmert and Foreign Minister Livni, and the Palestinian delegation was led by Palestinian Authority President Abbas and his Prime Minister Salam Fayyad. The Conference was the first, and remained the most significant, since the failure at Camp David (July 2000 in Maryland) and the subsequent outbreak of the Second Intifada. Its purpose was a permanent arrangement for Israel, the PLO and the Palestinian Authority.

From Abu Alaa’s memoirs: “Olmert dominated the negotiations with Abu Mazen, while Livni made much progress in relations with the Palestinians.” In addition,

“Olmert couldn’t hide, even from the Palestinians, his desire to bypass the avenue where Livni was in charge and position himself at the head of Israel’s leadership as creating the breakthrough in the diplomatic process. The Palestinian leadership understood that it could bend the Israeli side to its will. ... Nonetheless, Olmert did not manage to display courage, and in the end of the process he was defeated by weakness and insufficient bravery, rather than the corruption scandals that enmeshed him.”

Ariel Sharon: Many Palestinians considered Sharon **the most impressive Israeli leader since Ben-Gurion** — a man of vision who was capable of delivering judgements and acting decisively, unlike others involved in the negotiations. As recalled by Abu Alaa and his confidants, **“he was very polite to the Palestinians, he behaved with dignity, and he was shy on the one hand but a hard-nosed farmer on the other hand.** He always succeeded in impressing those around him.”

Ehud Barak: Barak was described as a cold and supercilious man. His personality certainly influenced the contacts with the Palestinians, especially when Barak and Arafat were obliged to make decisions at Camp David. In his memoirs, Abu Alaa described three visits by Arafat to Barak’s home in Kochav Yair. When each of the first two visits ended, **Barak could not be bothered to accompany Arafat to his helicopter, “but the third time, after his unmannerliness was explained to him, Barak did accompany Arafat to his helicopter and made efforts to display respect and politeness.”** Abu Alaa saw the display of respect as feigned and was not impressed by any possibility of progress, even when Barak insistently pushed Arafat into the cabin at Camp David.

The Camp David Summit, led by US President Clinton, Israeli Prime Minister Barak, and PLO Chairman Arafat, failed and begat the Second (Al-Aqsa) Intifada. Abu Alaa, who participated in the preliminary talks, foresaw the failure. The Israelis and Americans remembered Abu Alaa as presenting no compromises in the Oslo negotiations and considered him a negative influence, whereas on the Palestinian side he was considered a definite positive influence — to the point where some Israelis thought he could soften Arafat.

The Palestinians pressed for complete sovereignty over the areas of Judea, Samaria, and the Gaza Strip. Barak offered 73% of the West Bank, and the entire Gaza Strip, with the Palestinian area intended to expand to 94%, including Jerusalem, over the coming 10–25 years. In the discussions, Barak created the precedent of Israeli willingness to divide Jerusalem — which was a bone of contention — and envisioned annexing settlement blocs to Israel but relinquishing villages that had been annexed to Jerusalem after 1967. Abu Mazen, speaking for the Palestinian Authority, demanded the entirety of East Jerusalem.

Abu Alaa's memoirs describe attempts by the Peres to save the failing negotiations and say that Peres despised Barak's behavior at Camp David and Barak's refusal to meet alone with Arafat. According to those close to Abu Alaa, **Peres told Abu Alaa that "Barak didn't intend to make progress, and if it were up to Peres, Peres would sleep in a Camp David cabin with Arafat until the two of them walked out with a signed agreement."**

Benjamin Netanyahu: Netanyahu, elected in 1996, declared from the day of his inauguration that Israel would honor the signed agreements on condition that "the principle of reciprocity" be honored. His first year in office was marked by escalation between Israel and the Palestinians, with the opening of the Western Wall tunnels and with severe disturbances in which 17 IDF soldiers were killed.

The Hebron Agreement (November 15, 1997) was drawn up as a supplement to Oslo II and signed by Israel and the Palestinian Authority as an interim step. Its purpose was the restructuring and redeployment of IDF forces in Hebron under a system dividing Hebron into an "H1" zone under full Palestinian control and an "H2" zone where the Jewish community would live under IDF control. Abu Alaa, who was worried about Netanyahu and described him as **a sly leader, relates that Netanyahu's participation in the Hebron agreements with Arafat created a dangerous precedent significantly fracturing the Oslo Accords.**

In Abu Alaa's view, many of Israel's leaders — and especially Olmert — "wanted to cut the ribbon" concluding the Oslo process. Barak set impossible conditions straightaway, whereas **Netanyahu expressed strong opposition in principle to all progress.**

Yasser Arafat: Abu Alaa attained a respected international standing and became the architect of the Oslo Accords, viewed as the basis for a historic solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Although Arafat envied him that achievement, he honored and supported Abu Alaa in the process. **"Arafat knew every step, and so he trusted Abu Alaa,** who for his part "conscientiously updated his leader — something those on the Israeli side refrained from doing until the later phases."

Abu Mazen: According to Palestinian sources, **Abu Mazen preferred the negotiations to fail, in order to save him from making decisions he was incapable of. But he exploited the failure in order to give the impression of striving to renew negotiations** and cultivated that impression deceptively.

The same sources related that over seven years Abu Alaa spoke to Arafat of the need to recognize Israel, and Abu Alaa was ready for a painful compromise that would bring peace and an end to the quarrel. "Abu Alaa took action in Tunis. He built the institutions of the future Palestinian state, surrounded himself with worthy Palestinian leaders, advised them of the developments, and enjoyed good relations with Nabil Shaath, Hassan Asfour, Nabil Amr, and Yasser Abed Rabo.

A number of testimonies indicate that **Abu Alaa and Arafat were suspicious of Abu Mazen during the first stages of the Accords, because he disappeared and spent months in Russia.** “Abu Alaa was unappreciative of Abu Mazen, to put it mildly ... Abu Mazen doesn’t want to progress with the diplomatic process and, furthermore, he is unable to because he doesn’t have the necessary courage and leadership abilities. He is considered far from being the heir to Arafat. He has proven a failed, anemic leader.” In recent years, Abu Alaa accused Abu Mazen of destroying the infrastructures of the future Palestinian state.

■ The Armed Conflict

Israelis disagree regarding whether Arafat had planned to start the Second Intifada or was caught up in circumstances that led him to renew the armed struggle against Israel —especially following the failure of Camp David and his assessment that Israel would not permit a Palestinian state to be established on the 1967 lines and would not vacate the West Bank and East Jerusalem. According to Abu Alaa’s memoirs, “a number of leaders” appealed to the better nature of Marwan Barghouti, a leader of Fatah who was close to Arafat, and urged him to immediately stop the attacks against Israel. Barghouti said several times that it was “Arafat who demanded that he take arms against Israel.” Those close to Arafat contend that Palestinian figures, fearing the consequences, sent a clear message to Arafat in the first week of the Second Intifada demanding him to cease the methods of armed resistance.

The USA’s failure: Those close to Abu Alaa ascribed the start of the armed struggle in Israel to an American error, or the “diplomatic stupidity” as they put it, that required the Palestinians, headed by Arafat, to meet with Barak at Camp David. Abu Alaa tried to prevent that meeting, despite a series of agreements between the Israeli and Palestinian teams such as recognition of the Jordanian border as the future eastern border of the Palestinian state.

Abu Alaa was angry that Clinton and the Americans ignored his warnings, and he declared that “the Israelis and Palestinians should have been left to negotiate directly, without American mediation, because the Americans often tend to ignore reality.” Abu Mazen saw the results in the form of the Camp David discussions’ failure and the consequent eruption of the Second Intifada.

Abu Alaa believed that Barak, unlike Clinton, came to Camp David to embarrass Arafat and prove that Arafat didn’t intend to reach an agreement. And Abu Alaa believed that Barak succeeded. “Barak perceived clearly that Arafat could not go so far as to end the dispute with Israel, but Barak’s perception doomed Arafat and Israel to the lengthy bloodletting of the Second Intifada.” Moreover, Abu Alaa believed that the assassination of Rabin and the advent of Hamas were what halted the Oslo Accords’ momentum all the way to the present.

The withdrawal from Gaza and the Hebron agreement: In 2005, despite American pressure, Abu Alaa refused to coordinate the Israeli disengagement from the Gaza Strip, seeing a danger that Sharon could demand a price from the Palestinians, in the form of significant compromise in Judea and Samaria, simply for withdrawing from Gaza.

■ The Palestinian Authority – A Trojan Horse?

In 1994, Arafat met with dozens of activists from Fatah and from the PFLP in Jericho and they questioned him trenchantly about recognition of Israel, the signing of agreements, and diplomatic compromise. He answered that the Palestinian Authority would be a “sulta muharriba” – a “fighting authority.” Abu Alaa considers those words not as proof that Arafat saw the Palestinian Authority as a Trojan Horse but rather as an attempt to silence criticism from the activists of the Palestinian organizations. Thus he claims that Arafat told young people in Jericho that “This is the first time in history that Palestinians are changing direction. No more will Palestinians be expelled from Palestinian territory, but on the contrary Palestinians will move from overseas into Palestinian territory.”

Years afterward, when Netanyahu became Prime Minister, Abu Alaa understood that the Palestinians had formulated the Oslo Accords and trusted their Israeli counterparts but had created no mechanism of arbitration whatsoever. And in retrospect, that should have been done in the documents and agreements from Oslo.

30 Years Since Oslo: The Settlement Enterprise and the Expansion of the Jewish Population of Judea and Samaria

Maj. (res) Lilach Eshtar

■ 30 Years Since Oslo: Have the Bypass Roads Built in the Wake of the Oslo Accords Been the Biggest Contributor to Population Growth in Judea and Samaria?

A total of 116,500 people lived in Judea, Samaria, and Gaza upon the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993, according to the Central Bureau of Statistics. In 2003, a decade after the signing of the agreement, the Interior Ministry reported that 231,400 Jews lived in Judea, Samaria, and Gaza. As of January 2023, some half a million residents live in about 150 towns throughout Judea, Samaria, and the Jordan Valley. A rough estimate would show that the population of Judea and Samaria has doubled every decade, though it has slowed down somewhat over the last ten years. At the same time, these areas have experienced life under the influence of terrorist attacks of varying frequency, Disengagement, military and Civil Administration governance, and occasional construction freezes. Notably, the Oslo Accords did not place restrictions upon the number of Israeli settlers allowed or the extent of the settlement enterprise. They leave the settlement issue as something to be discussed in the framework of negotiations towards a permanent arrangement.

According to the Rabin government's doctrine, the Oslo Accords were supposed to be the first part of a series of agreements that would eventually bring the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to an end. The prevailing opinion among the settlers in Judea and Samaria was that this agreement was the first of a series of future agreements that were meant to bring the settlement enterprise to a halt and bring Israel back to the borders of 1967. To prevent that from happening, settlement leaders put greater effort into encouraging the rapid absorption of new settlers and the establishment of new towns. In practice, at the time of the signing of the Oslo Accords, several factors came together, deliberately yet perhaps with unexpected timing and intensity, that significantly boosted the population growth of the settlement enterprise. In retrospect, the argument could be made that the construction of a system of transportation from Judea and Samaria to the centers of employment in Israel was the primary cause that stimulated population growth and serves until today as the most significant factor motivating people to move to these areas.

It is no secret that the Rabin government, concurrent to the signing of the Oslo Accords, placed a focus on the paving of bypass roads in Judea and Samaria. The definition of a bypass road meant that it would go around cities and villages that became Area A. The bypass road, which became a code name for the paving of roads in Judea and Samaria, was meant to fulfill Rabin's promise at the time to the settlers that the Oslo Accords would be implemented while protecting their security and allowing them to safely go on with their daily lives. The paving of these roads was not meant to prevent terrorist attacks. Rather, it was to create continuity between Jewish towns, as the roads between them passed through Arab villages.

In 1994, about half a year after the signing of the Oslo Accords, a large wave of attacks began, one that Israel had never before experienced. Bus bombings became the main form of Palestinian terrorism, the perpetrators of which came from the territories. These attacks were carried out within the Green Line inside Israeli territory and rattled Israelis to the core, particularly due to the high numbers of casualties. In April, a suicide bombing attack was carried out on the No. 5 bus on Dizengoff Street in Tel Aviv, resulting in the murder of 22 people. It was the first attack that brought terrorism into the heart of Israeli consciousness. It was not the last, as in that very same year, Israel suffered other similar suicide bombing attacks, including in Afula where nine were murdered and in Hadera where five Israelis were murdered. During this time, the Israeli government continued paving bypass roads, though they were not as acutely necessary since the terrorist attacks were primarily taking place inside Israel. Nevertheless, the government wanted to bring the Oslo Accords to fruition.

According to the Central Bureau of Statistics¹, road pavement projects increased ninefold in 1992 compared to 1991 but decreased sixfold in 1993. In 1994, there was an increase in the number of road pavement projects versus 1993. Put more simply, some 40 kilometers of road were paved in 1992 while only 14 kilometers of road were paved in 1994. The large push of road pavement projects had already taken place in 1992, prior to the Oslo Accords and during the government of Yitzchak Shamir, which ended in July 1992 and unknowingly laid the groundwork for the transportation infrastructure of the Oslo Accords. There are those who argue that the main motivation for the bypass roads was the First Intifada, which eroded the security of the roads in Judea and Samaria, while Oslo created the incentive for an additional acceleration of the trend.

The real story in my opinion, however, can be found in Ariel Sharon's understanding, when serving as Housing and Construction Minister, that transportation in Judea and Samaria is not important just for settler safety but also for ensuring Israel's hold of the territory. Sharon successfully demanded that the Public Works Department be placed under his jurisdiction, and he began a road-planning operation in Judea and Samaria unlike any other. As part of this operation, he made sure to outsource the planning of roads so that it would not be under the ministry's supervision. He thus created a system that would bypass the Public Works Department in order to expedite the planning and approval of such projects. The Rabin government essentially adopted the plans that had already been approved, completed projects that had already begun, and even planned new roads using the same platform that had been initiated under the Shamir government. The swift construction and the fact that certain roads already existed directly contributed to the rapid population growth during those years.

Two years into the Rabin government, while the Oslo Accords were being implemented, the number of residents of Judea, Samaria, and Gaza grew by some 30,000 people, 12,000 of which moved there after the Oslo Accords were signed. The city of Ariel grew in that time period by 38.5%. Efrat grew by about 45%. The number of people living within the jurisdiction of the Binyamin Regional Council grew from 14,887 on June 30, 1992 to 21,803 people as of June 1994, making for a growth rate of 46.5%. The population within the jurisdiction of the Samaria Regional Council grew in that time period by 27%. The overall growth rate of the population living in Judea, Samaria, and Gaza in the first two years after the inauguration of the Rabin government was 31%. Essentially, the pace of growth of the Jewish population in Judea and Samaria was three times greater than that of the rest of Israel in the years 1999-2003.²

The most significant growth was in the settlements located closest to Israel's major centers of employment, which made it possible for families to move to a new place of residence without changing jobs. It is also apparent today that the demand for real estate in Judea, Samaria, and the Jordan Valley is not dictated by the level of friction with the Palestinians. Rather, it is a consequence of the distance from Israel's major centers of employment. A review of the Yad2 website shows that the asking price for a two-family home in Neve Daniel, a town that is half an hour from Jerusalem, is NIS 4,195,000 (roughly \$1.09 million USD). In Tekoa, which is also located about a half an hour from Jerusalem, a house is up for sale for NIS 4,999,999 (roughly \$1.3 million USD). These are unusually high prices in relative terms to the Israeli peripheral towns.

On the other hand, in the Jordan Valley and the northern Dead Sea, areas over which there is agreement amongst a consensus of Israeli public opinion and where attacks by Palestinians are less prevalent as compared with the rest of Judea and Samaria, the prices and levels of demand are lower.

In the northern Dead Sea area, in Mitzpe Shalem, an hour's drive from Jerusalem, a villa with a pool can be bought for just NIS 2,750,000 (\$715,500 USD). In Moshav Roi, in the Jordan Valley, about 75 minutes from Tel Aviv, a farm can be purchased for not more than NIS 1,370,000 (\$356,400 USD). The differences in the levels of demand also demonstrate the fact that if there was ever a connection between settlement development and the level of certainty regarding the fate of the territories beyond the Green Line, it has become unraveled over time. In other words, Jewish migration into Judea and Samaria is unconcerned about future agreements. Rather, it is impacted most by the current reality. Distance from work, family, and cultural centers is more significant than concern about future withdrawal. It likely also points to the fact that the new residents of Judea and Samaria are not concerned that at some point in the future, Israel will return to conducting negotiations with the Palestinians and will give up land. Moreover, over the years, the bypass roads have become major highways alongside which new towns have been built and have developed quickly. On the other hand, the Jordan Valley Regional Council and the Megilot Regional Council, which have not benefited from new highways, continue to develop slowly, despite the relatively low threat level there and the high level of consensus that they enjoy amongst Israeli public opinion.

It can further be learned from this that the paving of roads was the biggest accelerator of settlement growth and the linking of the settlements to central Israel. There are even those who would say that the physical linkage of Judea and Samaria to central Israel was the first phase of the slow process in which the settlement enterprise made its way into the Israeli public consensus. It is likely that that when more secular Israelis moved to Judea and Samaria and institutions like Ariel University were built, they created a new type of public consciousness regarding the settlements amongst a large segment of the citizens of Israel.

Three Decades Post-Oslo Accords: Israel's Approach to Combating Terrorism in Judea and Samaria

Dr. Omer Dostri

The Oslo Accords, initially signed in a solemn ceremony on the White House lawns on September 13, 1993, ultimately fell short of achieving the long-anticipated peace between Israel and the Palestinians. These accords led to several key developments. Firstly, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) withdrew from Palestinian settlement areas in Judea, Samaria, and the Gaza Strip, placing them under the control of the Palestinian Authority. Within the Palestinian Authority's framework, security mechanisms were established with the responsibility of maintaining order and security in these territories.

However, the practical outcome of these arrangements had adverse consequences for the security of Israel and its citizens for several reasons. Firstly, the agreements allowed significant figures associated with terrorism, including Yasser Arafat, chairman of the Fatah movement, to gain influence and control over these territories. This occurred instead of fostering and developing local leadership, whether centralized or rooted in tribal and district structures within Gaza and Judea and Samaria. Secondly, the IDF's withdrawal from these territories weakened its ability to prepare, respond, and take proactive measures against terrorism aimed at Israel. This withdrawal left a security gap.

Thirdly, the influx of Palestinian terrorists, combined with the IDF's withdrawal, significantly bolstered the military and terrorist capabilities of Palestinians, both in the cities of Judea and Samaria and the Gaza Strip. In the six years following the implementation of the Oslo Accords from 1994 to the outbreak of the Second Intifada in 2000, Palestinian terrorism escalated from using rudimentary tools like stones, knives, and Molotov cocktails to employing rockets, firearms, explosive devices, and suicide belts. This escalation highlighted the Palestinians' capacity for military and terrorist intensification once Israel lost its security control over the territories, and the IDF faced restrictions in operating within Palestinian cities.

Despite these developments and numerous attacks, Israel did not abandon its commitment to the idea of withdrawing from the territories of Judea and Samaria and the Gaza Strip, continuing to adhere to the agreements. This persistence is perplexing, especially considering that the Gaza-Jericho Agreement served as a safeguard against Palestinian deception. Nonetheless, Israel continued to transfer control of various Palestinian cities to the Palestinian Authority, relinquishing its safeguard as a result of its own actions.

■ From a containment policy to a policy of decisiveness

In the early stages of the Second Intifada, which began in September 2002, the IDF's response to riots and acts of terrorism was initially constrained, primarily characterized by defensive measures. These actions included employing snipers, dispersing demonstrations in conflict hotspots, and setting up ambushes along movement routes. The IDF conducted targeted arrests in areas designated as B and only ventured into the outskirts of areas marked as A when necessary. These measures were taken to safeguard the Israeli population in motion and to strategically enhance control over the region. Additionally, sporadic attacks using helicopter gunships were carried out against Palestinian Authority government facilities, although these facilities were often vacated due to prior warnings from the IDF.

A significant shift in Israel's policy occurred in February 2002, when a decision was made at the political level to launch an extensive and sustained military operation aimed at disrupting terrorism and its infrastructure in various Palestinian cities within Area A of Judea and Samaria. This operation was named "Essential Defense." The military strategy behind it was to exert increasing pressure on the Palestinian Authority through a series of military actions in cities known as hubs of terrorism.

During Operation "Essential Defense," the IDF conducted operations in locations such as the Balata refugee camp in Nablus and the refugee camp in Jenin. Subsequently, the IDF engaged in operational activities in cities like Tulkarm, Bethlehem, and even Ramallah. This operation spanned nearly a month and involved six divisional and division-level actions, resulting in the loss of four IDF soldiers. Approximately 80 Palestinians were killed, around 300 were injured, and about 60 were arrested for interrogation by the Israel Security Agency (Shin Bet).

However, upon assessing the operation's outcome, it became evident that it had not effectively deterred or significantly undermined the operational capabilities of terrorist organizations. This was primarily due to the constraints imposed on the depth of IDF entry into urban areas, with the prohibition of forces entering the refugee camps themselves, except for the operation in Tulkarm.

Following the tragic attack at the "Park" hotel in Netanya during a Passover Seder celebration, resulting in the loss of 30 civilian lives and injuring 160 others, the political leadership made the decision to initiate a comprehensive and substantial military operation in Judea and Samaria, known as "Defensive Shield," with the objective of "altering the prevailing circumstances." The government's decision, following the launch of the operation, explicitly stated that "Israel would actively combat all aspects of the Palestinian terror infrastructure, and would carry out extensive operations until the goal was accomplished." Approximately 20,000 reservists were called up, and five divisions were mobilized for this endeavor. The operation commenced on March 28, 2002, with the seizure of Ramallah and the

Palestinian Authority's headquarters, subsequently followed by the takeover of four other cities: Tulkarm, Qalqilya, Bethlehem, and Jenin. Operation "Defensive Shield" effectively concluded on April 21, 2002, while the sieges of the Palestinian Authority's headquarters in Ramallah and the Church of the Nativity compound in Bethlehem persisted for an additional month.

Throughout the operation, 28 soldiers and border police lost their lives, and 185 soldiers sustained injuries. Approximately 200 Palestinians were killed, including 56 high-priority targets and ten potential suicide bombers. Thousands of suspects were apprehended, 50 explosive laboratories were dismantled, and an array of weapons, along with dozens of rocket engines and anti-tank missiles, were confiscated. Soldiers who participated in the operation reported a prevailing sense of victory that broke the defensive stalemate, enabling the IDF to take the initiative in the fight against terrorism.

While terrorist attacks did not cease entirely following the operation, its primary achievement lay in restoring the IDF's freedom of action in all Judea and Samaria territories. This enhancement significantly bolstered intelligence capabilities on the ground, facilitating numerous operations in cities and villages. Ultimately, these efforts contributed to the defeat of terrorist organizations and a substantial reduction in terrorism within the region.

Operation "Defensive Shield" marked a pivotal moment in Israel's struggle against Palestinian terrorism, and its outcomes continue to shape the IDF's activities in Judea and Samaria. This includes entering territories under the control of the Palestinian Authority, conducting preventive arrests, and taking proactive measures despite the Oslo Accords, when the Palestinian Authority either refuses or is unable to carry out these operations as promised. In response to the ongoing wave of attacks, several smaller and medium-sized military operations were carried out, involving the deployment of IDF forces into the urban areas of Palestinian cities.

For instance, on June 22, 2002, the IDF launched a large-scale operation called "Determined Path," resuming operations in the cities and refugee camps of Judea and Samaria. The primary objective of this operation was to build upon the work initiated during "Defensive Shield" and further disrupt the remaining terrorist infrastructure in the region, particularly in Nablus and Jenin. "Determined Path" concluded on July 2, 2002, resulting in the capture and destruction of 10 explosive laboratories, numerous explosive devices, tens of kilograms of explosives, and hundreds of weapons. Approximately 600 Palestinians were arrested, including 150 individuals wanted for planning terrorist attacks.

The sustained, intense, and continuous efforts of the IDF in combating terrorism in Judea and Samaria, particularly through "Defensive Shield" and "Determined Path," combined with the construction of the security fence along the seam line

(implemented from August 2002 to 2003), the IDF's presence in areas classified as B and A, intelligence operations in these regions, and the elimination or capture of most terrorist organization leaders in Judea and Samaria, contributed significantly to a substantial reduction in suicide attacks and all forms of terrorism against Israeli citizens and security forces. In 2004, the number of suicide attacks dropped to 12, and by 2005, it had decreased to five. Between 2004 and 2014, the IDF refrained from undertaking major operations in the Judea and Samaria territories, instead focusing on consistent and routine day-to-day activities, with occasional raids aimed at thwarting local terrorist operatives.

■ **Lessons Drawn from Israel's Counter-Terrorism Efforts Following the Oslo Accords**

At the onset of the second intifada, the IDF and the security apparatus faced considerable challenges in countering terrorism and establishing a favorable tactical and operational position. This difficulty arose because the IDF and security organizations lacked a significant presence and control on the ground. Consequently, the initial efforts during the early stages of the second intifada primarily focused on building a military infrastructure, specifically aimed at achieving dominance and control on both operational and intelligence fronts. Consequently, the majority of the IDF's early responses to the surge in terrorism during the second intifada centered around capturing and securing checkpoints and crossings under the Palestinian Authority's control. This included gaining command over vital movement routes and access roads and strategically positioning themselves in elevated geographical locations, such as mountains and hills.

Throughout the Second Intifada, the IDF gradually increased its presence in these areas, emphasizing extensive, intensive, and continuous operations within Areas A. These raids into Areas A continued almost regularly for the past two decades, with the exception of the recent years leading up to the outbreak of the wave of terrorism in late 2021. This ongoing presence afforded the IDF the freedom of action to conduct military operations and effectively maintained a low level of Palestinian terrorism in Judea and Samaria. An analysis of the situation underscores the strategic, operational, and tactical significance of the territories in Judea and Samaria for both the IDF and the State of Israel.

Historical examples serve as crucial lessons in security. They illustrate that the withdrawal and absence of Israeli security forces and civilians from these territories would jeopardize the state's security and the safety of its citizens, greatly diminishing the IDF's capacity to respond effectively in the face of increased terrorist activities and widespread waves of terrorism.

A comparison between the level and nature of terrorism in the regions of Judea and Samaria versus the Gaza Strip underscores the critical importance of Israel's control over every available territory. Without such control, there is a substantial risk that

the occupied area may evolve into a terrorist stronghold from which attacks against the state and its citizens can be launched. While Israel faces security challenges from both Judea and Samaria, it enjoys a greater degree of operational freedom and maneuverability in these regions. This freedom of action, combined with ample room for maneuver, serves as a potent deterrent against terrorism, enabling proactive measures and intelligence gathering due to its on-the-ground presence. This stands in contrast to the situation in the Gaza Strip following Israel's withdrawal from the area on 2005.

The strategic viability of Israel's presence around Judea and Samaria has not only been underscored in light of its military presence there, but also its civilian one. Without Jewish communities around the area, the Palestinian Authority would have already ceded to Hamas, given the force multiplier these communities (dubbed "settlements") supply to the IDF's activity. These points of stability not only legitimize Israel's presence in the territories, but greatly facilitate the movement of forces around the area, provide a safe exit and return point, and normalize Israeli routine presence there by sheer use of the routes, and fostering of joint Israeli-Palestinian industrial zones. The lack thereof, such as in Northern Samaria following the 2005 disengagement, has inevitably led to continued force buildup of terror groups, hampered the IDF's activity there and removed a significant barrier that impeded terrorism bases from flourishing.

Israel's experience in dealing with terrorism during the Second Intifada (1993-2004) demonstrated that a significant reduction in terrorism can only be achieved through comprehensive, sustained, and ongoing military operations aimed at the core and vital elements of the adversary. One key reason for this is that it is only in extensive military operations, where the IDF can effectively encircle the area and respond swiftly, that there is a realistic chance of substantially dismantling most of the terrorist organizations' military infrastructure, disrupting the senior leadership, and neutralizing the leadership and operatives who form the core of the enemy's strength. Conversely, during sporadic military incursions, limited operations, or raids, terrorist operatives and their leadership often manage to evade capture by seeking refuge in refugee camps or shifting from one town to another. They also have the opportunity to conceal or transport weapons until IDF forces can reach their hiding places.