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**"The Arab-Israeli Peace Process- 1999"
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For some aspects of Arab-Israeli relations and negotiations, the beginning and end of 1999 contrasted starkly. Stagnation, disdain, and distance evolved, even if only temporarily, to reluctant embrace. Yet, despite renewed momentum in Arab-Israeli negotiations at year's end, and some improvement in bilateral Arab-Israeli relations, distinctive Arab voices throughout the year opposed both Israeli legitimacy and the pace of Arab normalization of relations with the Jewish state. Some constants for the year mirrored years past: Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak remained Palestinian Authority (PA) President Yasir 'Arafat's single most important adviser; the US continued to play a dominant role in Arab-Israeli negotiations; Hizballah forces in southern Lebanon periodically challenged Israel's presence; and Jordanian-Israeli relations remained relatively stable.

Israeli and Arab negotiators continued, as they had on and off since the 1991 Madrid Middle East peace conference, in bilateral negotiating processes. Neither Israelis nor Palestinians made an effort to move from implementing incremental steps to reaching for something broader, namely a comprehensive Palestinian-Israeli agreement. Likewise, neither Israeli nor Arab diplomats considered adopting a broader comprehensive negotiating approach in which all Arab sides would meet with the Israelis at a major conference to resolve outstanding differences. Parochial Palestinian and Syrian interests took precedence over a broader pan-Arab mechanism of negotiations with Israel. Throughout the year, peaceful Arab-Israeli relations remained an elusive objective, but the negotiating process was significantly more active on more fronts on the eve of the new millennium than when 1999 began.

At the beginning of 1999, the Syrian-Israeli negotiating track appeared to be dead.

Physically embedded in southern Lebanon since 1982, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) did not appear likely to withdraw either unilaterally or in some connection with a possible Syrian-Israeli or Lebanese-Israeli agreement.

As for Jordan, while October 1999 marked the fifth anniversary of the Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty, no fanfare on either side of the Jordan River commemorated the event. Surliness and mistrust still characterized Israeli-Jordanian relations. Lacking a significant "peace dividend," Jordanians remained somewhat embittered, pointing frequently to the absence of economic benefits to their daily lives since the treaty with Israel. Furthermore, the prospects of any improvement in bilateral Jordanian-Israeli relations were suspended by internal changes in both countries: King Husayn's death in February and the ascension to the throne of his son 'Abdallah; Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's defeat in May; and his successor Ehud Barak's outlining of how the Palestinian-Israeli track would unfold. Quite noticeably, anti-normalization pronouncements against Israel from Jordanian and other Arab professional associations increased in the second half of the year. But those statements of anger against Israel ultimately did little to change the historically pragmatic relationship between Israel and Jordan.

In a broader geographic sweep, until Israel's elections, its diplomatic relations with Arab and Muslim states languished or worsened; Arab media, both government and non-government sponsored outlets, hurled continuous volleys of invective at the Netanyahu government, primarily for its turgid pace in negotiating with the Palestinians. Three years of Netanyahu's applied sluggishness on the Palestinian-Israeli track pained virtually every Arab politician and editorial writer.

More than any other factor, Barak's defeat of Netanyahu in Israel's 17 May elections increased the pace of Arab-Israeli talks and, at least to some degree, improved Arab-Israeli relations. Almost immediately after Barak's election, he and Syrian President Hafiz al-Asad engaged in a series of public exchanges in which each praised the other, an event unprecedented in Israeli-Syrian relations. This raised hopes that Syrian-Israeli talks might

resume after a hiatus of almost four years. Then, in mid-December, Barak met with Syrian Foreign Minister Faruq al-Shar' in Washington, DC, under US President Bill Clinton's guidance, to plot out a schedule for future substantive talks. Although no formal agreement was signed between them, a promise was made at the conclusion of their several days of talks to continue discussions on 3 January 2000. Given the history of Syrian-Israeli enmity, such an initial public meeting raised hopes and expectations that a Syrian-Israeli agreement might be consummated in the not-too-distant future, the difficult issues to resolve notwithstanding. The Shar'-Barak meetings were not media extravaganzas like Egyptian President Anwar Sadat's visit to Jerusalem in November 1977, or 'Arafat's public handshake on the White House lawn with former Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin in September 1993. Yet, the public meeting of a high-ranking Syrian official with the Israeli prime minister under the auspices of the American president was symbolically significant in its own right.

With respect to Lebanon, Barak made a campaign pledge to withdraw Israeli troops within a year. By the end of December, Barak had instructed various branches of the IDF to plan for implementing such a contingency.

On the Palestinian-Israeli track, Barak and 'Arafat, almost immediately after the May elections, initiated a regular dialogue, as did their negotiating representatives. Whereas 'Arafat and Netanyahu did not meet even once between January and the elections, Barak and 'Arafat met with the public's knowledge six times during the remaining months of the second half of the year, either directly or at some international function or gathering. From midyear forward, Palestinians and Israelis at various levels frequently addressed immediate outstanding problems, engaged in substantive discussions about final status issues, and adjusted timetables on both interim and final status matters. The respective sides renewed bilateral committee talks on civilian matters - aviation, law, trade, industry, and security - and added a new joint committee to manage prisoner releases.

In September, Barak and 'Arafat, under the watchful eyes of Egyptian President Mubarak, Jordan's King 'Abdallah, and President Clinton, signed the Sharm al-Shaykh agreement (SSA) aimed primarily at implementing previous Palestinian-Israeli understandings. Equally important, the SSA called for a quick resumption of final status talks, established a timetable for the conclusion of a framework agreement on permanent status issues (called FAPS) by 13 February 2000, and set a 13 September 2000 deadline for completing a comprehensive final status agreement.

Not all Palestinian-Israeli issues were resolved, however, because each side still had negotiating "red lines" it would not cross, and residual rancor and mistrust muddied Palestinian-Israeli relations. Furthermore, Palestinians and Israelis who resisted the Oslo accords' inherent concept of sharing the land west of the Jordan River remained vocally adamant in their opposition. Palestinian opponents to the concept did not care whether Netanyahu or Barak led Israel. Added to them were Palestinians who viewed Oslo as fundamentally flawed because it gave Israel the power and right to decide the content and pace of withdrawal. Some Palestinian leaders, such as Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) head Na'if Hawatima, also noted that the "unjust" nature of Oslo derived from the weakness of Arab solidarity in the face of Israeli power.¹ Throughout the year, Palestinian and Arab voices chided the US for not applying enough pressure on Israel to provide more land to the PA on a faster timetable. But early in the year, the US announced that it planned to play a much less active role in final status negotiations because "permanent status is not something that should be mediated."²

With the onset of Barak's candidacy, and with former Israeli military leaders entering the election scene to oppose Netanyahu, a change, if not improvement, in Arab-Israeli relations was anticipated among Arabs and Israelis who wanted the negotiations to move from languishing engagement to active progress. Some Palestinians believed that a left- of-center-led Israeli government would be more flexible in negotiations than one right- of-center. Indeed, Barak's election saw a spike in Arab expectations that movement would return to Arab-Israeli talks on all fronts, and by the end of the year, those expectations were partially fulfilled. Yet, there was an unseen legacy from Netanyahu's stewardship of Arab-Israeli negotiations: Palestinian and Syrian officials translated Barak's willingness to rejuvenate negotiations as a willingness to accept Arab views on the negotiated outcome. Such views included, for example, the Arab demand for full Israeli withdrawal to the 4 June 1967 borders. Basic Palestinian and Israeli disagreements on final status issues transited the May 1999 elections:

removal of some or all the settlements.

Possibly for this reason, Palestinian-Israeli violence subsided before Barak's election. Nevertheless, the pace of negotiations slowed, returning to the pre-June 1967 borders, repatriating Palestinian refugees to pre-1967 Israel, or putting portions of Jerusalem under foreign sovereignty.

Barak's election promise to withdraw Israeli troops from Lebanon, unilaterally or otherwise, provided hope for some movement on the Syrian-Israeli or the Lebanese-Israeli track, if not both. Israel's bilateral ties with Egypt and Jordan - the two Arab states with full diplomatic relations and bilateral peace treaties with Israel - improved markedly with Netanyahu's defeat. For example, in late November, Egypt conducted meetings between Mubarak and Israeli Minister of Regional Cooperation Shimon Peres to widen economic cooperation, even as Egyptian media and commentators continually agitated against normalization of relations with Israel.³ In December, Egypt decided to sign an agreement to sell natural gas to Israel.

After the watershed Israeli election, Arab and Muslim states not contiguous to Israel blunted some of their sharpest public antagonism toward Israel and moved to improve bilateral relations. To be sure, the improvements in tones were slight; they emerged not from a change in ideological conviction, but out of a readiness to accept understandings deemed compatible by the Palestinian leadership. Multilateral talks on issues of arms control, water, refugees, environment, and economic development stagnated during Netanyahu's tenure as prime minister, though the refugee working group met in Paris on 20 March. During the second half of the year, there was serious discussion about resurrecting the multilateral framework.

Throughout the year, the three most involved outside parties - the US, the European Union (EU), and Egypt - showed regular interest in promoting movement in negotiations. Each was frustrated and angry at the lack of progress at the year's outset; each, at the end of the year, was more active and positive in outlook. During the first six months of 1999, Washington listened arduously and frequently to the frustrations voiced by the parties. Throughout the year, Washington offered its mediation and good offices in seeing the 1998 Wye River Memorandum (WRM) implemented (see MECS 1998, pp. 68-75) but stayed clear of being involved in discussion of final status issues. The White House and State Department took a noticeably more proactive role in rejuvenating the Wye timetable after the Israeli elections. President Clinton, for example, had frequent contacts with Barak and 'Arafat in person, on the phone, and through American mediators. The September SSA did not demonstrate renewed American mediation - 'Arafat, Barak, and their respective advisors essentially hammered out that agreement - but it signaled again that Washington needed to be the "witness and guarantor" of Israeli-Palestinian understandings.

When the year started, the EU was angry with, if not hostile toward Israel. The EU Council of Ministers declared on 25 January that it deplored Israel's continued suspension of the Wye implementation and believed that Israel was contravening the spirit and letter of the memorandum (see chapter on Europe and the Middle East).⁴ By comparison, at the end of the year, the EU, though still adamantly opposed to Israel's settlement construction, talked seriously about twinning Israeli and Palestinian cities to encourage development in the PA areas and to stimulate regional cooperation.⁵ At the outset of the new millennium, therefore, the Arab-Israeli negotiating process was characterized by a measure of goodwill, encouragement, and progress. The passage of time and a change in Israel's prime minister had made the difference.

Mubarak continued to be 'Arafat's leading Arab counsel; throughout the year, they met in person no less than fourteen times. These meetings assured Cairo of its special advisory role to the PA. Likewise, the fact that final status talks moved forward by year's end led 'Arafat to shelve the idea of seeking to convoke a possible Arab summit meeting, again further solidifying Cairo's position.

Where Netanyahu opposed concessions to the Arab side, Barak indicated distinctive readiness to move the process forward. After Barak's election, Syrians, Palestinians, Lebanese, and other watchful Arab eyes waited to see what he would offer, and over what period of time, as well as what he would demand in return. Although most Arabs expressed either pleasure or caution about Barak's rapid jump-starting of the negotiating process, none were ready to accept any of the red lines the new prime minister presented in July. Perhaps

Palestinian and Syrian officials over-anticipated and too enthusiastically welcomed Barak's words and actions affecting diplomatic movement, particularly when compared to the inaction and disputatious Arab-Israeli atmosphere that characterized Netanyahu's tenure. But whereas Palestinians and Syrians found Barak increasingly ready to negotiate and compromise on a wide variety of issues, they also gradually realized that he was not ready to accept their respective negotiating positions. A priori Arab assumptions that Barak would rubber-stamp their negotiating views were unrealistic resulting in eventual disappointment and criticism. By the end of the year, while substantive progress could be seen on all negotiating tracks, Palestinian and Israeli negotiators still faced the most difficult and complicated items on the negotiating table.

Palestinian-Israeli diplomacy generally replaced violence in 1999; the year witnessed no major confrontations between Israelis and Palestinians and only a minuscule number of violent incidents. On the Israeli-Lebanese border, however, exchanges of fire were sporadic with a major outburst of violence in the spring. While a new era of trust was not yet born, nor even in sight, the protracted listlessness of Arab-Israeli negotiations that typified the first part of the year had, by year's end, been replaced by a clarification of views and renewed movement. By December, all parties interested in diplomatic progress were pleased, in relative terms, that substantive diplomatic progress ensued. At the beginning of the new millennium, prospects for progress in Arab-Israeli negotiations looked promising on the Syrian, Lebanese, and Palestinian tracks.

WAITING FOR ISRAEL'S ELECTIONS

The Arab-Israeli peace process was moribund at the end of 1998. Egyptian Foreign Minister 'Amru Musa described its state of affairs in January 1999 as "abysmal."⁶ Rancor, distance, frustration, and impatience characterized general Arab attitudes toward Israel. In January, Syria's official government newspaper, *Tishrin*, described the Netanyahu government as "tilting toward extremism, radicalism, and ethnic fanaticism, not capable of making peace."⁷ The chief editor of the Middle East News Agency (MENA) in Cairo, Mahfuz al-Ansari, described Netanyahu as "a racist person ... the most dangerous to administer the affairs of the Hebrew state."⁸ The Arab media and politicians almost always based their criticism against Netanyahu on what he had not fulfilled in association with the negotiating process. Summarizing that view, Egyptian commentator Makram Muhammad Ahmad said:

Netanyahu does not want peace for Israel; he wants Arab territory. He is committed, right down to his bone marrow, to the expansionist policies that seek to realize the Torah promise of a Greater Israel. His reelection will be a big catastrophe for the future of regional peace and stability because it will only cause more killing, blood, destruction, and violence. The Arab experience with Binyamin Netanyahu proves that he keeps no promise, honors no agreement.⁹

The underpinning irony of Netanyahu's December 1998 call for new elections was that his defeat came from partners in his own ruling coalition. They had supported Netanyahu in the 1996 election because he staunchly defended retention of the territories under Israeli control; spoke for the rights of the settlers in the Judea, Samaria, and Gaza Strip settlements; and remained openly critical of the Oslo process. Although he had signed the 1997 Hebron agreement, which stipulated the sharing of Hebron with the Palestinians, Netanyahu never hid his dislike for the PA or his distrust for 'Arafat. After returning from the Wye River summit talks, his coalition partners - to whom he had promised no further withdrawal from the territories - abandoned him for being too forthcoming at Wye. Abu Mazin, the second most important personality in the PA and the PLO, concurred; he believed that the "implementation of the WRM ... brought the downfall of the Netanyahu government."¹⁰

Rather than face a no-confidence motion in the Knesset in December 1998, which would have forced new elections within sixty days, Netanyahu called for new elections to be held on 17 May 1999. The date was twelve days after 'Arafat had publicly promised that he would unilaterally declare a Palestinian state. In response to the Israeli election timetable, 'Arafat backed down from his threat to declare the Palestinian state, noting that it would only provide "political ammunition" to Netanyahu.¹¹ The Palestinian leader was fed-up with Netanyahu and hoped for a change in the Israeli government. The absence of violent terrorist attacks prior to the May 1999 elections indicated that 'Arafat and other Palestinian leaders possessed direct control over all elements of the Palestinian community, especially those who vehemently and

violently opposed both the Oslo process and abandoning the "armed struggle" against Israel. This contrasted sharply with the run-up to the May 1996 elections, during which four terrorist attacks significantly influenced a sufficient number of Israeli voters to cast their ballots for someone perceived to be "tougher" on 'Arafat than Shimon Peres, the Labor Party candidate at the time (see MECS 1996, pp. 363-68).

As for Netanyahu, personally, he still possessed a combination of distrust toward 'Arafat and Palestinian national objectives and a basic opposition to the Oslo process. The Likud prime minister refused to grant prerogatives to the PA, to fulfill previously written commitments with them, or to return additional territories in the West Bank held by Israel since the June 1967 war. When the year started, Netanyahu claimed that he was "not to blame for the suspension of the negotiations";¹² it was the Palestinians, he said, who did not implement their share of the WRM. Many disagreed. Typical was the EU, stating on 25 January that it "deplored" the Israeli government suspension of WRM implementation.¹³

For their part, many Israeli leaders, both civilian and ex-military, distanced themselves from him, resigned from his Likud Party, or established new political parties to oppose the increasing embattled prime minister. Former IDF chief of staff Amnon Lipkin-Shahak, in announcing his candidacy for prime minister, typified the growing sentiment against Netanyahu when he said that the Likud leader was "dangerous to Israel; Netanyahu has to go."¹⁴ In its criticism of Netanyahu, however, the Israeli media tended to focus not so much on his slow pace in negotiating with the PA, but on his personality and autocratic style of governance. The day before the national elections, Ha'aretz characterized Netanyahu's character traits as "extraordinary in their destructiveness" and described Netanyahu as "a prime minister unique in the harmful influence he exerted on public life."¹⁵

Under the terms of the 1995 Oslo 11 agreement, "final status" talks were to be concluded by 4 May 1999. In fact, with the scheduling of Israeli elections the possibility of even beginning those talks was put on hold. Mutually agreed upon Palestinian-Israeli commitments made under American guidance at the Wye River summit talks in October 1998 were, for the most part, postponed. If tortuously implemented, obligations were undertaken with evasive intent and always with reluctance. Arab commentators and politicians accused Netanyahu of "exploiting" the election campaign to avoid implementing the Wye agreements.¹⁶

Israel's election campaign clarified policy differences between the two major candidates on negotiating issues with the Palestinians. Netanyahu noted that he did "not believe a sovereign Palestinian state [was] a historic imperative,"¹⁷ and he added that if 'Arafat "declared the establishment of a state unilaterally, it [would] mean the annulment of the Oslo accords."¹⁸ Said Barak, a Palestinian state "is not our concern ... Why should we be for or against a Palestinian state? A Palestinian state is not an Israeli goal."¹⁹ On final status issues, Netanyahu was more reluctant than Barak to make compromises with the Palestinians. He said:

If peace is to prevail, the Palestinians must not have a large army equipped with tanks, missiles, and artillery, a contiguous border with Jordan, and the capacity to form alliances with such regimes as Iraq and Iran. Israel cannot relinquish control over air space, strategic areas, and vital water resources, and [it] must retain security supervision over seaports and airports.²⁰

On Jerusalem, Netanyahu said not only that there would be no concession, but also that it was "not a subject for negotiation, never the capital of any other nation, and Israel's undivided capital."²¹ As for Barak, he reiterated positions similar to those held by his predecessor and mentor, Yitzhak Rabin. Barak said:

[There] must be physical separation from the Palestinians, with us being here and them being there, in accordance with four security red lines ... We need peace and separation on the ground. Jerusalem will remain united under Israel's sovereignty forever. Second, there will be no return to the 1967 borders on any account. Third, there will be no foreign army west of the Jordan River. Fourth, most of the Israeli settlers in Judea and Samaria will be clustered in large settlement blocs.²²

The October 1998 WRM contained a series of specific timetables connected to the fulfillment of obligations previously and newly negotiated. The primary issue pertained to Israel's next scheduled redeployment of forces. US mediators also made known their strong desire that both sides refrain from taking unilateral actions during the various transitional phases leading up to and including final status talks. Because of Palestinian insistence, the Wye talks also included discussion about the establishment and opening of the Palestinian seaport in Gaza and the Israeli release of Palestinian prisoners. The PA airport in Gaza opened, as agreed upon, at the end of November 1998.

For the PA, key issues were the withdrawal of Israeli forces and the transfer of land to PA control. After the completion of the first stage of redeployment in November 1998 -- its implementation involving rancor, bad will, and delay - the total area of land either partially or fully under PA control was approximately 920 square miles, approximately the area of the five boroughs of New York City.²³ The second stage of this deployment was to be completed by 16 February 1999, but it did not take place.

Other WRM obligations went similarly unfulfilled. Concerning the confiscation of illegal Palestinian weapons, some arms were collected in late 1998. Although a US Justice Department team helped the PA in January to create a system to collect, register, and destroy weapons, including heavy machine guns, hand grenades, and some mortars, the confiscation process stopped in late winter. The size of the Palestinian police force was another Wye issue; the PA agreed to reduce it to the amounts stipulated in the 1995 Oslo II agreement, which meant laying off as many as 10,000 police officers. In the end, however, the Palestinian leadership released less than the requisite number.

Also as part of Wye implementation, several bilateral subcommittees were formed to discuss particularly difficult issues. In early February, some fifty Israelis and Palestinians in the subcommittees established under the Oslo accords and the WRM met in Ramallah and discussed topics such as environment, electricity, water, communications, and transportation. Progress on specific issues included the Israeli commitment to lay five central water pipes in the West Bank to be linked to some fifty Palestinian villages, Israeli approval for the drilling of sixteen water wells, and a postal agreement aimed at expediting and improving service.²⁴ By the end of February, however, virtually all the Wye committees set up to implement its various timetables, except those necessary to maintain security cooperation, ceased to meet until after Israel's May elections. The only other Wye committee that convened prior to the Israeli elections was the Israeli-PA-US anti-incitement committee, aimed at eliminating negative stereotypes in textbooks and sensitizing Israeli and Palestinian journalists to the adverse consequences of using incendiary phrases and vocabulary. Typical of the miscommunication between the sides was the committee's inability to reach a mutually agreeable definition of "incitement."²⁵

An exchange took place at King Husayn's funeral in February (see chapter on Jordan) that was representative of two opposing Israeli views about negotiations with the Palestinians and the Oslo process, and also of an alteration in radical Palestinian views about Israel. With dignitaries assembled to honor Husayn's life and memory, Israeli President Ezer Weizmann willingly shook hands with Na'if Hawatima, the Syrian-based leader of the DFLR Hawatima, who up until then had staunchly opposed Israel's very existence and was the mastermind of a 1974 attack that killed twenty Israeli schoolchildren in northern Israel, was also interviewed on Israeli radio. Netanyahu, also at the funeral with Israeli Foreign Minister Ariet Sharon, denounced Weizmann's handshake, saying that Israelis "should not talk to those who want us on earth rather than buried beneath it," to which Weizmann replied, "True, Hawatima murdered, but he was willing to extend a hand and to speak to me ... It is not a pleasure to speak with him ... but through him it is possible to arrive at all kinds of things."²⁶

For his part, 'Arafat was not yet interested in reaching a final agreement with Israel; he was interested in having more land returned to Palestinian control in the shortest possible time frame. He was also interested in the election of an Israeli leader who would be more prone to accept Palestinian positions on final status issues. A change in the Israeli government, from his viewpoint, strongly offered that prospect. In seeking to weaken Netanyahu and perhaps enhance Barak's election, 'Arafat made what seemed to be pragmatic, if not systematic, political decisions that would facilitate the weakening of Netanyahu's candidacy in the eyes of undecided, centrist, and even right wing Israeli voters. Although the Palestinian National Charter had been amended (see MECS 1996, pp. 151-53, 374), in December 1998, the

leadership once again went through the motions of amending articles in the Charter that remained objectionable to many in Israel. In a meeting in Gaza of the Palestine National Council and other Palestinian figures (see MECS 1998, pp. 75-76) with President Clinton, the previous changes were affirmed "in order to deny Netanyahu any opportunity or excuse for avoiding implementation of the [Wye] agreement."²⁷

On the highly emotional and contentious issue of Israeli settlement expansion, 'Arafat and the PA were exceptionally unperturbed in their comments during the spring election campaign, leaving opposition to such Israeli actions primarily to the Palestinian media. Danny Rubenstein, one of Israel's leading commentators on Palestinian affairs, noted at the end of February that the "Palestinians are quiet now [on the settlement issue] ... because the Palestinian leadership has concluded that a violent outburst would only help Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, whose entire reelection campaign is based on nurturing Israelis' fear of Arabs."²⁸ 'Arafat also realized that political distance between Clinton and Netanyahu enhanced Clinton's readiness to work more closely with the PA president. Said Ma'ariv in April, "The problem facing Netanyahu is that he has led US-Israeli relations to an unprecedented low and Washington-'Arafat relations to an incredible blossoming."²⁹ A reduction in incendiary language coming from PA officialdom toward Israel and diminished physical violence by Palestinians against Israelis prevented Netanyahu from stockpiling ammunition as the champion of Israeli security. As Israel's most decorated soldier, Barak was able to retain that undiminished appellation from the Israeli voter throughout the election campaign. 'Arafat's policy choices aided Barak's candidacy. How much of that strategy was orchestrated by interests outside of Israel - including those in Europe, the Arab world, and America who were all determined to rid the country of Netanyahu's leadership - remained unclear.

Throughout 1998 and early 1999, the date preferred for the Palestinian unilateral declaration of independence (UDI) was 4 May 1999, the official, established date set for the conclusion of the five-year transitional period. According to Mahmud 'Abbas (Abu Mazin), the Palestinian aspiration was to have that date "crowned with the declaration of the Palestinian state." Many Palestinian leaders and Arab officials weighed in on the importance of declaring the state. Both Marwan Barghuthi, secretary of 'Arafat's ruling Fatah Party in the West Bank and Qays 'Abd al-Karim, a member of Hawatima's DFLP, adamantly endorsed the declaration of statehood on 4 May. Both feared that a failure to do so would "consecrate the status quo as the shape of the final settlement."³⁰ Ultimately, however, 'Arafat and the Palestinian leadership refrained from unilaterally declaring an independent Palestinian state. In a March 1999 opinion poll conducted by the Tami Steinmetz Center for Peace Research at Tel Aviv University, 56% of potential Jewish Israeli voters believed that a Palestinian UDI would affect the outcome of the May elections. Of those 56%, 80% believed it would strengthen the Israeli parties of the right.³¹

'Arafat had additional considerations. He understood that a mere verbal declaration would not change the reality of either the inadequate dimensions of the state or the prerogatives he and the PA wanted. It might be a Palestinian state, but with its ties to Israel, it certainly would not be an independent one, politically or economically. Outstanding unsettled issues included the largely noncontiguous nature of the areas under PA administration, the poor economic foundations of a state-in-the-making, a not-yet-defined economic aid package from foreign sources for the new state, and the extraordinarily sensitive and undecided question of the "right of return" of Palestinian Arab refugees to their former homes and lands in Israel. Moreover, no agreement had been reached concerning Arab-Muslim rights, privileges, and control of eastern Jerusalem and Arab sections of Jerusalem's Old City, which the Palestinians demanded as part of the future capital of their state. Other unfinished negotiating issues included the future of Israeli settlements and settlers, definition of the Palestinian state's borders, a physical connection between Gaza and the West Bank, the release by Israel of Palestinian prisoners, and most potentially contentious of all, the Palestinian insistence on the "right of return" for Palestinian refugees from the 1948 war.

Other liabilities were also attached to a UDI. It could have left some with the undesired impression that the Palestinian conflict with Israel had been resolved satisfactorily. More importantly, it would have opened the prospect of Israel unilaterally declaring the fulfillment of its own objectives, such as by annexing disputed territories, suspending the disbursement of collected tax revenue to the PA, and closing Israel's 1967 borders to some 100,000-plus Palestinian workers. The Palestinians expressed further concern that Israel might use the UDI as a pretext to take "intransigent" action, such as an "Israeli attempt to return to the Palestinian

towns"32 vacated prior to the January 1996 Palestinian presidential and legislative council elections. 'Arafat also wanted to curry favor with the Clinton administration and EU countries. It was argued that 'Arafat could, in exchange for not proclaiming UDI, obtain American, European, and other international commitments to support the state's declaration at some future time. Bassam Abu Sharif, a long-time confidant, noted quite candidly that "'Arafat is trying to make this international support and pledge [for a Palestinian state] a price for postponing the declaration of the Palestinian state."33 In previous Palestinian-Israeli negotiations, the American-held view was to oppose all unilateral actions, which included Israel's establishment or expansion of settlements, as well as the Palestinian UDI. It is not clear whether there was direct linkage between the postponed declaration and subsequent EU endorsement of the future Palestinian state. On 25 March, however, in the final communique of the Berlin summit, the EU stated its support for "the Palestinians' permanent and unrestricted right to self-determination, including the possibility of a state," and called for "the prompt fulfillment of that right," which "is not subject to veto." The EU countries pronounced themselves willing to "envisage recognizing a Palestinian state once the time comes."34 The EU called for an early resumption of final status negotiations and called upon the parties to "refrain from activities which prejudice the outcome of final status negotiations," including settlement activity, incitement, and violence (see chapter on Europe and the Middle East).35 Arab gratitude for declaratory EU support for the Palestinian state was prominently noted by Palestinian officials.36

Thus, throughout the spring, prospects for UDI were debated almost daily by Arab and Israeli politicians and by the Arab, Israeli, and international media. In March, the US Senate and House of Representatives approved concurrent resolutions calling on President Clinton not to recognize a unilaterally declared Palestinian state. At the same time, because of the halt in Wye implementation, Congress decided against fast-tracking a Wye supplemental aid package that would have given to Israel \$1.2bn. to cover redeployment costs and \$400m. to the PA in donor assistance.37 On 26 April, Clinton reflected the feeling in Congress and in the EU Berlin statement. In a public statement and private letter issued the day before the Palestinian Central Council (PCC) was set to debate the declaration issue in Gaza, Clinton said that the US supported "the aspirations of the Palestinian people to determine their own future on their own land ... Palestinians and Israelis must avoid unilateral acts and declarations that prejudice or predetermine issues reserved for permanent status negotiations."38 Clinton stipulated that the US would convene a new set of peace talks within six months after the Israeli elections and hoped that the final status talks would be completed within one year. Advocating movement and stipulating a timetable for progress was an obvious American endorsement of Barak's views and, therefore, his candidacy for prime minister. Clinton, for his part, refused to meet Netanyahu prior to the Israeli elections, and the Israeli prime minister was quoted as saying that he was not going "to stand in line" for a meeting with the US president.39 On 27 April, 'Arafat recommended that the PCC oppose UDI, which it did. 'Arafat reportedly said, "We don't need to affirm our state, because we are actually exercising statehood."40

By postponing UDI, 'Arafat won international plaudits and a series of promises for future endorsement and support of the state-to-be, but he inevitably disappointed many Palestinians and other Arabs who criticized him for what was seen by many as caving into American wishes. Conjecture might have one believe that 'Arafat never intended to declare the state, but simply wanted to use the threat as political bludgeon to extract concessions from Israel and others. If his true position was that he would never compromise on full Israeli withdrawal, Arab control over east Jerusalem, and the Palestinian "right of return," then the diplomatic "game" he played was masterful and highly successful.

In a poll among Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza conducted ten days before the PCC decision, 48% supported waiting to declare a state until there was an agreement with Israel; 42% supported establishing the state when the transitional period ended in early May, even if no agreement with Israel was signed by that date?41 The close of the five-year Oslo interim period on 4 May came and went with very little notice taken in Israel or among the Palestinians. It is noteworthy that in the months prior to the election, and in fact as early as December 1998, two-thirds of the Israeli Jewish public believed that the "peace process" would "ultimately lead to the establishment of an independent Palestinian state and that whatever government arises from the coming elections will arrive at a permanent settlement which will include withdrawal from territories and recognition of such a state."42 In other words, by the time of the May 1999 elections, a vast majority of Israelis had internalized the eventual reality of the establishment of a Palestinian state. The devil, however, remained in the details,

including the state's dimensions, prerogatives, and whether it would emerge eventually from some unilateral act or through negotiations.

TRANSFORMING THE NEGOTIATING ENVIRONMENT AND ARAB-ISRAELI RELATIONS, BARAK-STYLE

Barak perceived his victory of 56.1% of the vote as a mandate for his candidacy and positions, putting little stock in the possibility that perhaps many who voted for him were voting primarily against Netanyahu. Immediately after his victory was clear, Barak outlined his negotiating positions with the Palestinians. He promised to put any final status agreement to the Israeli public in the form of a national referendum. He indicated his negotiating red lines: No concessions on Israeli sovereignty over a unified Jerusalem, no "foreign" army west of the Jordan River, no evacuation of major Jewish settlement blocs, and no return to the June 1967 borders. In Washington, Jordan's King 'Abdallah quickly met with Clinton and congressional leaders, where he noted his pleasure with Barak's election.⁴³ Almost simultaneously in Washington, the America Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), Israel's most powerful lobbying voice in Washington, reversed its historical opposition to a Palestinian state. During its fortieth annual conference, AIPAC said it took such action "to comport with a more mainstream position and promote consonance with the stance of Israeli leaders on this issue, noting that the Labor Party no longer opposed a Palestinian state and soon-to-be former foreign minister Ariel Sharon accepted its inevitability."⁴⁴

During the six weeks Barak spent forming a coalition government, Israel's relations with the Arab states and the Palestinians continued to be strained. The lame-duck Netanyahu government expanded settlement areas around Jerusalem and established Jewish civilian enclaves in contested areas around the city, including in Ras al-'Amud and Jabal Abu Ghanaym, known in Hebrew as Har Homa. On 24 June, Netanyahu also retaliated militarily against a Hizballah Katyusha rocket attack against northern Israeli settlements. The largest Israeli attack on Lebanon since Operation Grapes of Wrath in 1996,⁴⁵ the retaliatory strike caused a blackout in Beirut when a power plant was struck (see chapter on Lebanon).⁴⁶ On 20 May, Barak had repeated his campaign pledge to withdraw Israeli troops from Lebanon within a year.⁴⁷ His public thinking at that time tied preparation, negotiation, and withdrawal to resumption of the Syrian-Israeli talks, not to a unilateral withdrawal. On 3 June, however, while Netanyahu was still prime minister, Israel had its client militia, the South Lebanese Army (SLA), withdraw unilaterally from an area north of Israel's declared security zone. The Israeli-sponsored partial SLA withdrawal was undertaken without any security guarantees provided by the Lebanese government.⁴⁸ A distinction was clearly visible in Israel's evolving strategic policy toward Lebanon: Israel wanted to withdraw its troops from Lebanon while declaring its intent to punish anyone who engaged in acts that threatened Israeli security.

Once the Israeli election results were tallied, Arab political leaders and media focused intensely on what Barak would do. Most Arab writers and leaders were cautiously optimistic, but a minority suggested that no difference existed in Israeli views regardless of the country's prime minister - all were expansionist, aggressive, and arrogant. Still others counseled patience in prejudging Barak. At the same time, Arab governmental and private media were virtually uniform in expressing unrestrained pleasure that Netanyahu was gone. And there were several statements of Arab praise for Israel's democratic way of changing governments. Egyptian columnist Salama Ahmad Salama was delighted, noting that Netanyahu's departure "removed one of the most hated Israeli personalities in the history of the Jewish state," while "opening an opportunity for a breakthrough" in negotiations.⁴⁹ London's *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, under the title "Barak's Israel," called Netanyahu's defeat the end of a "nightmare."⁵⁰ Mahmud 'Abbas said that Barak's election "created conditions for the resumption of the final status talks alongside the implementation of the interim phase agreements."⁵¹ A Palestinian National Council (PNC) member offered a more tepid view, stating that while Israelis affirmed their preference for peace, a Netanyahu victory would have continued "the enormous political gains on both international and Arab levels ... [E]ven the United States, Israel's major ally, became sympathetic with the Palestinian position."⁵² An additional Palestinian expression was not praise for Barak's victory but "admiration" for the Israeli political system. Compliments were offered for the exercise of the free will of the majority, with comparisons made to Palestinian politics where "factions, parties, and forces are self-installed ... our Palestinian people are thirsty for the exercise of the freedom of choice."⁵³

statements, said that Egypt should "wait and see" and "not prejudge" the new Israeli prime minister. Both hoped that past agreements with the Palestinians would be implemented prior to initiating final status negotiations and that talks with Syria would resume where they left off - the Egyptian and Syrian euphemism for the alleged Rabin promise to return to the 4 June 1967 lines.⁵⁴ A writer for the government-controlled Syrian press claimed not that Barak won but that Netanyahu lost, and that "there are no major differences among the rulers of Israel from any party, shape, or color." Regardless of leadership, he continued, the "expansionist, racist, and aggressive" policies of all Israeli leaders need to change,⁵⁵ and Israel needs to renew what Syrians believe to be Rabin's pledge to withdraw Israeli troops to the lines of 4 June 1967. Jordan's *al-Dustur* hoped in an editorial for the "opening a new chapter in the region."⁵⁶

While exhilaration about Netanyahu's defeat was expressed and speculation about the contents and pace of future negotiations amply debated, there was little public acknowledgment that renewed negotiations might require possible mutual compromises on crucial issues, if the coming negotiations were truly to involve "give and take." Arab quarters, particularly, were unsure of Barak's readiness to consent to desired Palestinian or Syrian Arab outcomes in negotiations: total Israeli withdrawal from all the territories taken in the June 1967 war, the right of return of Palestinian refugees to pre- 1967 Israel, and the establishment of a Palestinian Arab state with Jerusalem as its capital. No effort was made to prepare domestic constituencies for eventual agreements with Israel. The Syrian and Palestinian views, as they became clearer by the end of the year, were focused on the unalterable Arab requirement that Israel accept the totality of the Arab view of the negotiated outcome. At that time, a consensus Israeli view about Barak's stewardship of the negotiating process emerged. Typical was the view expressed by a titled editorial in *Ha'aretz*: "Barak Administration to Rebuild Confidence and Enable Substantial Progress."⁵⁷ *Hatzofeh*, the paper of the Israeli opposition National Religious Party (NRP), noted that even those who voted against him should "lend him a hand," because Barak "had created for himself a wide public coalition."⁵⁸

THE SHARM AL-SHAYKH AGREEMENT

On 11 July, five days after having his coalition government confirmed by the Israeli Knesset, Barak met with 'Arafat at the Erez crossing, the first Israeli-PA summit in seven months. Four days later, Barak next met with Clinton in the first of two meetings while on his maiden trip to Washington as prime minister. At the second major occasion for funeral diplomacy of the year, 'Arafat, Barak, Clinton, and 'Abdallah met in Rabat on 25 July at the funeral of Morocco's King Hasan II. Then on 27 July, Barak and 'Arafat met again, and the new prime minister tried to allay 'Arafat's fears that Israel would place Syrian-Israeli talks ahead of Wye implementation or discussion of final status talks.⁵⁹ Barak then met with Egyptian President Mubarak in an effort to have the Egyptian president persuade 'Arafat to consent to Barak's delay in implementing the next withdrawal as specified in the WRM.⁶⁰

In August, Israeli and Palestinian negotiating teams held almost daily meetings in Israel, Washington, and the Palestinian areas on establishing a timetable for implementation of agreements made in the 1998 WRM. Israel and the PA reached agreements on initial construction of the Gaza sea port and on opening a southern safe passage route between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Impasses emerged over the number of Palestinian prisoners to be released, however, and over the timetable and areas from which Israel would withdraw as part of committed redeployments. At the end of August, Mubarak entered the negotiations in an intermediary role, at a time when Barak asked Washington to allow Israel and the PA to negotiate with less American intervention. With that in mind, Barak asked US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright to delay until the end of August her trip to the region, which she did. In early September, she shuttled between 'Arafat, Barak, and Mubarak, seeking to reach a final agreement; by then, however, the Palestinians and Israelis themselves had already done most of the "heavy lifting" in the negotiations. The pace of August's negotiations was a far cry from the immobility that characterized talks six months earlier.

Signed on 4 September and witnessed by Albright, Mubarak, and King. 'Abdallah, the SSA basically reaffirmed previously negotiated Palestinian and Israeli commitments, created a timetable for their implementation, raised some new issues, and stipulated the establishment of a final status talk framework by 13 February 2000. Ten of the eleven articles in the SSA either repeated language from past agreements or tinkered with their still-unimplemented obligations.

For the Palestinians, the SSA attached specific dates to past Israeli promises to open a key market street in Hebron, inaugurate a land passage between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and permit the construction of a Gaza sea port. As for the Israelis, the SSA provided them two extra months to complete withdrawals envisioned in the 1998 WRM and permitted them to devise a plan to ensure Palestinian acquisition of contiguous territory while Israel retained the strategic Judean Desert. Also, the SSA highlighted direct Israeli-Palestinian negotiations with less US engagement.

Some of the clauses in the SSA showed "subtle concessions" by Israel.⁶¹ But none of the stipulations in the SSA altered the total amount of West Bank land - 40% - to be under full or partial Palestinian control by the end of this stage, set for February 2000. For the first time, Israel affirmed in writing an oral promise it had made to release Palestinian "security prisoners," not simply convicted felons such as those whom Netanyahu released after Wye in late 1998. At Wye, Israel had managed to retain linkage between its territorial withdrawals and specific Palestinian obligations, such as confiscating illegal weapons or amending the PLO Charter. In the SSA, Israeli negotiators agreed to specific dates for further withdrawals, without direct linkage to outstanding Palestinian obligations. In an important shift favoring Israeli negotiating views, the SSA committed Israel to a specific date by which "permanent status negotiations" must end, namely 13 September 2000. Previously, the end of the negotiating calendar remained intentionally ambiguous, in order to avoid giving to the Palestinian side a trigger date for UDI, so opposed by Israel, Clinton, and the EU.

In comparing the withdrawal specifics in the 1999 SSA with the 1998 WRM, Israel was to withdraw from 13% of the West Bank in three stages over a period of three months. As Israel had already completed a 2% withdrawal, this left 11%. Some 3% of the remaining pullback was to take place in the Judean Desert, which the Palestinians agreed was to be a nature reserve with no building allowed. By the SSA, Israel was to hand over the remaining 11% in three stages, not two. The first took place a week after the agreement was signed, the second was to be completed by 15 November, and the third by 20 January 2000. The Judean Desert nature reserve areas and the other areas returned to the Palestinians remained non-contiguous.⁶²

With respect to prisoner release, according to Wye, Israel was to release 750 prisoners. It had already released 250. Of those remaining, the Barak government was talking about releasing 102 security prisoners; in the agreement, however, Israel promised to release 350 security prisoners in two phases. Some 199 were released on 9 September and 151 on 15 October, just after the commencement of Ramadan. Opposition radical Islamist Hamas and Islamic Jihad members were included among those Palestinian Prisoners Israel released in October. The two sides agreed to talk in December about an additional release, but no numbers were suggested.

As for the building of the Gaza seaport, the WRM established a committee to discuss it; in the SSA, planning for the port was to begin immediately, and actual building, with certain security restrictions, was to commence in October. The construction was delayed, however, due to disagreements between Israel and the PA on the truck route to be used for the transport of construction materials for the port. On the matter of safe passage, the southern route from Gaza's Erez crossing to Tarqumiyya (adjacent to Hebron) was supposed to open in October pending a protocol agreement, and negotiations were to continue on the northern route (between Gaza and the Ramallah area). On 5 October, Israel and the PA signed an agreement opening the southern safe passage route running the 28-mile distance using existing Israeli roads. Future suggestions for the route included a special road, bridge, and tunnel. Owing to disagreements about the issuance of travel permits, the safe passage did not begin operation until 25 October. The process for using the safe passage applied both to the southern route and to the northern route that was to open in 2000. Among the procedures, Palestinians were to apply to the PA for magnetic cards that would give them one year's access to the route, with Israel retaining the right to reject any applicant. The 130,000 Palestinians who worked in Israel automatically qualified to receive cards. Palestinians would use their own cars, with the route open ten hours a day, seven days a week. Although Israel said it would not trap "wanted" Palestinians on the "safe passage" route, it did not renounce its prerogative to arrest Palestinians traveling on it.⁶³

Not mentioned by the Wye Memorandum, Hebron's Shuhada Street was to be reopened in two stages. A portion of the street was open to movement prior to the SSA, but full traffic did

not pass along it by the end of the year. Likewise, the opening of the Hisba, the main Arab wholesale market did not occur on the first day of November as promised. The difficulties in sharing Hebron, a city important to both Palestinians and Israelis, foreshadowed the difficulties of final status arrangements for Jerusalem.

While Wye did not contain a specific target date for concluding talks on a permanent peace accord, the SSA noted that within five or six months the two sides were to begin negotiating the outline of a final-status agreement, and by 13 September 2000, the accord was to be concluded. In the meantime, no unilateral steps - such as the establishment or expansion of Israeli settlements or a Palestinian declaration of statehood - were to be taken.⁶⁴

Israelis were generally uniform in their acceptance of the SSA; in Palestinian and Arab quarters, however, reaction ranged from skepticism to open opposition. Unlike the domestic coalition unrest generated by the WRM a year earlier, the SSA caused no domestic earthquake in the Israeli cabinet, nor instability in the Knesset. By a vote of 22-2, the cabinet approved the agreement, and the Knesset ratified it by a 54-23 margin.⁶⁵ The most vigorous Arab opponents of the SSA were writers in the pan-Arab press in Europe. By contrast, although many Palestinian politicians and analysts disliked the SSA, those in daily physical or geographic proximity to the territories were not as vocal in their condemnations. Writing in *al-Quds al-Arabi*, 'Atwan 'Abd al-Bari remorsefully claimed that Barak had scored a brilliant success against the Palestinians, one that would cause the "doors of Arab normalization that were almost closed during the past three years [to] be opened very wide."⁶⁶ Anis al-Qasim, in castigating 'Arafat and the agreement in *al-Hayat*, accused 'Arafat of surrendering Palestinian legal and historic rights and postponing statehood to protect his own leadership positions. One Palestinian writer, Ashraf al-'Ajani, questioned why the Palestinians were paying "the price for a commodity we already bought before."⁶⁸

Some writers' and leaders' opposition was muted. Although he categorized all Palestinian-Israeli agreements since Oslo as flawed, the SSA included, Jihad Khazin suggested in *al-Hayat* that, by comparison, the agreements "are much better than the death and despair sown by the rejectionists."⁶⁹ Mubarak's political adviser, Usama al-Baz, argued that "Palestinian gains far exceeded concessions in the SSA" and added that insisting on the "projected Palestinian state was out of question in the agreement" because the time was not ripe to tackle it.⁷⁰ Looking into the near future in negotiations, Palestinian writer Mamduh Nawfal sensed that the SSA "pulled the door wide open to the battle of the final solution that will be hard and very long."⁷¹ After the SSA was signed and interim issues implemented to some degree, the focus shifted to final status talks. On 13 September, the sixth anniversary of the signing of the original Oslo accord, Israel and the PA held a ceremony at the Erez crossing that symbolically opened final status talks. On 16 September, Barak met with 'Arafat secretly; after the meeting was leaked, Barak proposed that they have regular private meetings to monitor final status talks.

For the remainder of the year, Barak publicly articulated, and with increasing frequency, his outlines for what an agreement with the Palestinians might look like. While he became more specific about many aspects of the negotiations, and as the committees or groups discussing final status talks had more meetings, 'Arafat and the PA leadership remained strictly circumspect. They made no public remarks about their outlines for the negotiations and stipulated no vision for the future relationship between Israel and a Palestinian state that could be construed as an alteration of their "absolutist" negotiating position. Neither 'Arafat nor high-ranking members of the PA leadership deviated in any way from their insistence on securing an Israeli withdrawal from all of Arab Jerusalem. Similarly, no leading Palestinian offered to rescind in any way their demand for Israeli withdrawal from all the territories, and none raised even the slightest possibility that the "Palestinian right of return" might be politically finessed. Although fully aware of Israel's red lines, 'Arafat seemed to realize that, if he waited long enough, Barak would make some additional compromise that would bring the Israeli negotiating stance, even if only by inches, that much closer to the Palestinian viewpoint.

Barak enumerated not only what he would do but also what was not negotiable. He sparked a negative Palestinian comment when he told his cabinet on 8 November - and reiterated it the next day with 'Arafat present at the Paris meeting of the Socialist International Congress - that UN Security Council Resolution 242 was not applicable to the West Bank and Gaza. Barak reasoned that the resolution applied only to sovereign states and not to organizations. During his speech to the congress, Barak said that although Israel wants "political separation from the

Palestinian areas, economic cooperation" between the two peoples would continue.⁷² Physical separation was his political objective, but just three weeks earlier Barak had also suggested economic separation between Israel and the future Palestinian entity. It is unclear whether Barak used the prospects of an economic as well as a physical separation as a negotiating lever to achieve other concessions, but he did begin to define Israel's future relationship with a Palestinian state.

The debate no longer concerned whether there would be such a state; the question now was what kind of state it would be, and what kind of relations it would have with Israel. Barak premised his definition of that relationship on the notion that the Palestinian state would not be a security threat to Israel, and that Israel would control aspects of the Prerogatives of the Palestinian state that might threaten Israeli state security. Barak proposed separation but not Israeli detachment from the future Palestinian state. He proposed a separate economy, a free trade agreement, broad economic cooperation, the sharing of expertise and raw materials, and allowing some Palestinians to continue working in Israel. He asserted his belief that the Palestinians "will not want to be fully integrated into our economy, use our currency, or accept limitations on access to world markets; they will want to have and control their own economy, value their own currency, and determine their own markets."⁷³

After his speech at the Socialist International Congress, Barak brushed off reporters' questions about 'Arafat's demand that Israel "withdraw from all of Jerusalem, Latrun, and Bethlehem." He said one had "to get used to hearing speeches in the coming days," because the two sides had "entered the difficult, painful part of the negotiations."⁷⁴ Movement in PA-Israeli negotiations continued. 'Arafat and Barak met again in Oslo on 1 November to take part in two days of ceremonies honoring the memory of Yitzhak Rabin. The next day, they met together with Clinton, again to determine how best to approach final status talks: deal with all the issues simultaneously or establish separate committees for each topic. Barak considered a third option of establishing three categories of issues: those that were non-negotiable (like Jerusalem), those that were vital but negotiable, and those in which both sides displayed a measure of flexibility. Barak also wanted the US to convene a Camp David-style summit early in 2000.

Despite a pipe bomb incident in Netanya that injured twenty-seven Israelis on 7 November, the PA and Israel had their four final status teams meet for the first time on 8 November. The location of the meetings alternated between Ramallah and Jerusalem, and the issues were discussed as a package rather than in separate committees. Nonetheless, each side had sub-teams that focused on the four cluster issues of: (a) boundaries, settlements and security; (b) the nature of the future Palestinian entity, its foreign policy, and the issue of refugees; (c) water and economics; and (d) Jerusalem.⁷⁵ For the Israelis, Oded Eran, Israel's ambassador to Jordan, led the final status team, and Yasir 'Abd Rabbu headed the PA delegation. Progress on the discussion of final status issues was hampered by the substantial lack of fulfillment of obligations made originally in the WRM and reconfirmed in the SSA. The two sticking points were Israel's fulfillment of the second stage of withdrawal and the final prisoner release. The prisoner release was carried out on 29 and 30 December; additionally, no draft of a framework agreement on permanent status was completed by year's end. Although 'Arafat and Barak met one more time before the end of the year, this time in Ramallah on 21 December, Barak and Israel's focus had turned toward the Syrian-Israeli track, a reality that did not please 'Arafat at all. An American negotiator recalled that when 'Arafat learned from a television announcement of the proposed high-level Syrian-Israeli talks in Washington in mid-December, he was "sullen, even pale."⁷⁶ After the Barak-Shar' meetings in Washington, the Palestinian press took a worrisome view that Syrian-Israeli talks would deflect the focus away from the Israeli-Palestinian track. *Al-Ayyam*, in particular, feared that, in keeping with Egyptian-Israeli precedent, Israel would sign a treaty with another contiguous Arab neighbor while it continued to treat the Palestinians in a heavy-handed manner.⁷⁷

THE SYRIAN-ISRAELI TRACK

During the first five months of 1999, no movement at all occurred on the Syrian-Israeli track. The most notable event occurred on 26 January with the Israeli Knesset's 53-30 passage of the first reading of a Golan Heights law. Sponsored by the Third Way Party, it required that any change in the status of Israeli sovereign territory, including the Golan, first had to be approved by a 61-vote majority in the Knesset and then needed endorsement by a simple majority of citizens voting in a national public referendum.⁷⁸ Such a parliamentary act succeeded in both

currying support among settlers in the Golan and antagonizing the Syrian government. At the end of May, following Barak's election, a flurry of articles appeared in the Israeli press claiming that a number of private Israeli-Syrian talks had taken place during Netanyahu's tenure.⁷⁹ Apparently, secret Israeli-Syrian discussions were held at various times from 1997 through 1999 via a series of intermediaries, including Omani Foreign Minister Yusuf bin 'Alawi, EU Special Envoy to the Middle East Miguel Moratinos, American businessman Ronald Lauder, and Netanyahu's national security adviser, Uzi Arad. Included in the discussions on the Israeli side were Israeli Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai, Maj. Gen. (Res.) Danny Yatom, and Maj. Gen. Shaul Mofaz, then the head of the Planning Division and later the IDF chief of staff. For a variety of reasons - including the fact that Netanyahu was unwilling to withdraw from all of the Golan Heights as Asad had demanded - no breakthrough had been achieved. After his election, Barak reportedly sent via Itamar Rabinovich, former Israeli ambassador to the US and primary interlocutor for the Rabin government in negotiations with Syria, a message to Clinton that Israel was prepared to restart the Syrian-Israeli track in earnest.⁸⁰ Then, in a mid-June *Ha'aretz* interview, Barak expressed his desire to resume peace negotiations with Syria, and stated that he would offer Syrian President Hafiz al-Asad an enticing package, including an agreement on the Golan. The prime minister-elect maintained, however, that he would not discuss withdrawal from the Golan until he determined what Israel would receive from the normalization of relations with Syria. Barak then drew his distinction between the Palestinian and the Syrian tracks: "The Palestinians are the source of the legitimacy of the continuation of the conflict, but they are the weakest of all our adversaries. The Syrians are a source of conventional strength that can generate a major collision."⁸¹ Following this public statement, Barak and Asad traded unanticipated laudatory comments about the other through the writings of Patrick Seale, a British biographer of Asad and historian of modern Syria. Seale quoted Asad as saying that Barak was "a strong and honest man [who] can accomplish whatever he decides to do," and Barak praised Asad for creating "a strong, independent, self-confident Syria" and called Syria the "keystone of peace" in the region.⁸² "A courtship, unfamiliar in Arab-Israeli dialogue" is how one Palestinian commentator labeled the Asad-Barak exchange. In his inaugural speech as prime minister on 6 July, Barak said that the peace process would be his top priority, that he hoped to conduct simultaneous negotiations with the PA and Syria, and that he would withdraw troops from Lebanon within the year. To be sure, Syrian skepticism about Israeli intentions to withdraw from Lebanon or the Golan accompanied the Asad-Barak exchange. Barak's conciliatory words, in the official Syrian newspaper *al-Thawra*, were variously viewed as "tactics of maneuvering and deception" or a "public relations job."⁸³

Throughout the autumn, Palestinian-Israeli negotiations headlined the negotiating process, particularly after the signing of the SSA. Quietly, however, ideas were being exchanged between Damascus and Jerusalem. On 7 December, with Secretary of State Albright's visit to Damascus for talks with President Asad, discussions about a renewal of Israeli-Syrian talks reached a decisive moment. Throughout the fall, Clinton and Barak had had discussions about renewing Syrian-Israeli talks; the topic was reportedly discussed on 18-19 November during the Istanbul meeting of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Details of these discussions developed from a variety of sources, including the intercession of French intermediaries along with dozens of phone calls Clinton had with Asad and Barak since August 1999. On 8 December, Clinton announced that Barak and Syrian Foreign Minister Faruq al-Shar' would meet in Washington the following week, with a follow-up session of intensive negotiations to occur at an undetermined location.⁸⁴

The official Syrian media - historically hostile to Israel and antagonistic to the US for its perceived adopting, promoting, and supporting Israeli views about all aspects of the conflict and its resolution - adopted a distinctly uncommon warmth to the US as a result of the Clinton announcement. Turki al-Saqr, editor of Syria's governmental organ, *al-Ba'th*, echoed a sentiment of hopefulness and cordiality. In an editorial the day after Clinton's announcement, Saqr remarked that "Syria wants normal relations with the US based on mutual respect, equality, shared interests, and non-interference in internal affairs; and, secondly, that Syria means what it says when it announces that peace is its strategic choice."⁸⁵ By voicing a hope for improved Syrian-Israeli relations prior to the convocation of the Israeli-Syrian talks, the editorial clearly indicated that Asad's regime hoped that Barak would execute full withdrawal from the Golan Heights. Without such a withdrawal, it was well understood, the enhancement of Syrian-US relations would not ensue. Put differently, Asad would not likely have consented to send his foreign minister for public talks with an Israeli prime minister, in Washington, under the auspices of the American president, if he did not sincerely believe that full Golan withdrawal would be the outcome of the discussions.

Media reactions in Israel and the Arab world speculated about why the talks broke down in 1996, who was responsible for that shutdown, and all the issues associated with a possible Syrian-Israeli agreement. Such issues included limited force zones after Israel's withdrawal of forces, depths of withdrawal, future borders, water issues, levels of diplomatic normalization, timetables for implementing an agreement, the costs associated with an agreement, and whether the US would defray such costs and to what degree. Speculation also arose concerning the immediate and interim impact of a future Syrian- Israeli agreement on other spheres. The pace of progress on the Palestinian-Israeli track; the impact talks might have on Barak's promise to withdraw from Lebanon by July 2000; Syria's future relationship with Iran, Hizballah, and Lebanon; speculation on Syrian interest in upgrading its economy by reaching out to the West and to the US in a post- agreement environment; and how Barak's promised referendum on a Syrian agreement would fare with the Israeli electorate were all subjects of discussion. Overall, there was a measure of guarded optimism from virtually all Israeli and Arab sources that these talks would lead to significant changes for the better for Syria, Israel, and the region.

In his 8 December announcement of the renewal of Syrian-Israeli talks after a hiatus of four years, Clinton said that the negotiations would resume "from the point at which they left off," with no preconditions.⁸⁶ Such a carefully stated formulation allowed each side to interpret the framework for negotiation in its own way. For Syria, that meant the talks would resume based on the commitment ostensibly made by the late prime minister Rabin, for Israel to withdraw from the Golan Heights to the 4 June 1967 lines. The Israeli view, held by Barak, was that such a statement floated by Rabin was not a commitment but was instead a possible scenario if Syria were to provide full peace in exchange. Barak publicly opposed a return to the 4 June 1967 border, arguing that it included an area that "Syria seized in an act of aggression," and that its control by Syria would put "Israel's water sources at risk."⁸⁷ Nonetheless, Barak believed that "Asad was a sober man, who made a mistake when he thought Rabin deceived him. We hope he will not repeat the same mistake ... [All of our struggle for years was to bring the Syrians to a meeting at the political level ... [T]his is a historic opportunity."⁸⁸ Prior to his departure to Washington, Barak told the Israeli Knesset that, for peace with Syria, Israel would have to pay a "heavy territorial price."⁸⁹ From the Knesset, he won a close vote of confidence - 47-31 with twenty-four abstentions - to negotiate with the Syrians. Israel's Likud opposition leader, Ariel Sharon, opposed the conditions upon which the talks were to take place, saying that "the government's consent to restart the negotiations from the point where they stopped three years ago is the Barak government's total surrender to the Syrian demands."⁹⁰ With fifty-five Knesset members either opposed or abstaining and Sharon's apprehension of Barak's intentions clearly stated, a majority of the Israeli Jewish public opposed trading the Golan Heights for a peace agreement. Comparisons of Israeli views toward peace with Syria between January and December 1999 revealed that, at the end of the year, 50% were certain there would be peace with Syria, a jump of 10%. Yet at the end of the year, more Israelis - 62% as compared to 50% in January - were opposed to giving up the Golan Heights, even if that was the price of obtaining a peace treaty with Syria. In a poll conducted in mid-December which asked Israelis if they should be faced with only two options - full withdrawal from the Golan Heights in return for a full peace agreement or retaining Golan without a peace agreement - 39% said they would opt for a full withdrawal, 50% favored retaining the status quo, and 11% were undecided. Thus, at the time of Barak's discussions with Shar', the Israeli public possessed a greater certainty that there would be peace with Syria, but also a greater reluctance to withdraw from the Golan Heights to achieve that objective.⁹¹

In Washington, the Syrian-Israeli talks under Clinton's direction began on 15 December with a welcoming ceremony at the White House. Five years earlier, on 21 December 1994, Barak - then as Israeli chief of staff - had detailed discussions in the US with his Syrian counterpart about security issues associated with a Golan withdrawal. This time, Barak's discussions had obvious symbolic and political implications as well. These were public talks about establishing a political framework; they were not talks designed to ratify an understanding or agreement previously negotiated secretly behind the scenes. There was no discussion about the contents or drafting of a final Syrian-Israeli agreement. In their respective opening remarks in mid-December, Clinton predicted obstacles along the negotiating path, but noted that for "the first time in history, there is a chance for a comprehensive peace between Israel and Syria and indeed all its neighbors." Barak said that Israel was determined to do whatever it could "to bring about the dreams of children and mothers all around the region to see a better future for the Middle East at the entrance to the new millennium." And Shar' was businesslike, bringing

greetings from Asad while emphasizing "that peace for Syria means the return of all its occupied land."⁹² He then proceeded to read a list of Syrian grievances against Israel. Shar' also failed to shake Barak's hand, a non-act which particularly perturbed Israelis.

During the two days of discussions that followed, Clinton and Albright each met with Barak and Shar' together and alone, but Barak and Shar' did not meet alone. At the end of their talks, they agreed to hold their first round of "intensive" talks in or near Washington from 3 January 2000 onward, and they agreed to have the US State Department manage all press briefings so as "to avoid leaks and unproductive statements."⁹³ Between the end of the first round of procedural discussions and the January 2000 meetings, little was said about the upcoming talks, apart from Barak's statement that he wanted to focus on security and normalization issues before dealing with border and water matters. Barak apparently was aware of the difficulties in negotiating an agreement with the Syrians, which explained his desire to reach a "core agreement" with Syria, something more than a declaration of principles but less than a full peace treaty.⁹⁴ By the end of the year, Barak's views about the general possibilities of returning the Golan Heights in exchange for a final agreement with Syria, and his views about making deeper withdrawals and other concessions on the Palestinian-Israeli track, were far more conciliatory in tone and greater in substance than were the consensus views held by many in his coalition or by the general Israeli public.

JORDANIAN-ISRAELI RELATIONS

For most of the year, the overall quality of Jordanian-Israeli relations remained unchanged, though anti-Israeli feeling among some parliamentary, professional, and political groups increased, particularly during the second half of the year. King Husayn died in February (see chapter on Jordan), leaving a forty-five year legacy of establishing and protecting Jordan's political independence and territorial integrity. Early in his life, he understood that Israel's military strength and its interest in having a stable eastern neighbor would support the territorial sovereignty of his kingdom. Having lost the West Bank and East Jerusalem in the 1967 war, after having placed his armed forces under Egyptian President Jamal 'Abd al-Nasir's control, he stayed away from the planning of the October 1973 war, lest his small country become completely undone. Already in the 1970s, he was being outflanked by the PLO politically in the contest for who would be the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. By the end of the 1980s, he realized that Jordan could no longer compete with the PLO for custodial rights to the West Bank.

After Husayn's July 1988 strategic decision and public announcement to disengage from the West Bank and leave it to the PLO to negotiate with Israel (see *MECS* 1988, pp. 589-95), he moved along the path of protecting the general interests of his East Bank kingdom. Nevertheless, his personal interest and involvement in shaping a satisfactory outcome to the Palestinian question never waned. He arduously pursued this dual approach of protecting his kingdom while remaining a minor cook at the Palestinian-Israeli diplomatic stove. This was evident on more than one occasion: during the Madrid Middle East peace conference that followed the Gulf War, in the management of the subsequent bilateral talks from 1991-1994, in the signing of the Jordanian-Israeli Washington declaration of July 1994, in the Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty (particularly in Article 9, referring to Hashemite interests in Jerusalem) of October 1994, and at the Wye River negotiations in October 1998.

King Husayn wanted to be sure that the evolution and establishment of Palestinian political rights, including a possible Palestinian state, did not adversely affect Jordan's territorial integrity or sovereignty. Since the early 1960s, he had had hundreds of hours of secret contacts with Israeli leaders of all political shades. When he died, many Israelis, as did many Arabs and other world leaders, felt the world had lost a man of dignity and civility. The rapport that his grandfather, 'Abdallah, had established with Israel in the pre-state period, and Husayn's own contacts with virtually every Israeli prime minister, added to the respect nationwide that Israelis showed at his death. Many Israelis considered him a friend, "a noble and generous monarch,"⁹⁵ an "island of stability" in the Middle East.⁹⁶ Eitan Haber, the director-general of the Prime Minister's Office under Rabin, who had met Husayn on numerous occasions, defined Jordanian-Israeli mutual benefits: "The existence of Jordan as a kingdom depended, at least to some extent, on the State of Israel. But Israel also owes Jordan, and certainly the Hashemite Royal House,...deep thanks."⁹⁷ On the day of Husayn's funeral, flags on all Israeli buildings were at half staff in honor of the king. After such prolonged preeminence as Jordan's ruler, it was not surprising that for much of 1999, Husayn's death opened speculation about continuity

regarding Jordan's future stability, and its policies toward Israel, the Palestinians, and the peace process. Husayn's return to the kingdom in January while in the end stages of terminal cancer, his sudden alteration of change in the succession line from his brother, Crown Prince Hasan to his oldest son 'Abdallah, his death and funeral and 'Abdallah's accession to power and effort to consolidate his position throughout the year dominated Jordan's national agenda. 'Abdallah's previous personal and professional contacts with key Israeli military establishment officials, owing to the new king's military background,⁹⁸ helped to solidify an already existent pragmatic relationship vis-à-vis the Palestinian issue: Neither Jordan nor Israel were interested in seeing an extension of Palestinian political aspirations to the east side of the Jordan River. Under 'Abdallah, Jordan's national interests required any final settlement the Palestinian refugee issue would not come at Jordan's expense, either with refugees from Lebanon and Syria flocking to Jordan as the first step to their hoped-for return to pre- 1967 Israel, or with Jordan failing to receive compensation for its decades of hosting Palestinian refugees, and with the refugees themselves remaining in place, embittered and without the possibility for individual compensation either. Having withstood a demographic surge of Palestinian immigration after the 1948, 1967, and the 1991 wars, Jordan was keen on influencing, if not steering, a Palestinian-Israeli settlement in a way that its East Bank integrity would be protected. As for Israel, it had historically demanded the existence of a stable eastern neighbor as a strategic territorial buffer against countries lying to the east of Jordan. Regardless of when a Palestinian state would be established, Israel needed the goodwill of Jordan to help monitor the future Jordanian- Palestinian state border. Transitions from Netanyahu to Barak or Husayn to 'Abdallah did not change these respective core strategic interests.

Solidification of 'Abdallah's rule coincided with the Israeli election campaign and Barak's candidacy. Barak's election and forward movement in negotiations with the Palestinians during the second half of the year suited 'Abdallah's preference and need to focus on governance and domestic stabilization. Had Netanyahu been reelected, 'Abdallah might have had to take publicly strident positions against Netanyahu's "no movement" policy. As it turned out, Barak's election and the immediate diplomatic movement he adopted on the Palestinian and Syrian tracks provided 'Abdallah additional time to defer anti-Oslo domestic pressure that might have broadened in Jordan. Put differently, 'Abdallah's priority of consolidating his authority was not distracted by a need for staunch advocacy of anti-Israeli positions, nor was the new king exposed to strong pressures to do so by other Arab capitals.

As compared to the Syrian and Palestinian tracks, the Jordanian track remained understated in public, but nonetheless strategically critical for Barak. The new Israeli prime minister, while on his way to Washington in July for his first meeting with Clinton, met with the new Jordanian king. Barak's foreign minister, David Levy, met with 'Abdallah on 10 August to report to the king about those Washington meetings. At their July meeting, Barak and 'Abdallah discussed bilateral Israeli-Jordanian relations, including issues put on hold during the Israeli election campaign. These subjects included the development of the 'Aqaba-Eilat airport, an increase in the number of flights between Israel and Jordan, and water. Another subject was the possibility of promoting the Peres Center for Peace project to create an oncological hospital in Naharayim, with an initial investment of \$7m., to honor the memory of the late King Husayn. Jordan regularly asked Israeli officials to put fewer restrictions on the export of Jordanian goods to the West Bank and Gaza.⁹⁹ In the August visit of Israeli officials to Amman, Jordan agreed to reactivate some seventeen bilateral agreements that had been suspended because of the impasse in the peace process under Netanyahu.¹⁰⁰ These agreements included additional discussions about linking fiber-optic networks and the promotion of economic benefits to be derived from their peace treaty, including tourism. At the end of August, Israel approved Jordan's request to obtain parts of its winter water share directly from the Yarmuk River rather than from Lake Tiberias as stipulated in their 1994 treaty.¹⁰¹

Although bilateral relations had improved, Jordanian professional unions and political opposition groups created an ad hoc coalition, the National Conference to Fight Normalization (NCFN), which was established prior to the fifth anniversary of the Jordanian-Israeli treaty. The NCFN had several objectives, including the blacklisting of professionals who had significant contact with Israel, boycotting Israeli products, and intimidating clients of companies dealing with Israel. Individual professional associations and unions took some action against members, expelling lawyers, reporters, and artists. In December, the leadership of the NCFN froze the organizational membership of the Jordan Press Association because it refused to expel three journalists who visited Israel in September.¹⁰² A similar group of professional

organizations opposed to normalization was formed in Algeria in December.¹⁰³ Just prior to Secretary of State Albright's visit to the region in early September and to the signing of the SSA between Barak and 'Arafat, Jordanian authorities arrested a dozen Hamas activists and kept the pressure on opposition groups throughout the end of the year.¹⁰⁴ Just as King Husayn was a witness to the October 1988 WRM, King 'Abdallah was a witness to the agreement signed at the SSA.

SUSTAINED ARAB ANTI-NORMALIZATION WITH ISRAEL

Israel's relations with Arab states - including Egypt and Jordan, with which it had contractual peace treaties - were generally much cooler in the first half of the year than after Barak's elections. In most cases, however, Arab anti-normalization attitudes toward Israel remained constant, and were not dependent on the identity of the Israeli prime minister. Animosity toward Israel existed on several levels: opposition to Israel's very existence as a predominantly Jewish state; opposition to Arab or Muslim willingness to negotiate with Israel under the Oslo process or in any fashion; opposition to the maintenance of both the Jordanian-Israeli and Egyptian-Israeli peace treaties; and a fear that Israel, if given the chance, might economically overpower its Arab neighbors and ultimately dominate the entire Middle Eastern region. Such attitudes emanated from a variety of sources: official Arab government media outlets, non-governmental Arab media, Arab professional organizations, and Israel's Arab minority.

Throughout the year, opposition to normalization of relations with Israel were regular themes in the Arab press. As the negotiating process moved forward, however slow or tortuous, the fear grew that Israel was being accepted as a state in the Middle East on its own terms. Firm ideological and philosophical attitudes were articulated within anti-normalization statements. They focused on a variety of themes, from avoiding normalization with Israel because it undercut Palestinian negotiations, to threatening to punish those who engaged in normalization. Americans were generally blamed for stimulating Arab-Israeli normalization. Writings included anti-Zionist critiques of Israel's creation, references to the "weakness of the Arab nation" in coping with Israel as a reality, expressions of fear of what would occur to Arab culture because of movements toward normalization, and an enumeration of reasons to oppose it. In January, an editorial in the Palestinian paper *al-Hayat al-Jadida* characterized normalization with Israel as "immoral and an inexcusable state."¹⁰⁵ An article in a January issue of the Jordanian paper *al-'Arab al-Yawm* expressed fear about a Jewish cultural invasion and the need to oppose normalization because "Jews are our enemies," they "stole our homeland ... and robbed us of our right ... uprooted its people and declared war on the Muslims."¹⁰⁶

In March, after 'Abdallah's accession in Jordan, the Jordanian opposition Muslim Brotherhood presented its political program, which not unexpectedly called for a halt in normalization of Arab relations with Israel.¹⁰⁷ About the same time, Lebanese Hizballah secretary-general, Hasan Nasrallah, said that "any normalization of relations with Israel is, clearly, unacceptable... [W]e will resist it using all available means."¹⁰⁸ The 1998 WRM called for a reduction of verbal incitement to improve the climate for normalization between Israel and its neighbors. In response, the Federation of Arab Journalists specifically rejected this effort, claiming that it was an Israeli excuse to restrict "freedom of the press and expression in Arab countries."¹⁰⁹ In September, Palestinian Hamas leader Shaykh Ahmad Yasin was quoted as saying that "normalization of ties with Jews produces a submissive and capitulationist generation."¹¹⁰ In Lebanon, at the same time as their Algerian and Jordanian counterparts were organizing, the Lebanese Press Association announced the creation of a national committee to resist normalization with Israel; its stated goal was to urge the Lebanese government to resist "normalization at the largest scale."¹¹¹

Often, the US was blamed for promoting Arab normalization of relations with Israel. In the shadow of the establishment of full diplomatic ties between Mauritania and Israel at the end of October, a writer in the Palestinian *al-Quds* accused Washington of leading "the campaign of Israeli-Arab normalization with economic, military, and political seductions" for the Arabs.¹¹² When Algerian President 'Abd al-'Aziz Bouteflika announced in November a warming of relations with Israel, 'Arafat's Fatah Central Committee vehemently attacked the Algerian president for rushing toward normalization. The committee suggested that Bouteflika's actions were an "overt collusion with the Zionist enemy [and] ... a stab in the back for the Arab position [and] the Palestinian people ... who have been continuing their struggle for a century to liberate their homeland from an enemy that usurped their land."¹¹³ At the end of the year, in the pan-

Arab newspaper *al-Hayat*, Lebanese commentator Hazim Saghiyya wrote that the sad part of normalization was that "the transition to modernism, or democracy, or progress, or Westernization should necessarily have to go through Israel ... because of the wretched condition of the Arab nation and the models it offers" for governance.¹¹⁴ Egyptian Foreign Minister 'Amru Musa said that normalization with Israel could not be expanded "while Israel expands the building of settlements and expropriates Arab land, and while the Israeli government evades implementing the agreements signed with the Palestinian party."¹¹⁵ The outspoken Libyan leader Mu'ammarr al-Qadhafi said normalization with Israel would be possible only "when the millions of displaced Palestinians return to Palestine and there are UN-supervised elections and a democratic Palestinian state in which there are Arabs and Jews. But that would no longer be Israel."¹¹⁶

CONCLUSION

As compared to the year's beginning, by the end of the year, although movement on both the Palestinian-Israeli and Syrian-Israeli tracks was noticeable, such diplomatic progress did not change general Arab skepticism and mistrust concerning Israeli intentions or, in some cases, the Oslo process in general. Conversely, among Israelis, there was a degree of guarded optimism, even enthusiasm. What caused this different outlook about Israeli legitimacy and Israel's role in a Middle Eastern future?

Israelis, for the most part, continued to accept the legitimacy of all Arab states, while the majority of its Arab and Muslim neighbors remained hesitant at best concerning Israel's legitimacy to be a state with a Jewish majority and character. With a persecution complex as part of the national fiber, Israelis wanted to be accepted and, therefore, among those who favored the peace process, possessed unrealistic expectations that the chances for genuine peace with Syria and the Palestinians were possible. A significant portion of the Arab population, however, continued to believe Israel controlled the negotiations. These Arabs further felt that the Israelis were implementing full withdrawal from the territories too slowly, that the international community cared little about the Palestinian issue, or that the entire Oslo process was a hoax and should be abandoned. In a United Arab Emirates paper, Egyptian commentator Muhammad Sid Ahmad suggested that the Syrians and Palestinians work in concert in negotiating with Israel, while ruefully acknowledging that "Barak... holds virtually all the cards on the Palestinian track."¹¹⁷ Remarks by a variety of Arab officials, including Israeli Arabs, typified the differing views. Among Palestinian leaders, 'Arafat adviser Bassam Abu Sharif bemoaned the nonchalance and indifference of the international community in its attitude toward the Palestinians and expressed bitterness about the "deterioration of the economic situation" and "Israel's expansionist plans" in the territories.¹¹⁸ Abu 'Ali Mustafa, deputy secretary-general of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), vehemently stated his "rejection of the Madrid track [and] the Oslo agreements," and called on the Palestinian leadership "to halt the ongoing negotiations with Israel."¹¹⁹ Israeli Hadash (Democratic Front) Party chairperson Muhammad Baraka, a Knesset member, was as blunt as any of Israel's neighbors in castigating Israel and in defining its institutions as racist.¹²⁰ In late November, Israeli Arab protesters in front of the prime minister's office in Jerusalem allegedly chanted "death to the Jews," which Hatzofeh labeled as Arab "incitement against Israel."¹²¹

By contrast, Uri Savir, who had negotiated portions of the Oslo agreement, provided a more positive outlook for the future. He noted that in "Oslo, the Palestinians discarded the dream of rejecting the State of Israel's very existence and recognized Israel as a neighbor and a partner to promote Palestinian interests. We [Israel] discarded the dream of a Greater Eretz Yisrael and terminated our control of the Palestinians' lives. The transition from a bloody conflict to peaceful relations is hard."¹²² In evaluating the Syrian-Israeli talks, Israeli Knesset Speaker Haim Ramon realized discussions would be "long, thorny, and full of obstacles," but "history [would] not forgive any of us if we waste this opportunity."¹²³ Said Syrian Foreign Minister Shar', in summing up his discussions with Barak, "I can speak about the seriousness of Israeli Prime Minister Barak. We felt it during the two-day talks in Washington, However, I cannot speak in the same degree about optimism, because in the next round, which will be held on 3 January 2000, we will closely test this seriousness."¹²⁴ Shar's remarks were in stark contrast with the Egyptian foreign minister's characterization of the peace process as "abysmal" at the beginning of 1999. By the end of the year, Barak willingly put his foot on the negotiating process accelerator. In so doing, he accepted the reality that he would have to negotiate the emotionally and strategically painful details associated with an Israeli withdrawal

from Lebanon, the West Bank, the Golan Heights, and perhaps a power-sharing regime in Jerusalem. Where there were no public negotiations at the beginning of the year, their presence at the end of the year was stunning, albeit fraught with the uncertainty of defining the devil's details.

NOTES

For the place and frequency of publications cited here, and for the full name of the publication, news agency, radio station or monitoring service where an abbreviation is used, please see "List of Sources." Only in the case of more than one publication bearing the same name is the place of publication noted here. Unless otherwise stated, all references to *al-Ayyam* are to the Ramallah daily.

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