

The Israel-PLO Mutual Recognition Agreement

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Abstract

From the perspective of a practitioner who was deeply engaged in the negotiations, this article describes how the Israeli-Palestinian Mutual Recognition Agreement was conceived and negotiated. It explains the process of convincing Israeli and Palestinian leaders to accept mutual recognition, overcoming their initial objections. While not nearly as publicized as the 1993 Declaration of Principles agreed at Oslo, this Agreement became the bedrock for all the Oslo Accords, and set the stage for subsequent negotiations.

Keywords

Oslo Accords – Israel – Palestine Liberation Organization – Mutual Recognition Agreement – negotiation

Beginning in 1993, Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) entered into a series of interrelated agreements known, collectively, as the Oslo Accords. Among these agreements were the 1993 Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements (the “Declaration of Principles” or “DOP”), and its two main implementing agreements: the 1994 Agreement on the

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Gaza Strip and the Jericho Area (also known as the “Gaza-Jericho Agreement” or the “Cairo Agreement”), and the 1995 Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (also known as “Oslo II”).

A lot has been written over the years about the DOP, the Cairo Agreement and Oslo II. Less focus has been placed on another component of the Oslo Accords, which was even more groundbreaking: an exchange of letters between Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat. This exchange, often referred to as the “Israel-PLO Mutual Recognition Agreement,” occurred shortly before the ceremonial signing of the DOP in Washington, DC. Validating once again the veracity of Marshall McLuhan’s adage that “the medium is the message,” the mutual recognition letters – signed separately in Israel and Tunisia (where the PLO was then headquartered), without the theatrical visual of the two former enemies standing side by side – left no lasting impression in the public mind. However, the famous handshake between Rabin and Arafat, which took place just three days after the letters’ exchange on the White House lawn, would not have occurred if the Mutual Recognition Agreement had not been reached.

Personally, the Mutual Recognition Agreement is my favorite of the many agreements that I drafted which comprise the Oslo Accords. Unlike the other Oslo agreements, all of which were intended to be temporary and only valid until replaced by the Permanent Status Agreement to be reached within five years, the Mutual Recognition Agreement is the only one that was both groundbreaking and intended to remain in force indefinitely.

This article describes how I conceived the Israeli-Palestinian mutual recognition idea and developed the Israel-PLO Mutual Recognition Agreement. It also describes the arduous process of convincing the Israeli and Palestinian leaders to accept mutual recognition, overcoming their initial objections. The article also demonstrates how history could have taken an alternative path, for better or worse, should Israeli and PLO leadership not have included mutual recognition in the Oslo process. While not nearly as publicized as the DOP and subsequent steps, the Israeli-Palestinian Mutual Recognition Agreement became the bedrock for all Oslo Accords, and set the stage for all subsequent and future permanent status negotiations.

Background

I first became involved in the Oslo negotiations in late May 1993, when Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Yossi Beilin and Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres invited me to Israel to review a draft of a document titled “Declaration of Principles.” The document – which would eventually lead to the Oslo

Accords – had been negotiated secretly in Norway by two Israeli academics, Professor Yair Hirschfeld and Dr. Ron Pundak, and representatives of the PLO, led by Ahmed Qurie (known as Abu Ala). Shortly before I was invited to Israel, Uri Savir, Director General of the Israeli Foreign Ministry also joined the Israeli team.

I was then practicing law in a large law firm in Washington, DC, having retired as a colonel in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) four years earlier, after serving for 18 years. Peres and Beilin asked me to review the draft DOP because of my background as Director of the International Law Department in the IDF, in which role I was responsible, among other things, for maintaining the rule of law in the West Bank and Gaza (WBG). Thus, I was very familiar with these areas and all associated legal issues.

Importantly, I was also the IDF representative in the Israeli delegation that negotiated an autonomy agreement for the WBG with Egypt and the United States, following the 1978 Camp David Accords. In that role, I had developed a detailed autonomy plan for the right-wing government of Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin. No less important, I was also known as a confidant of Rabin, having worked with him closely for five years in the 1980s, when he was the Minister of Defense during the Likud-Labor coalition government. It appears, therefore, that Peres sought my involvement in the Oslo process to utilize my experience, as well as Rabin's trust in me, which he did not enjoy.

After reviewing the draft DOP, I shared my negative opinion about it with Peres and Beilin. Peres then took me to meet Rabin. I explained what I thought were the main deficiencies in the draft and Rabin agreed with me completely. Yet, instead of concluding that the DOP should be discarded and ordering that the Oslo back channel be closed, Rabin asked me whether I could fix the draft. When I said "yes," Rabin instructed me to do so. He sent me directly to Oslo, where I worked with the three other Israeli team members, under Rabin's close supervision, for three and a half months negotiating the draft with the PLO.

Full agreement on the text of the draft DOP was reached and the DOP initiated on the night of August 19–20, 1993 in Oslo, and then officially signed in Washington on September 13, 1993. At that time, I also accepted Peres's offer to join the Israeli Foreign Ministry as its Legal Advisor, the position in which I spent the next three years negotiating all of the Oslo implementing agreements.

The Palestinian Representation Conundrum

In those days, official representatives of Israel were negotiating an agreement for self-government arrangements in the West Bank and Gaza in Washington with a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation that included non-PLO Palestinian

residents of the WBG. That formula for Palestinian participation in the peace talks was devised in 1991 by U.S. Secretary of State James A. Baker, III, in the context of drafting the letters of invitation to the 1991 Middle East Peace Conference in Madrid.

This formula was intended to accommodate Israel's long-standing policy of not talking with the PLO, in objection to the PLO's history of terrorist attacks against Israel and Israeli civilians, its refusal to recognize the existence of the State of Israel, and its objectives, as reflected in the Palestinian National Covenant (or Charter), to destroy Israel. Israel's attitude to the PLO was also intertwined with its objection to the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, which, if created, was considered to pose a mortal danger to Israel. Concurrently, the official Israeli position was that discussions over the future of the West Bank should only be conducted with Jordan, from which Israel captured these areas in the 1967 Six-Day War. Indeed, Israel commenced secret discussions with Jordan regarding the fate of the West Bank shortly after the 1967 war was over.

However, on October 29, 1974, the Arab League, in its Seventh Summit Conference, passed a Resolution on Palestine which, among other things, "[affirmed] the right of the Palestinian people to establish an independent national authority under the command of the Palestine Liberation Organization, the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, in any Palestinian territory that is liberated." This resolution significantly undermined Jordan's ability to continue discussions with Israel regarding the WBG, as the PLO's status was being upgraded from that of a backseat driver to the recognized future government of a Palestinian "independent national authority" – even though, because of Israel's strong objection to engaging the PLO, it was unable to assume any official role in the Middle East Peace Talks that commenced after the 1973 Yom Kippur War.

Following the adoption of the Rabat resolution, Israel became concerned that the United States, too, would recognize the PLO as the representative of the Palestinians in peace negotiations. Israel, therefore, sought and obtained the following assurance from the United States:

The United States will continue to adhere to its present policy with respect to the Palestine Liberation Organization, whereby it will not recognize or negotiate with the Palestine Liberation Organization so long as the Palestine Liberation Organization does not recognize Israel's right to exist and does not accept Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338.

This assurance, made by Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, was included in a Memorandum of Understanding executed by the U.S. and Israel, which was

then led by Prime Minister Rabin in his first round in that position, in connection with, and on the same date (September 4, 1975) as, the Israel-Egypt Interim Agreement brokered by Kissinger to achieve a partial Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai and associated Egyptian commitments to Israel.

Thereafter, the United States, particularly during the Carter Administration, began searching for ways, through indirect contacts with the PLO, to obtain the PLO's acceptance of the two conditions in the American assurance to Israel (recognition of Israel's right to exist and acceptance of UN Resolutions 242 and 338), so that formal contacts between the two sides could begin.

To facilitate PLO acceptance of these two conditions, the Carter Administration resolved to not demand that the PLO amend its Charter to delete the provisions negating the existence of Israel, but rather, combined these two conditions into one: the PLO's acceptance of U.N. Security Council Resolution 242. The rationale for folding the second condition into the first was this: because Resolution 242 includes a principle acknowledging "the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of every State in the area and their right to live in peace," and because Israel is a State in the area, the PLO's acceptance of Resolution 242, the Carter Administration argued, should be interpreted as also recognizing Israel's right to exist. The PLO, however, refused to accept even that single, watered-down condition, because, as the PLO asserted, Resolution 242 was drafted as applying only to the area's states – which made Jordan, not the Palestinians or the PLO, the appropriate Israeli counterpart for implementing the resolution's "territory for peace" formula. As a condition for accepting Resolution 242, therefore, the PLO demanded that the resolution be modified to specifically refer to the PLO and the goal of establishing a Palestinian State. That demand, however, was negated by another U.S. commitment made to Israel, also included in the 1975 Memorandum of Understanding, according to which the United States would oppose and, if necessary, vote against any initiative to change Resolution 242. While the PLO found it difficult to accept even one of the two U.S. conditions for opening a dialogue set by the U.S. in 1975, in 1985 the U.S. Congress codified these two conditions into a law and adopted a third condition: that the PLO must renounce the use of terrorism.

Intertwined with the question of whether the PLO was able and willing to meet the three American conditions lay the more fundamental question of who was authorized to speak on behalf of the Palestinians. Was it Jordan from which Israel captured the West Bank in 1967 and whose inhabitants were all Jordanian citizens or was it the PLO as the Arab League resolved in 1974? Moreover, it was clear that the identity of the representative would also impact significantly the likely outcome of the negotiations. If it were Jordan, the outcome could be expected to involve re-association of the West Bank with

Jordan, whereas if the PLO were to be accepted as the representative, the PLO was expected to demand that an independent Palestinian State be established.

American policy at that time supported a "Jordanian solution" for the West Bank, seeking to place the West Bank under the authority of the Hashemite Kingdom, while also accommodating Palestinian national aspirations through some future federation or confederation between Jordan and the West Bank. As part of this approach, the United States came up with the idea of a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation to the peace talks, which Israel accepted. In an attempt to placate the PLO, the U.S., Egypt and Israel worked out an approach that the Palestinian members of the joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation could be WBG residents who were PLO sympathizers, as long as they were not formal members of the PLO. At some later point, Israel even agreed to the inclusion among the Palestinian delegates of a few members who were affiliated with the PLO and not current WBG residents, provided that they were individually acceptable to Israel.

But the PLO opposed giving any role to Jordan for West Bank negotiations issues and also vetoed the participation of any Palestinians in the peace talks, whether as members of a Jordanian delegation or otherwise, insisting on the participation of a separate PLO delegation, even as the PLO failed to accept the three U.S. conditions. For instance, as the 1978 Camp David Accords were being put in place and the United States, Egypt and Israel were looking for WBG Palestinian leaders to join the process, Yasser Arafat's Fatah organization, which constitutes the central part of the PLO, announced its "absolute rejection" of the accords and called on Palestinians to reject the idea of a self-governing authority and to boycott any elections in the WBG to establish such a body. Fatah also warned that anyone who became involved would "pay the price for his betrayal." No wonder that, in those circumstances, no WBG Palestinians were prepared to come forward and hold themselves out as representatives of the Palestinians in peace talks with Israel. As of 1988, therefore, international negotiations over the Palestinian problem were blocked for lack of an acceptable Palestinian representation: Jordan was excluded by the Rabat Resolution; the PLO was excluded by Israel; and non-PLO WBG leaders were excluded by PLO threats.

That reality was quite convenient to Israeli right-wing parties, as the lack of acceptable Palestinian representation provided much-needed justification for avoiding any discussions over the fate of the WBG, which they wanted to keep. That reality was also very convenient to hardline Palestinians who objected to recognition of Israel and to any negotiations with it, preferring the use of force to liberate not only the Israeli-occupied West Bank and Gaza, but rather all of Israel itself, which they considered to be part of their Palestine.

But the cards were re-shuffled dramatically when, on July 31, 1988, following the outbreak of the Palestinian Intifada in the West Bank and Gaza, Jordanian King Hussein declared that Jordan was cutting all legal and administrative ties to the West Bank. This was followed by an August 7th press conference in which Jordan announced it would never again assume the role of speaking on behalf of the Palestinians. The PLO quickly seized the moment to fill in the void created by the Jordanian relinquishment of that role. In a speech given in Geneva on December 14, 1988, PLO Chairman Arafat finally accepted all three American conditions. On the same day, U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz confirmed that, based on the PLO's acceptance of the three conditions, the United States would open a dialogue with the PLO. But that dialogue was short-lived. In June 1990, U.S. President George H.W. Bush suspended the dialogue after a PLO member organization launched a terrorist attack on Israel's coast and Arafat refused to renounce the attack or take any steps against its perpetrators.

When the Madrid Peace Conference opened in 1991, U.S. Secretary of State Baker finally managed to develop a format for Palestinian participation that was acceptable to all sides – through a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation. Israel accepted the formula because the Palestinian team was comprised of non-PLO WBG residents. Jordan, too, accepted the formula even though it had renounced its claim to the West Bank in 1988. And the PLO ultimately decided to abstain from vetoing the participation of WBG Palestinians in the process. The PLO's change of heart resulted from the fact that it had gambled on the wrong side in the 1990 Gulf War – with Saddam Hussein – and thus became ostracized in the Arab world that uniformly supported Kuwait (and joined the U.S.-led coalition that came to its rescue), coupled with the fact that WBG Palestinians had gained confidence and clout in the intervening years, having successfully commenced and sustained for several years the Intifada against Israel without the PLO's involvement. Apparently, the PLO concluded it would be better off taking what it could, rather than missing the Madrid Peace Conference train altogether.

This joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation format was maintained when the peace talks relocated from Madrid to Washington, except that the Israeli delegation commenced meeting separately and directly with the Palestinian team in the joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation (with a few Jordanian delegation members sitting there passively) to discuss uniquely Palestinian issues, primarily ideas for Palestinian autonomy in the WBG. But no real progress was achieved. While Israel knew well that the PLO, in fact, controlled the non-PLO members of the Palestinian team, dictating to them what positions to take, Israel pretended that it was not talking with the PLO, but rather with non-PLO Palestinians.

Several months after the new, left-wing government of Rabin and Peres took office in July 1992, the PLO started signaling to the new Israeli government, through the secret back-channel discussions in Oslo, that it was prepared to be more pragmatic than the official non-PLO team in Washington, and that it was ready to help in reaching a WBG autonomy agreement under conditions that would be acceptable to Israel. Yet, even though Rabin and Peres were much more flexible than Begin and his right-wing successor, Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, on issues related to the future status of the WBG, they, too, opposed the creation of a Palestinian State, largely over security reasons. Rather, Rabin and Peres preferred an arrangement that would give Jordan a role in running the West Bank. They also objected to having any official contacts with the PLO.

Who Will Sign the Oslo Agreement?

During my first meeting with Peres, on June 3, 1993, it became clear to me that Peres and Beilin – as well as Prime Minister Rabin, who was being briefed by Peres about the Oslo back-channel discussions – did not intend the Oslo DOP to be an agreement between Israel and the PLO. Rather, they all considered the Oslo back-channel discussions to simply be a conduit to reinvigorating the official Washington discussions, then stalled because of huge gaps between the positions of the two parties on the core issues. In other words, while they understood that the PLO, in fact, controlled the non-PLO Palestinian delegates in Washington, they did not want any formal role for the PLO in the official track. The idea at the time was simply to feed the official channel (that did not include the PLO) with the results of progress made in the back-channel.

I realized this approach when I asked Peres to clarify a central point that was not addressed in the draft DOP. “Should the DOP be finalized in Oslo,” I asked. “What will you do with it? Who will sign it?” Peres responded that he believed that the agreement should be signed in Washington by Israel’s official delegation and by the non-PLO Palestinian team in the joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation, without acknowledgement that the document had been drawn up in direct discussions between Israel and the PLO. (In subsequent discussions, Peres indicated his desire to be the Israeli signatory of the DOP.) Peres added that, according to his plan, Israel and the PLO would each give the Oslo draft to the respective Washington delegations and instruct them to sign it. Subsequently, I heard from the PLO in Oslo that this idea was fully shared by them.

Indeed, it is very common in high-stakes international negotiations for more senior officials of the two sides, who naturally have more authority to

make decisions on difficult issues, to take over when the lower-level negotiating delegations get stuck. This can happen permanently or temporarily, with or without the knowledge of those lower-level delegations. For instance, in 1949, official Israeli and Jordanian delegations met on the Greek island of Rhodes to negotiate, with the assistance of U.N. mediator Dr. Ralph Bunche, a General Armistice Agreement to end the war between them (known in Israel as the War of Independence). At that time, without their knowledge, a full-fledged agreement was secretly developed in Jordan through discussions conducted directly between Jordanian King Abdullah – assisted by Jordan's commander of the Jerusalem area, Colonel Abdullah Tal – on the one hand, and an Israeli team led by young Colonel Moshe Dayan, then the Israeli commander of the Jerusalem area. Once an agreement was reached in those secret negotiations, it was presented to the two official delegations at Rhodes for signature without changes.

But the negotiation structure in 1993 was completely different from the one in 1949. In the latter case, as soon as the draft General Armistice Agreement was concluded in the secret Israeli-Jordanian discussions, the official delegations were informed that their superiors had reached full agreement and they were instructed to sign the draft General Armistice Agreement. In 1993, conversely, Peres intended to keep secret the fact that Israel negotiated the DOP with the PLO, while instructing its official delegation in Washington to sign it.

"It won't work," I said. "The members of the Israeli delegation are not puppets on a string. They will ask: 'Where did this agreement come from?' What will you respond?" I assumed that the official non-PLO Palestinian delegates in Washington would also raise similar questions. In response, Peres suggested that the draft DOP could be presented as either a Norwegian or an American proposal. I thought that this idea of presenting the draft as a Norwegian proposal was untenable. Norway had never been involved in mediating any aspect of the Israeli-Palestinian dispute, nor did it participate in mediating any other Israeli-Arab discussions. I thought, therefore, that no one would believe that somehow Norway suddenly came up with a complete draft DOP.

As for presenting the draft as an American proposal, I doubted the U.S. would agree to take ownership of the DOP. Just six years earlier, Peres had met with King Hussein in London and they reached an agreement (known as the "London Agreement") by which Israel agreed to convene an international conference to address, among other things, the Palestinian problem and Jordan agreed to represent the Palestinians in that conference. Peres at that time was the Foreign Minister in a Likud-Labor coalition government led by the hardline Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir. Because Peres then did not obtain the approval of Shamir for negotiating the London Agreement, Peres asked

U.S. Secretary of State Shultz to present the London Agreement as a U.S. proposal to the two parties, but Schultz refused to do so. Shortly thereafter, the Intifada started and Jordan announced that the Kingdom would no longer speak for the Palestinians.

I was concerned that the fate of the DOP could be the same if Peres asked the U.S. to adopt it as a U.S. proposal. "Further," I told Peres, "sooner or later, the fact that Israel had been negotiating with the PLO would leak to the press, and the Israeli Government will not be able to explain to the Israeli public why it agreed to talk with a terrorist organization."

First Floating of the Mutual Recognition Idea

I believed that, in light of what was happening in Oslo, it was in Israel's interest to present a series of demands to the PLO, such as a PLO commitment to revise its charter by abolishing its provisions calling for the destruction of Israel and other provisions not consistent with the DOP (or a commitment to announce these provisions void); a commitment to stop terrorist attacks against Israel; a commitment to recognize Israel; and a commitment to put an end to the Intifada (which was still going on in 1993). "If the PLO accepted these commitments," I explained to Peres, "meaning that the PLO is willing to demonstrate to Israel that it is no longer a terrorist organization, Israel will, in return, recognize the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people and agree to negotiate with it. Then, and only then, Israel can sign the DOP with the PLO, rather than attempting to hide the fact that it was talking with the PLO."

I also felt that there were commitments that only the PLO, but not WBG Palestinians, could undertake, for example, a commitment to cease terrorist activities outside the West Bank and Gaza. In addition, I thought that it would make sense for Israel, by entering into a Mutual Recognition Agreement with the PLO there and then, to lay the foundations for more comprehensive future agreements between Israel and the Palestinians, especially the Permanent Status Agreement, signed by an organization representing all Palestinians everywhere, not just the residents of the WBG (as was the case for the negotiations in Washington). For instance, only the PLO was authorized to discuss issues relating to the Palestinian refugees (living outside the West Bank and Gaza). For that reason, ultimately, I drafted the Israeli recognition of the PLO as "the representative of the Palestinian people," rather than the representative of only WBG Palestinians.

Additionally, but no less important, I thought that recognition by Israel of the PLO would mean Israeli recognition of the existence of a Palestinian

people and their right to determine who would represent it, whether or not Israel liked those representatives. I did not specifically verbalize this additional reason to Peres and Beilin, but thought that for dozens of years, Israel had tried to dictate to the Palestinians who their representatives were, despite the Palestinians and the entire Arab world telling Israel that the PLO was the representative of the Palestinians. First, Israel attempted for two decades to resolve the fate of the West Bank in discussions with Jordan, until Jordan renounced its claim to the West Bank. Israel also entered the 1978 Camp David Accords with Egypt, in which Egypt negotiated, on behalf of the Palestinians, a framework for WBG autonomy. Throughout the years, Israel attempted to identify non-PLO, WBG resident Palestinian leaders with whom it could negotiate an agreement. All of these attempts failed. And even when the Madrid joint representation formula succeeded in launching the discussions regarding the WBG, the PLO, in fact, controlled the Palestinian delegates and the discussions were not going anywhere substantively. Under the right circumstances, I concluded, recognizing the PLO as the body with the most legitimacy to negotiate on behalf of the Palestinians could be the much needed gamechanger.

Later, Abu Ala told me that once the Oslo back-channel discussions started, the PLO prevented the Palestinian delegates in Washington from making any real progress, so that compromises made by the PLO in Oslo would make the Oslo channel look more appealing to Israel. Rabin and Peres came to understand that if Israel did not talk to the PLO, there would be no agreement – and Rabin and Peres, unlike their Likud predecessors, were interested in an agreement. My suggestion that the secret, informal contacts with the PLO in Oslo be formalized through a Mutual Recognition Agreement was aimed at realizing their general goal, but they remained strongly opposed to it at first for various reasons. Rabin and Peres's lack of enthusiasm for the idea was matched by the PLO's.

No Enthusiasm

When I presented the idea of an Israel-PLO Mutual Recognition Agreement to Peres during our first meeting, he immediately rejected it. I got the impression that his primary concern was that presenting my additional demands to the PLO, which would be prerequisites for Israeli recognition, at such a sensitive juncture in the negotiations would establish too high a hurdle for the PLO, and the entire Oslo process could collapse. I asked him to reconsider the proposal after I had put my ideas in writing. Peres agreed to read my proposal. That night in my Jerusalem hotel room, I hand-wrote a document in Hebrew, which

I presented to Peres the next day. The document dated June 5, 1993, not yet drafted as an agreement, was entitled "A Proposal for an Agreement between Israel and the PLO." This proposal laid out all the elements that ultimately became part of the Mutual Recognition Agreement.

In 1993, when any contacts with the PLO were considered in Israel to be morally and politically verboten, this was a far-reaching proposal, as the following account demonstrates. Before I submitted the hand-written document to Peres, I showed it to Deputy Foreign Minister Yossi Beilin. Beilin accepted the contents of the document, but suggested that the reference to the PLO in the title be eliminated, so that the words be changed to "An Agreement between Israel and the Representatives of the Palestinians." Beilin, known in Israel as the "dove-iest" of all doves, explained that he was not sure whether the Oslo discussions would ever be concluded successfully, and he did not want any document kept in the Israeli Foreign Ministry archives to be discovered some day by an enterprising historian or diplomat suggesting that the Ministry was considering establishing formal relations with the PLO. I followed Beilin's instructions, erased the word "PLO" from the title of the document, writing instead "Palestinian Representatives," and presented it to Peres. His reaction, after reading the document in my presence, was: "Having read your proposal, my opposition to it has only increased."

Several days later, Rabin and Peres asked me to fly to Oslo to meet with the PLO representatives, to gather their stance on the contents of the draft DOP. This was a very crucial meeting for the entire Oslo back-channel discussions, given that Rabin had meanwhile instructed Peres to suspend the discussions with the PLO. Because Rabin did not trust the reports he was receiving from Peres and Beilin about the Oslo discussions, he wanted me to meet with the PLO and provide him with my independent evaluation of the PLO's positions. In preparation for that meeting, I developed dozens of questions to raise with Abu Ala and his colleagues, regarding various aspects of the DOP, but I also included several questions about possible Palestinian commitments to Israel of the type I proposed to Peres be included in a potential Mutual Recognition Agreement. As I had not been authorized to do so, I did not mention the idea of an Israel-PLO mutual recognition and specifically not the possibility of an Israeli recognition of the PLO.

Thus, at the meeting in Oslo on June 14, 1993, I tried to find out how Abu Ala and his PLO colleagues felt regarding possible cooperation between Israel and the PLO against threats from third parties, such as Hamas. Abu Ala responded: "We'll ask in Tunis." I then asked what they thought about a possible call for an end to the Intifada. Abu Ala responded: "We'll ask in Tunis." He added on his own initiative: "We can declare our recognition of Israel, an end to terror and our recognition of UN Resolution 242." When I asked what they thought about

cancellation of the Palestinian Charter, Abu Ala responded: "This was already done [by implication] when the Palestinian National Council recognized 242."

Encouraged by these replies, on my return to Israel to meet with Peres, I asked him to allow me to bring up the matter of an Israel-PLO Mutual Recognition Agreement with Rabin. Peres agreed. At that time, Rabin, Peres, Beilin and I were meeting frequently to discuss the negotiations with the PLO on the Declaration of Principles. On June 27, 1993, at the end of one of those meetings – after which I was to fly directly to Oslo for the next meeting with the PLO – on the way out the door, I reminded Peres that he agreed to allow me to raise the mutual recognition idea with Rabin. Standing near the door, Peres said to Rabin: "Joel has an idea for an additional agreement with the PLO. I am opposed to it, but I have told him that he can bring it up with you."

After hearing the details of my proposal, Rabin said, "It's too early." But he did not throw me out of his office. He did not chastise me for raising this idea with him. He didn't even reject the idea out of hand. Instead, he simply said that, at that point in time, it was too early to pursue such an idea. I interpreted his response to mean that he did not object to the idea in principle and assumed that he simply did not want to overburden the Israeli public with more fundamental changes than it could deal with: the new reality that would come with the implementation of the DOP taking shape in Oslo *AND* recognizing the PLO – all at once.

I was convinced, however, that if Israel intended to recognize the PLO, the time to reach an Israel-PLO Mutual Recognition Agreement was then and not later. I believed that the PLO was keen to win Israeli recognition as a legitimate negotiating partner and, if told that Israel would be willing to recognize it once the DOP is complete, the PLO would be prepared to make more far-reaching compromises on the remaining DOP issues, as well as providing important broader commitments that I suggested as prerequisites for the Mutual Recognition Agreement. If Israel waited with the mutual recognition idea until after the PLO leaked to the press that it was in direct contact with Israel, the PLO would be left with little if any incentive to make any of these commitments. I thought that Israel, therefore, should grasp this opportunity immediately, while it held the upper hand. I gathered my courage and asked Rabin: "Could I explore the idea of mutual recognition in Oslo, presenting it as my own personal idea?" Rabin immediately agreed to let me do that.

That same night (June 27, 1993), I met again with the PLO representatives in Oslo. Among other things, they reported to me Arafat's lukewarm response to my questions about possible PLO commitments to Israel. Among other things, Abu Ala informed me that the PLO was prepared to cancel the Palestinian Charter, but only in the context of publishing a constitution of the Palestinian State, once it is established. Hassan Asfur, another PLO representative in Oslo

added that some of the Charter's clauses are "qadduc" ("obsolete" in Arabic), adding that many of the Palestinian National Council's (PNC) resolutions contradict the Charter.

I took the opportunity to lay out my personal ideas to the PLO delegation. For the first time, I used the term "mutual Israel-PLO recognition." I read to them from a document in English (which I based on the hand-written Hebrew document I had prepared for Peres), which now bore the title "Informal Personal Ideas for Provisions to be Included in a Possible Side Agreement." This document was not yet drafted as an agreement, it simply included nine commitments to be undertaken by the PLO. As I elaborated when presenting the document, in return for Israeli recognition, the PLO would, among other things, recognize Israel's right to exist; declare an end to terror in the WBG, in Israel and abroad; declare an end to the Intifada; and declare that all provisions of the Palestinian Charter that are inconsistent with the PLO's commitments to Israel are null and void. A copy of the paper I used during that meeting is attached as Appendix A.

The PLO representatives took detailed notes of my suggestions and I could see that they were very interested. In the next meeting, however, Abu Ala informed me that he had briefed Arafat on the mutual recognition idea, but Arafat had rejected it. Apparently, Arafat did not like the many obligations that my proposal sought to impose on the PLO. In subsequent meetings, we concentrated on completing the drafting of the Declaration of Principles, where several of the changes I proposed to the original draft DOP – agreed to before I joined the delegation – caused a lot of heated arguments.

We returned to the idea of mutual recognition during a meeting held on July 11–12, 1993. The PLO representatives then raised new demands, insisting that the DOP explicitly state that the PLO would take control of Gaza after the Israeli withdrawal. It should be understood that the DOP was written as an agreement between Israel and local WBG residents, which was intended to regulate establishment of local Palestinian self-governing bodies, with no role for the PLO in running these bodies. In fact, the PLO was not mentioned in the DOP, for understandable reasons: Israel did not recognize the PLO and Israeli law considered the PLO a terrorist organization. When the PLO demanded to govern Gaza, I reminded them about my personal suggestion for a Mutual Recognition Agreement, and said that they must decide one of two things: either we sign a DOP without mutual recognition, in which case the PLO would have no role in implementing the agreement in Gaza or in the West Bank, or they accept the idea of mutual recognition, in which case Israel could give the PLO a role in running the WBG areas from which Israel would redeploy its forces.

The Only Option

At that moment, the penny dropped for Abu Ala and his colleagues, and from then on, the idea of a mutual recognition agreement became the only option for the PLO. Indeed, at the next meeting, which took place on July 25–26, 1993, Abu Ala reported that the PLO leadership was interested in a Mutual Recognition Agreement. During that session, which was punctuated by many crises, Savir agreed to decrease the number of commitments demanded of the PLO from nine to seven. From then on, we referred to the Mutual Recognition Agreement in the Oslo discussions as the Seven Point Agreement. Yet, since I still did not have authority to present this additional agreement as a formal Israeli proposal, it was still styled as a personal proposal of Joel Singer.

A short time later, Rabin too came to the conclusion that the Mutual Recognition Agreement was essential for Israel. This change of heart occurred during one of the meetings between Rabin, Peres, Beilin and myself, that took place on August 11, 1993. At that meeting, Rabin asked where in the DOP was there a Palestinian undertaking to stop the use of terrorism outside the WBG. I responded that the DOP was limited to establishing autonomy arrangements within the WBG and reminded Rabin that I had proposed to him that we negotiate a second agreement with the PLO where the PLO would undertake, among other things, a commitment to renounce terrorism everywhere. Rabin then finally realized that that second agreement actually was advantageous to Israel.

At the next session with the PLO in Oslo, Abu Ala announced that the PLO had accepted the Seven Point Agreement in principle and brought with him a PLO counter-proposal for a draft agreement. But when we read over the PLO-proposed six-page draft agreement, we were taken aback. The PLO had circumvented all their commitments with a great deal of verbiage and made them contingent upon impossible or senseless conditions. For example, under the PLO-proposed Mutual Recognition Agreement, all of the PLO's commitments, such as stopping the Intifada, renouncing terrorism, and so on, would take effect only after the establishment of a Palestinian State. On the spot, I rejected the PLO draft.

After the DOP was initialed in Oslo on August 20, 1993, Abu Ala gave me a new draft of a PLO-proposed Mutual Recognition Agreement that was shorter and clearer than the previous one. This time, however, the agreement was drafted so that all the commitments I had proposed apply to the PLO, would, under the PLO's new draft, apply to both parties equally. For instance, the PLO draft stated that Israel and the PLO agree to renounce terrorism, recognize Resolution 242, and the like. I rejected this proposal as well, insisting that,

for Israel to recognize the PLO, the agreement must be short, clear, with its commitments (other than the Israeli commitment to recognize the PLO) applying to the Palestinian side only, and with those commitments becoming effective immediately.

Abu Ala then suggested that I draw up the draft of the agreement and present it to him for review. After returning from Oslo to Israel, on August 26, 1993, I completed developing the first Israeli draft of the Mutual Recognition Agreement. I drafted that agreement as an exchange of letters between Rabin and Arafat, rather than as a standard agreement with two signatures at its end. Legally speaking, commitments included in such an exchange of letters are as binding as those included in a straightforward agreement, but the exchange of letters format is less frequently used and, when selected, it normally occurs in the context of addressing one of the issues originally belonging in the main agreement through an accompanying side letter agreement. For the Mutual Recognition Agreement, I decided to utilize the side letter approach because I thought it important to have Arafat himself be the PLO representative directly making these commitments. At that time, the finalized draft declaration did not yet include the names of the signatories, but Rabin and Peres reached an understanding that, if there was no mutual recognition, the DOP would be signed by the heads of the official Israeli and Palestinian delegations in Washington. But if the Mutual Recognition Agreement was achieved, the DOP would be executed at the minister level just below Rabin and Arafat – that is, by Peres and Mahmoud Abbas (known as Abu Mazen), who was providing guidance to the PLO delegation in Oslo. I was concerned that, if I drafted the mutual recognition commitments as a standard agreement, this document too would, by default, end up being signed by Peres and Abu Mazen (rather than Arafat). So, I drafted the document as an exchange of letters between Rabin and Arafat.

After I presented the draft to Peres and Rabin for approval, Rabin approved the document, but Peres remained hesitant. Because Peres was still undecided, Rabin and Peres agreed that a final decision would be reached after reporting to the United States about the conclusion of the DOP. That same day, Rabin called U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher, with Peres and myself listening, and told him that an important development had occurred in connection with the Palestinian-Israeli track, and requested to send Peres and me to brief him. Christopher then was vacationing at his home in Santa Barbara, California, so a meeting was set up for the next day at a nearby U.S. Marine Corps base, Point Mugu.

Peres and I arrived at the meeting accompanied by Norwegian Foreign Minister Johan Jorgen Holst and his Norwegian colleagues, husband and wife

Terje Rod Larsen and Mona Yuul, who helped the Israeli and Palestinian delegations reach the DOP in Oslo. Israeli Ambassador to the United States Itamar Rabinovich also arrived from Washington. Christopher was accompanied by his Special Middle East Coordinator Dennis Ross. After I briefed Christopher and Ross on the DOP, which both stunned and exhilarated them, the moment of truth for the Israel-PLO mutual recognition concept arrived.

Peres then asked Christopher whether the U.S. would agree to present the DOP as a U.S. proposal to the two parties and host the signing ceremony in Washington. After consulting with President Bill Clinton on the phone, Christopher responded that the U.S. would be happy to host the signing ceremony in Washington but, as I predicted, Christopher added that the U.S. cannot present the DOP as a U.S. proposal. As Christopher explained, "We didn't draft this agreement and we cannot say otherwise." At that point, Peres, too, finally understood that an Israel-PLO Mutual Recognition Agreement was the only feasible option to proceed.

If Christopher agreed to present the DOP as a U.S. proposal, there would have been no Israel-PLO Mutual Recognition Agreement, and the DOP would have been signed by one of the senior non-PLO representatives in the Palestinian delegation to the Washington discussions, instead of Arafat. There would, therefore, not have been a Rabin-Arafat handshake on the White House lawn. Further, Arafat and the PLO leadership would not have relocated from their headquarters in Tunis to the West Bank and Gaza, and would not have led the Palestinian autonomous bodies there, likely hardening the institutional divide and rivalry between Palestinians in the WBG and the PLO in Tunis. But Christopher refused, and history took the course it has taken, even though things could have developed differently.

Cutting the Gordian Knot

As we were discussing with Christopher, the possibility that the DOP be signed in Washington by PLO and Israeli representatives in a public ceremony with President Clinton and Christopher himself, the question arose as to whether PLO representatives could even meet with the U.S. President and the Secretary of State. Any contact between the U.S. government and the PLO had been suspended since 1991, and U.S. law prohibited official U.S.-PLO contact without a new finding that the PLO had met all conditions set by U.S. law. I informed Christopher and Ross that I had drafted a proposal for an Israel-PLO Mutual Recognition Agreement, which Rabin had authorized me to present to the PLO, and that this mutual recognition concept was acceptable in principle to

the PLO, even though they had not yet seen the draft. I shared a copy of the draft with Ross and the Secretary. After Ross reviewed the draft, he indicated that, if one point was slightly revised and the Palestinians accepted the revised draft, the PLO's acceptance of the commitments included in the agreement would also serve as a basis for lifting the American restriction on meetings with representatives of the PLO.

That same day, I flew to Oslo together with Holst, Larsen and Yuul, where I was joined by Savir, and we began negotiations with Abu Ala and his colleagues on the draft Mutual Recognition Agreement, which I presented to them. That meeting began on August 30, 1993. At that time, we already knew that, due to President Clinton's scheduling constraints, September 13, 1993 was the only date available for him to host the DOP signing ceremony in Washington. This left us with only two weeks to complete the negotiations over the Mutual Recognition Agreement.

In contrast to the negotiations on the DOP, where an attempt was made to reach compromises, this time we presented the draft essentially as a "take it or leave it" proposition. I explained to the PLO representatives that if they accepted the draft agreement we proposed – which had already been agreed to by both Israel and the United States – they could get "two (recognitions) for the price of one." But the two-day discussion did not lead to an agreement. At some point, Abu Ala indicated that the issue of mutual recognition was not something he was capable of addressing, indicating that only Arafat could make the necessary decisions, and suggesting that we should deal with Arafat himself on these issues. When I returned to Israel and raised with Peres the idea that Savir and I go to Tunis to meet with Arafat, to conclude the Mutual Recognition Agreement, Peres rejected it out of hand. The discussions with the PLO resumed on September 8, 1993 in a Paris hotel, and lasted until very early in the morning of September 9, when the text of the Mutual Recognition Agreement was finally agreed.

During that meeting, Abu Ala appeared to be very weary and dismayed. We assumed he was struggling with significant push backs from the PLO leadership. Indeed, it was even more complicated. Unlike the DOP, which dealt with transitory West Bank and Gaza arrangements and which were supposed to be replaced with the Permanent Status Agreement five years later, every sentence of the Mutual Recognition Agreement touched upon some of the most fundamental issues of the Palestinian people and the PLO. Moreover, while the DOP negotiations were conducted with only a handful of PLO members in the know, news of the agreement quickly spread on its conclusion, and soon many other PLO operatives became involved in the behind-the-scenes maneuvering at the PLO headquarters in Tunis. Suddenly, there were many new cooks breathing on Abu Ala's neck, which agitated him.

Arafat too appeared to begin suffering from a severe case of buyer's remorse. As we understood, he began questioning commitments he had already provided to the United States five years earlier, such as the PLO's renouncement of terrorism. Through Abu Ala, we understood that Arafat was having second thoughts regarding this phrase, because it could have been interpreted to mean that the PLO's actions against civilians was terrorism, which Arafat apparently found difficult to accept. But we stood firm and the PLO ultimately accepted the draft, as we presented it, with only minor changes. It helped that, during this round of discussions, Norwegian Foreign Minister Holst and his colleagues took a more active role than in prior rounds of DOP negotiations. The Norwegians joined us in the Paris hotel and, while not participating in the Israeli-PLO discussions, had constant side discussions with Abu Ala, urging him and, through him, Arafat to overcome their "cold feet" and quickly conclude the agreement, or jeopardize the Washington DOP signing ceremony scheduled for only four days later – which stood to be a highpoint of Palestinian history.

But not only Arafat raised last-minute issues with the Mutual Recognition Agreement. Rabin too had exhibited strong sensitivities about recognizing the PLO, even after he approved elevating the concept from "Joel Singer's personal proposal" to an official Israeli position. Those sensitivities actually arose only because I used the exchange of letters format for the Mutual Recognition Agreement. Thus, when I presented for Rabin's approval the draft letters, which incorporated the PLO commitments and Israeli recognition of the PLO, he approved the draft without any changes, with only one exception. In these letters, I included the standard opening salutation: "Dear Mr. Arafat" at the top of Rabin's letter to Arafat and a similar opening salutation ("Dear Mr. Rabin") at the top of Arafat's letter to Rabin. Rabin instructed me to remove the word "dear" in both places. Apparently, the word seemed to Rabin to reflect undesired warmth that he was not ready to embrace.

This was not the only delicate wording challenge for Rabin. After the negotiations with the PLO in Paris concluded in the early morning hours of September 9, 1993, Savir and I sent the draft to Israel for final approval, and went to sleep for a couple of hours before our flight back to Israel. Upon arrival in Israel, I heard that Rabin was furious at me. When I inquired as to why, the response was that Rabin was angry because the final text of the letters included the word "Sincerely" before his and Arafat's signatures. I explained that this word had been there all along, including in the draft I presented to Rabin, which he had approved. The answer was that, upon review of the final, agreed upon draft, Rabin spotted the word, which he had presumably missed when approving my original draft. He then sent instructions to our Paris hotel through the Israeli Foreign Ministry to remove it from the draft. But I had not

received any such instructions. Only then did Savir recall that, after the conclusion of the negotiations, while we were fast asleep in our rooms, he had received a phone call from Israel early in the morning. Half-asleep, he listened and agreed to implement Rabin's order, but exhausted, he immediately fell back to sleep and forgot to tell me about it.

It was most difficult for the PLO to come to terms with two commitments in the Mutual Recognition Agreement. They were concerned that they might not be able to put an end to the Intifada, which was one of the obligations that I included in the draft I gave them. The PLO had not ordered West Bank and Gaza Palestinians to start the Intifada, which was rather an authentic Palestinian grassroots outburst of defiance against Israel. In fact, the PLO was as surprised as Israel was when the Intifada started. The PLO, therefore, was concerned that, if they instructed WBG Palestinians to stop the Intifada, they might not obey, which would result in breaching their commitment to Israel (thus giving Israel a basis for halting the Oslo process). Even more importantly, this would demonstrate publicly that the PLO does not control the WBG Palestinians, undermining the PLO's legitimacy. Thus, the PLO delegation asked to take this commitment out of Arafat's letter to Rabin and put it, instead, into a separate letter from Arafat to Norwegian Foreign Minister Holst. We accepted this proposed change.

Hardest of all for the PLO was the demand that they revise the Palestinian National Covenant (or Charter). They requested that we make do with Arafat's declaration to Rabin that the Charter's provisions denying Israel's right to exist and those that contradict the other PLO commitments were no longer valid. However, we insisted that Arafat's letter to Rabin would include both a declaration that those commitments are no longer valid, as well as a commitment to bring about a formal amendment of the Charter in the Palestinian National Council. Finally, they accepted our demand, and the drafting of the mutual recognition letters was completed on the morning of September 9, 1993. A copy of the Mutual Recognition Agreement is attached as Appendix B.

On that day, Holst flew to Tunis to obtain Arafat's signature on Arafat's letter to Rabin, from where he flew to Jerusalem to obtain Rabin's signature on Rabin's letter to Arafat. Rabin signed his letter to Arafat on September 10, 1993. The Gordian knot was cut in one fell swoop. The path was open for the historic handshake between Rabin and Arafat three days later on the White House lawn.

Postscript

Unlike the Oslo Agreement, which was intended to establish a transitory, five-year arrangement and has been more honored in the breach than in the

observance, the Mutual Recognition Agreement was intended to be permanent and it still stands, more than 25 years after it was concluded – an accomplishment that transcends the immediate purpose for which I originally conceived it. In retrospect, it represents the beginning of the reconciliation process between Israelis and Palestinians, who share the same piece of land. Even as Israelis and Palestinians try to divide the land between themselves, their close proximity requires that they learn to live together side-by-side, in peace.

For a hundred years prior to the Mutual Recognition Agreement, Israelis and Palestinians did not recognize one another as a distinct people with unique national aspirations. Many Palestinians believed that there is no such thing as a Jewish people, and that Judaism is only a religion. As reflected in the Palestinian National Charter's aims of destroying Israel, most Palestinians also refused to accept the existence of the State of Israel, to which they referred disparagingly as the "Zionist entity." They considered the Jews living in Israel as foreign invaders (notwithstanding Jewish ties to that land dating back 3000 years) and vowed to expel them all (other than those few who had been born in Palestine before the start of Zionism).

Many Israelis, likewise, believed that there is no such thing as a Palestinian people, and considered the Palestinians to be Arabs who happened to live in the Land of Israel, particularly the West Bank and Gaza (to which Israelis refer by their Biblical names, Judea and Samaria). Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir was quoted in 1969 as saying that "there were no such thing as Palestinians." Similarly, when in 1978 Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin entered the Camp David Accords with Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, he could not accept that a Palestinian people existed and, therefore, he insisted on clarifying, in a side letter he sent to U.S. President Carter, that all references in the accords to the "Palestinian people" would be construed and understood by Israel as "Palestinian Arabs."

In the same vein, the official position of Israel for many years was that the future status of the West Bank and Gaza must be determined through discussions with Jordan and Egypt, the former occupiers of these areas, rather than with Palestinian representatives, let alone the PLO (which Israel considered to be a terrorist organization), despite the majority of the Palestinians deeming the PLO their legitimate representative. Israel also historically objected to the creation of a Palestinian State in the West Bank and Gaza.

Once the Mutual Recognition Agreement was signed, a sea change occurred. The most immediate change was that all the previous constraints on having a direct dialogue between the Government of Israel and the representative of the Palestinians, the PLO, disappeared. From then on, if issues could not be resolved, it was because the parties were not able to agree on substantive issues, not because there was no agreement on the representation of the Palestinians,

which prevented starting a discussion, as had been the case for many years prior to the Mutual Recognition Agreement. Finally, Israelis and Palestinians both recognized the actors on the other side of the table which could legitimately negotiate toward peace. It may now sound fundamental, but it was a ground-breaking leap forward then.

Moreover, both sides now recognize that there is a people on the other side, not just a collection of individuals who are religiously Jewish, or a collection of Arab individuals who happen to reside in the West Bank and Gaza. On the Israeli side, the recognition that there is a Palestinian people, which first occurred in the Mutual Recognition Agreement, has led ultimately to support for the idea of the creation of a Palestinian State, an idea which now both left-wing and right-wing Israeli governments share. While there is still an argument between the parties regarding the location of the borders between the State of Israel and the future State of Palestine, this is no longer an existential problem, as it had been before the Mutual Recognition Agreement.

But the scorecard for the Mutual Recognition Agreement otherwise includes mixed results. On the plus side, the PLO appears to still be committed to a peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian dispute, and Abu Mazen, more than his predecessor Arafat, continues to oppose strongly the use of force and terrorism against Israel and Israelis. Additionally, the Intifada that was still ongoing at the time the Mutual Recognition Agreement was executed immediately stopped. Yet, in 2000, a new Intifada, much more violent than the first one, broke out and Arafat did little, if anything, to stop it. As a result, Israel had to re-enter the West Bank to suppress the violence.

When the PNC convened on April 24, 1996 to address the PLO's obligation to modify the Palestinian Charter, it failed to do so and, instead, adopted a resolution appointing a committee assigned with the task of proposing a redraft of the Charter to the PNC, which caused significant damage to Israeli public support for the Oslo peace process. Under significant pressure from both Israel and the United States, the PNC convened again on December 14, 1998, in the presence of President Clinton, and adopted a letter signed by Arafat which specified the Charter's provisions being abrogated. While both President Clinton and the Benjamin Netanyahu-led Israeli Government accepted that PNC resolution as satisfying the PLO's obligation in the Mutual Recognition Agreement, some Israeli commentators have continued to argue that despite that resolution, the Charter remained unchanged.

Further, in 2006, Hamas took over the Gaza Strip from the PLO and, since Hamas opposes the Oslo Accords, including the Mutual Recognition Agreement, one can conclude that for a significant portion of the WBG Palestinians – those living in the Gaza Strip – the Mutual Recognition Agreement failed. Even the

PLO threatens, from time to time, to rescind its recognition of Israel, as well as all agreements entered with it, apparently out of its frustration with the stalled Permanent Status Agreement negotiations. And, by way of proof that old beliefs die hard, Abu Mazen himself, in a speech made to the Palestinian National Council in Ramallah in May 2018, reportedly stated that the Jews are not a people and Judaism is only a religion. This comes on top of the PLO's refusal to recognize, in the context of the Permanent Status Agreement, that Israel is a Jewish State.

Clearly, the Mutual Recognition Agreement needs much more time to override long-held policies and beliefs. It will likely continue to suffer setbacks, at least until a Permanent Status Agreement that is acceptable to both Israelis and Palestinians is accomplished. But notwithstanding the bumpy road that started in 1993, the Mutual Recognition Agreement still stands. One must keep hope that this agreement will not be discarded if the road to a resolution of the Israel-Palestinian dispute continues to face more challenges.

Appendix A: Informal Personal Ideas for Provisions to Be Included in a Possible Side Agreement (Drafted June 23, 1993)

PLO COMMITMENTS TO ISRAEL

1. The PLO is committed to the Middle East peace process and its goals, as set out in the invitation to the Madrid Conference. In particular, the PLO endorses the goal of reconciliation and peaceful coexistence between Israelis and Palestinians.
2. The PLO recognizes Israel's right to exist.
3. The PLO accepts United Nations Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338.
4. The PLO renounces the use of terrorism, including attacks and attempted attacks against Israelis.
5. The PLO declares that it has ceased completely, and will continue to abstain from, any acts of terrorism, as described above.
6. The PLO will neither support nor advocate acts of terrorism, as described above, committed by others.
7. The PLO declares that, in light of the fundamental change of circumstances that has occurred, all provisions of the Palestinian National Covenant incompatible with the above commitments, have become obsolete and are null and void.
8. Upon the inauguration of the Palestinian Interim Self-Government Council, the PLO will issue a declaration calling upon all Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip to put an end to the Intifada. This declaration will also call for a complete cessation of violent acts against Israel and Israelis.

9. The PLO will work with Egypt and other countries in convincing Arab countries which are not parties to bilateral negotiations in the Middle East Peace process, to stop the boycott against Israel and establish diplomatic relations with Israel.

– JOEL SINGER

Appendix B: Mutual Recognition Agreement

September 9, 1993

Yitzhak Rabin
Prime Minister of Israel

Mr. Prime Minister,

The signing of the Declaration of Principles marks a new era in the history of the Middle East. In firm conviction thereof, I would like to confirm the following PLO commitments:

- The PLO recognizes the right of the State of Israel to exist in peace and security.
- The PLO accepts United Nations Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338.
- The PLO commits itself to the Middle East peace process, and to a peaceful resolution of the conflict between the two sides and declares that all outstanding issues relating to permanent status will be resolved through negotiations.
- The PLO considers that the signing of the Declaration of Principles constitutes a historic event, inaugurating a new epoch of peaceful coexistence, free from violence and all other acts which endanger peace and stability. Accordingly, the PLO renounces the use of terrorism and other acts of violence and will assume responsibility over all PLO elements and personnel in order to assure their compliance, prevent violations and discipline violators.

In view of the promise of a new era and the signing of the Declaration of Principles and based on Palestinian acceptance of Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, the PLO affirms that those articles of the Palestinian Covenant which deny Israel's right to exist, and the provisions of the Covenant which are inconsistent with the commitments of this letter are now inoperative and no longer valid. Consequently, the PLO undertakes to submit to the Palestinian National Council for formal approval the necessary changes in regard to the Palestinian Covenant.

Sincerely,
Yasser Arafat, Chairman
The Palestine Liberation Organization

• • •

September 9, 1993

Yasser Arafat, Chairman
The Palestine Liberation Organization

Mr. Chairman,

In response to your letter of September 9, 1993, I wish to confirm to you that, in light of the PLO commitments included in your letter, the Government of Israel has decided to recognize the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people and commence negotiations with the PLO within the Middle East peace process.

Sincerely,
Yitzhak Rabin
Prime Minister of Israel

• • •

September 9, 1993

His Excellency Johan Jorgen Holst
Foreign Minister of Norway

Dear Minister Holst,

I would like to confirm to you that, upon the signing of the Declaration of Principles, I will include the following positions in my public statements:

In light of the new era marked by the signing of the Declaration of Principles, the PLO encourages and calls upon the Palestinian people in the West Bank and Gaza Strip to take part in the steps leading to the normalization of life, rejecting violence and terrorism, contributing to peace and stability and participating actively in shaping reconstruction, economic development and cooperation.

Sincerely,
Yasser Arafat, Chairman
The Palestine Liberation Organization