



The Establishment of the Palestinian Authority: Key Agreements and the Gaza-Jericho Process

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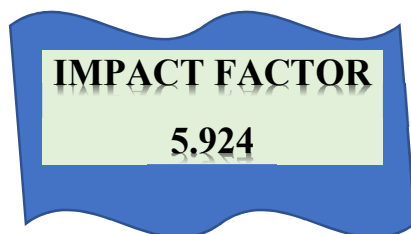
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Abstract

This paper examines the historical and political processes that led to the establishment of the Palestinian Authority (PA) within the framework of the Oslo Accords. Particular attention is given to the Declaration of Principles (1993), the Gaza-Jericho Agreement (1994), and subsequent negotiations that defined the contours of the interim self-governing body. The study highlights the contentious issues of sovereignty, security, settlements, and borders, while also assessing the divergent Palestinian perspectives on the accords. It argues that while the PA represented a landmark in Palestinian self-rule, its establishment was constrained by Israeli security control, the unresolved status of Jerusalem, and the absence of guarantees for a sovereign state.

Keywords: Palestinian Authority, Oslo Accords, Gaza-Jericho Agreement, self-rule, sovereignty



1. Introduction: The Oslo Accords and the Quest for Interim Self-Governance

The signing of the Declaration of Principles (DoP) on 13 September 1993 between the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and Israel marked a turning point in the history of the Palestinian national movement (United Nations, 1993). The agreement envisioned the creation of a Palestinian Interim Self-Government Authority for a transitional period of five years, during which permanent status negotiations would take place. Despite its historic symbolism, the DoP left unresolved the most contentious issues—Jerusalem, borders, refugees, and settlements—thus deferring them to later negotiations (Aruri, 2003).



2. The Declaration of Principles: Framework and Structural Limitations

The DoP established a conceptual framework for peace but contained major ambiguities. While it created the basis for a Palestinian self-governing authority, it avoided recognition of Palestinian sovereign rights or guarantees of eventual statehood (Brown, 2003). Israel retained overriding authority in defense, foreign affairs, and settlement policy (Shlaim, 2014). Critics argued that the agreement legitimized Israeli occupation under a new administrative arrangement, while weakening Palestinian demands for independence (Beinin & Hajar, 2014).

3. From Principles to Practice: The Gaza-Jericho Agreement of 1994

The Gaza-Jericho Agreement, signed in Cairo on 4 May 1994, operationalized the DoP by granting Palestinians limited autonomy in Gaza and Jericho (United Nations, 1994). The agreement provided for the withdrawal of Israeli forces from specified areas and the transfer of civil authority to the PA. However, Israel retained control over external security, borders, and settlements, reflecting the asymmetry of power between the negotiating parties (Klein, 2007).

3.1 Negotiation Challenges and Security Constraints

Negotiations leading to the agreement were protracted, with disputes over troop redeployment, border arrangements, and the scope of Palestinian jurisdiction (Abbas, 1995). Israeli insistence on retaining security prerogatives clashed with Palestinian demands for full withdrawal. These tensions highlighted the unequal bargaining position of the parties (Brown, 2002).

3.2 International Mediation and Economic Assistance

An international conference in Washington in October 1993 mobilized donor commitments to support Palestinian reconstruction (Hilal, 2007). Donor aid, however, was conditioned on the progress of political negotiations. The establishment of the Palestinian Economic Council for Development and Reconstruction (PECDAR) reflected both the promise of economic development and the risk of donor dependency (Sayigh, 2011).

4. Palestinian Political Responses: Support, Skepticism, and Fragmentation

The Palestinian political landscape was divided over the Oslo process. Fatah, the dominant faction within the PLO, endorsed the DoP as a pragmatic step toward statehood. However, other Palestinian leaders and civil society actors criticized the accords for compromising national rights, neglecting refugees, and risking territorial fragmentation (Robinson, 1997). The absence of explicit provisions on Jerusalem and the right of return deepened skepticism within Palestinian society (Ghanem, 2010). This internal division weakened the legitimacy of the PA from its inception.

**5. Economic Dependency and the Paris Protocol (1994)**

The Paris Protocol on Economic Relations, signed in April 1994, institutionalized the economic framework between Israel and the PA (World Bank, 1994). While it facilitated trade, taxation, and labor flows, it effectively integrated the Palestinian economy into Israel's, limiting independent policy-making (Arnon & Weinblatt, 2001). This dependency raised concerns about the PA's ability to function as a self-sustaining governing authority.

6. The Hebron Massacre, Security Agreements, and International Oversight

The Hebron massacre of February 1994, in which an Israeli settler killed 29 Palestinians at the Ibrahimi Mosque, exposed the fragility of the peace process (Beinin & Hajjar, 2014). In response, the Israeli-Palestinian Security Agreement of March 1994 introduced a Temporary International Presence in Hebron (TIPH), though with a limited mandate (Shlaim, 2014). Despite Palestinian dissatisfaction, the agreement enabled stalled negotiations to resume, ultimately paving the way for the Gaza-Jericho Agreement.

7. Conclusion: Limited Self-Rule and the Paradox of the Palestinian Authority

The establishment of the PA was both a historic breakthrough and a paradox of limited sovereignty. While it created the institutional framework for Palestinian self-rule in Gaza and Jericho, it did not resolve the fundamental political questions of borders, refugees, Jerusalem, and settlements. The PA emerged as a governing authority with administrative responsibilities but without full sovereignty (Sayigh, 2011). Thus, the early phase of the PA embodied both hope for institutional self-rule and disillusionment with its structural dependency.

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