

Analysis of the Oslo Accords

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Executive Summary

Among the numerous efforts by Israel and Palestine to resolve their tensed conflicts, the Oslo Accords, signed in 1993 and again in 1995, serve as a testament that the goal of peace between the two nations may be far from fruition.

The Oslo Accords were not designed to be the final solution to the conflict between the nations, rather, they were designed to be a “Declaration of Principles” and a base from which further full peace agreements could be made- its conception was to serve as a launching pad to further peace agreements. When analyzing the effectiveness of the Oslo Accords, it is important to remember this fact, as it would be easy to view the Accords as completely unsuccessful for not fully harboring peace between the nations if one were to analyze the outcome of the Accords by full “peace”.

An initial goal of the agreement was for both nations to acknowledge and accept the legitimacy of each other’s governments- a difficult task for both nations, as they vehemently despised the legitimacy of each other. In accordance with that goal, a Palestinian Authority would be established. The Palestinian Authority would oversee self-governance in regions like the West Bank and Gaza Strip- both highly disputed pieces of land between the nations. In order for Palestinians to have the right to self-governance, the Israeli military were forced to evacuate the six Palestinian cities they had been occupying. Another goal of the Oslo Accords was to enhance the Palestinian economy in order to build a stronger and more sustainable society.

For several years, despite the tension between the two nations, it was seen by many around the world that the Oslo Accords were directing Israel and Palestine on a path to peace. However, because these Accords lacked many long-term goals, unification, and concise direction throughout the process dwindled, ultimately causing a collapse of the agreement. The failures of the Oslo Accords have left Israeli and Palestinian diplomacy in shambles and have reshaped the middle east of today.

The recommendation of this report is to analyze the policies of the Oslo Accords between the Israeli and Palestinian governments to better understand the failures and successes of their journey to peace. Important also, is to analyze and decipher how the foreign policies of these nations has negatively impacted their current relations, and how the policies have damaged future opportunities of reconstruction.

Analysis

After several rigorous decades of uncertain and tense relations, filled with failing foreign policies and agreements, Israel and Palestine signed the Oslo Accords in 1993 in Washington D.C. The talks and negotiations of this agreement began in 1992 in Oslo, Norway, as Norway would act as the mediator. The Accords were constructed in a way to strictly be a foundation from which other, more forward focused, agreements and policies could be made.

The first set of agreements in 1993 required cooperation of both nations, meaning that both Israel and Palestine would have to make numerous sacrifices in order for the peace process to continue. A contested fact that was difficult for Israel to accept was the legitimacy of the Palestine Liberation Organization (Rynhold 2008). The PLO formed in 1964 with the intent to formalize a political system for the Palestinians who had no central government at that time (Rynhold 2008). Another goal of the PLO was to eliminate the newly formed nation of Israel. Because of the violence harbored by the PLO, many nations, including the U.S. resented them and referred to them as a terrorist organization (Rynhold 2008). The actions of the PLO and its leader, Yasser Arafat, were what caused great skepticism and distrust by Israel, as they too saw it as a terrorist organization (Rynhold 2008). Despite the opposition of countries around the globe, the PLO received an observer seat at the U.N., furthering its legitimacy. For these reasons, Israel loathed the PLO and saw them as a major threat; however, one of the first requirements of the new accord was for Israel to accept the PLO as the true representative of Palestine (Rynhold 2008).

As a result of Israel's legitimizing of the PLO, the PLO was then instructed to denounce terrorism (Rynhold 2008). This act seemingly had no effect on their actions though, as they continued to carry out terrorists acts against Israel (Rynhold 2008). As the actions of the PLO evolved, extremist rhetoric grew louder, ultimately creating what is now the governing political organization, Hamas, infamous for its terrorism (Rynhold 2008).

Similar to Israel's view of the legitimacy of Palestine, the same sentiment was expressed by Palestine to Israel. As a result, the PLO was instructed to recognize Israel as a country. This admission by the PLO is in many ways one of the most difficult things to do so difficult that Palestine still disagrees with the legitimacy of Israel, because they did not believe in Israel's right to exist. The decision of this admission by both countries was an essential element to the foundation of this agreement and future agreements, because if one nation refuses to see the other as a legitimate state, hardly any progress can be made. A scenario in which nations refuse to view each other as legitimate can create an imbalance on the view of power between the two and can lead the negotiation terms to be partial.

Another prerequisite to the signing of the Accords was determining how the West Bank would be divided. In an effort of fairness, one third of the West Bank land was to be governed by the Israelis, one third was to be governed by the Palestinians, and the last third was to be jointly governed by both nations. This prerequisite is the source of numerous issues that the nations still face today. As the Israelis continue to approach diplomatic relations from a mindset of power, they continue to expand the original territory established to them, extending the tension between the two. While this prerequisite was initially somewhat followed, Israel eventually broke the terms of the agreement and began expanding their territory and occupation through military force (Boatman and Martin 2019). Additionally, Israeli settlement in Palestinian territory grew from 250,000 in 1993 to 600,000 today (Wermenbol 2018).

The long-disputed territory between the two became a quite contentious discussion during the talks leading up to the agreement, as it still is today. Before the Oslo Accords, Israel's military had been occupying six major Palestinian cities (Asfour 2018). In response to this, the agreement required Israel to halt these operations and to no longer occupy these cities. Israel failed to completely follow the terms of this prerequisite (Asfour 2018).

One of the only forward focused and long-term goals that was created in this agreement was to have a newly formed Palestinian Authority to oversee and govern Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip (Asfour 2018). At the heart of what Palestine wanted the most out of the agreements was the ability to have self-governance in the West Bank and Gaza Strip; however, Israeli presence barred them from that opportunity. Through the creation of the Palestinian Authority, Palestinians felt they would gain the opportunity of self-governance within those regions. The U.N. supported Palestine's right to self-governance, even in the disputed land outlined in the Oslo Accords (Asfour 2018). The U.N. received and supported Palestine's Declaration of Principles; however, there was little U.N. involvement in the peace process, including peace keeping missions (Asfour 2018).

The economic assistance for this agreement by countries across the world reached \$30 billion; however, the GDP of Palestine grew only 0.1% (Boatman and Martin 2019). In addition to the poor economic standards of Palestine present before the signing of the Accords, Israel imposed several economic restrictions on Palestine and the Gaza strip. As a result of these factors, in 2018, Gaza's economic activity has decreased by 8% and unemployment reached over 52% (Boatman and Martin 2019). These statistics prove two facts: the act of throwing money at the issue may not always be the solution, and Israel's ability to hold such a strong grip on Palestine's economy is a result of an unfair agreement.

Much of the failure of Palestinian economic development throughout the Oslo process though, was self-inflicted. Within the Accords, there were four major economic goals that were mainly focused on improving Palestine's economy. The first goal was to have a steady contribution of foreign aid, the second was to have healthy economic relations between Israel and Palestine, the third was increase foreign investments in Palestine, and the fourth was to broaden Palestine's access to foreign markets (Leinwand 2001). During the process and even today, the Palestinian government refuses to participate and adapt to globalization in general, but especially economically (Leinwand 2001). The Oslo Accords' success was going to be based in how well each country participated diplomatically, but also how each country participated domestically. By Palestine's refusal to economically cooperate, their economy still lacks behind others' economies today, creating an open wound susceptible to more violent political turmoil, action, and violence.

Another failure of the Oslo Accords that can be used as a learning point for possible future agreements is the means to which the nations come to the table of negotiation. Because there were not many clear long-term goals set during the formation of the Oslo Accords, there was no exact and clear purpose to work towards except for the idea of diplomacy other than "building peace". If the two nations meet again for a new agreement, there must be a set of clear short-term and long-term goals that serve as a means of encouragement and measuring success and failure.

For future negotiations between Israel and Palestine, it will be imperative that there is an equal and balanced system set in place to not allow more power to be given to one particular nation. As stated above, a major flaw in the Oslo Accords is that Israel approached the agreement with the assumption of the upper hand in strength. Israel was

and still is adamant about displaying its dominance through military and economic powers. Israel has heavily relied on this strategy to gain assistance and support from other countries. If global peacekeepers such as the U.N. wanted to ensure a fair outcome for the citizens of both nations, provisions would need to be set in place in future agreements with mediating countries dedicated to upholding a fair system.

An initial alternative to the Oslo accords was to abandon it, which is ultimately what would happen several years later. Throughout the process of the Accords, it was extremely apparent that it was not working, and that peace and safety were not going to be achieved. While all of this was apparent, both states held on to the Accords with hope that it would somehow foster results. Amos Oz explains that the route of the depletion of the Oslo Accords was simply the fact that the spirit for peace broke down over time. Additionally, he explains that towards the end of the Oslo era, Israel began functioning with the mentality that they were working from a position of strength rather than of cooperation. This a large factor that still affects the relations between Israel and Palestine, as Israel truly sees itself as the country of strength and has convinced many other countries as well.

Two general 'alternatives' that had been discussed prior to the Oslo Accords can be summarized by realism and liberalism (Rynhold, 7). Throughout the Oslo Accord era, policy makers continuously debated between the two alternatives, and in a way still do today. The realist alternative is not necessarily focused on building peace but is more focused on conflict prevention and management (Rynhold, 7). The realist approach views political interests, power, and security as key factors of foreign relations (Rynhold, 7). The liberal alternative is to have a more integrated relationship between the two countries that did not require heavy military or political power to intervene in the

Other specific alternatives include a "separation strategy" in which a physical separation would be enacted that would prevent Palestinian goods and produce from being exported, even to Israel. Ariel Leinwand explains that this alternative strategy would be economic genocide for the Palestinians and would have ended the peace agreement immediately (Leinwand 2001). For example, in one instance, the Israelis dug a moat around a University, causing 65,000 Palestinian villagers to lose power and water-- proving the instability of the Palestinian economy and society (Leinwand 2001).

In general, one of the most obvious failures of the Oslo Accords are the vagueness of terms and future aspirations. As Boatman and Martin state, "The Oslo Accords said little about what the parties were making a transition to and from." (Boatman and Martin 2019) While the nations did have hopes and aspirations of obtaining peace, the Oslo Accords never alludes to any of those goals. The Accords instead only focus on the more short-term goals.

Due to the ultimate failure of the Oslo Accords, the issues arising from the Middle East continue to fester. Since the dilapidation of the agreement, talks and negotiations between the two nations have come to a stale halt, while tensions and military action continue to rise. Moving forward, it is apparent that the healing of the relationship between the two nations will be a long and tedious process. After examining the accomplishments and failures of the Oslo Accords, there is much to learn. Firstly, in a future agreement between Israel and Palestine, there must be a mediating country or figure who is truly impartial. The Oslo Accords proved that there was much bias to the terms and accountability given to Israel. While Israel officially recognized the POL as legitimate on paper, their mentality proved otherwise, and in parts, still does today. Another failure in this peace process was

the lack of U.N. involvement. In future peace operations between Israel and Palestine, there must be more involvement by the U.N.

While the Oslo Accords are no longer active, it is important to understand the lasting effects that it had on the relation between Israel and Palestine. Any possibility of future negotiations and/or agreements between the two nations will be extremely challenging but addressing and avoiding the failures of peace agreements such as the Oslo Accords will give the two nations a better chance of success.

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