How Norway betrayed the Oslo Accords – and the Palestinian leaders did too

Norway helped write the Oslo Accords. Then it betrayed their underlying principle of impartiality and sided with the Palestinians.

By Jan Kapusnak

On February 11, 2026, Mahmoud Abbas – the longtime head of the Palestinian Authority and chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) – arrived in Oslo. It was not just another European capital, but the one that lent its name to the most famous diplomatic experiment in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Thirty-three years earlier, Norway's Labour establishment had midwifed the secret channel. Driven by sociologist Terje Rød-Larsen and diplomat Mona Juul, and later taken up at ministerial level by Foreign Minister Johan Jørgen Holst it had produced the 1993 Declaration of Principles (Oslo I) and the 1995 Interim Agreement (Oslo II). The process helped earn Yasser Arafat, Shimon Peres, and Yitzhak Rabin the 1994 Nobel Peace Prize.

Oslo's premise was historically daring. Instead of ending the conflict in one grand leap, the parties would build habits of coexistence through reciprocal obligations: security cooperation, institution-building, and a mutual pledge to settle final-status issues only through direct negotiations. That reciprocity is precisely what has quietly evaporated from Norway's custodianship.

At the Government Guest House, Jonas Gahr Støre, Norway's prime minister and Labour Party leader, now received Abbas in the familiar register of Norwegian peacemaking. The two-state solution, he said, remains "the political vision we have to strive for." He described Palestinians as living under "extraordinarily difficult conditions," highlighted Israel's conduct in the West Bank and Gaza as "military pressure," and urged Israel to respect "fundamental rules and regulations under international law." The effect was to cast Israeli military operations primarily as punitive pressure rather than self-defence, while leaving Palestinian violence – and the security issues driving Israeli action – unmentioned.

Støre also said Norway wants Palestinians to be "governed by democratic institutions." Yet standing beside Abbas, he did not mention the PA's glaring democratic deficit, entrenched corruption, or its flagrant violations of the Oslo Accords. If Oslo is a contract, one side's obligations cannot be treated as optional etiquette.

The Oslo Accords rested on a straightforward bargain: Israel would transfer land and authority, and the Palestinian leadership would dismantle terror infrastructure and disarm armed factions by enforcing a real monopoly on force. Oslo II is explicit: both sides must take “all measures necessary” to prevent “acts of terrorism, crime and hostilities” against the other side, and act against offenders. Palestinian self-government was never meant to become a safe haven for militias, or a grey zone where violence continues under different banners.

There is, undeniably, a serious and worsening problem of Jewish settler violence in the West Bank. Israel – especially under recent governments – has too often failed to confront it with the consistency and severity it demands. But this is not the same phenomenon as organized Palestinian terrorism, which did not end under Oslo and, in many periods, intensified rather than receded.

Multiple factions under the broader PLO umbrella never truly abandoned armed struggle. That includes Fatah’s armed offshoots—most notably the Al-Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigades (and Abbas is Fatah’s chairman)—and the Abu Ali Mustafa Brigades, the armed wing of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. In Gaza, such factions have at times fought alongside Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, which openly reject Oslo’s premises. At times, even PA security personnel – including members of the Palestinian Police – have been implicated in attacks.

Another way the PA has violated Oslo’s spirit is by maintaining financial rewards linked to terrorism through the prisoner-and-“martyr” fund system dubbed “pay-for-slay.” The system provides monthly payments to Palestinians imprisoned for terrorist attacks on Israelis and to families of attackers killed while carrying out assaults. It functions as an incentive because payouts have traditionally been scaled with sentence length: the most serious offenders receive the highest benefits. The PA defends it as social support for “prisoners” and “martyrs.”

The U.S. and EU have tried repeatedly to pressure Ramallah to end the stipends. Abbas has repeatedly found ways to reassure donors he would do so – without dismantling the system. Under Donald Trump, the Taylor Force Act (2018) conditioned certain U.S. aid on ending the payments. Under Joe Biden, the pressure continued. In February 2025, Abbas issued a decree reported as ending the “martyrs fund” and shifting stipends into a new framework; the EU welcomed the move. In April 2025, the EU unveiled a support package of up to €1.6 billion for the PA while insisting none of its funds be used for “martyrs” payments. But in February 2026, Palestinian Media Watch alleged the reform was largely cosmetic: roughly

$315 million still reaching 23,000+ beneficiaries, reclassified as civil servants, security personnel, and pensioners.

Another Oslo violation is the PA's tolerance and sponsorship of hostile propaganda, incitement, and the glorification of violence. Oslo II requires legal measures to stop incitement. Instead, the PA has nurtured a public culture that celebrates attackers: schools, streets, squares, camps, and tournaments named for perpetrators; messaging that delegitimizes Israel; and a civic ideal of "martyrdom" against "occupation."

PA schooling is one of the clearest arenas where Oslo's ban on "hostile propaganda" is treated as optional. Multiple monitoring reports describe recurring patterns: maps that erase Israel, civics and history taught in zero-sum terms, and language that elevates "resistance" as civic virtue. Even without explicit calls to violence, the cumulative effect is to delegitimize Israel's permanence, normalize confrontation, and frame compromise as surrender.

Norway has, specially under Conservative-led governments, given the impression as if it grasped what Oslo forbids. The clearest example is the Dalal Mughrabi episode. In 2017, a girls' centre inaugurated by the Women's Affairs Technical Committee (WATC), a Ramallah-based NGO, was named for Mughrabi, a Fatah-linked terrorist associated with the 1978 Coastal Road massacre that killed 38 Israeli civilians, including 13 children. Norway condemned the glorification. Foreign Minister Børge Brende called it "completely unacceptable" and moved to freeze funding linked to the project.

But when Norway's Labour government returned, the instinct to draw bright red lines blurred into a fund-first, enforcement-later posture. Through the Foreign Ministry and NORAD (Norway's state development-aid agency), Norway, via direct grants and indirect funding pipelines, channels tens of millions of dollars to politicized NGOs operating in Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza. Including groups active in BDS (boycott campaigns targeting Israel) and "lawfare" at the International Criminal Court (using international prosecutions as a political strategy against Israel). In 2024, Norway committed more than NOK 267 million (about $26 million; CHF 20 million) to NGOs involved in the Arab-Israeli conflict. A number of these grantees are flagged for links to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), a designated terrorist organization in the US, EU, Canada, and Israel. A state that claims to be Oslo's guardian cannot dismiss systemic glorification of violence as a PR problem.

Another Oslo violation is unilateral internationalization. Oslo II bars either side from changing the status of the West Bank and Gaza before final-status talks. Yet for more than a decade the Palestinian leadership has pursued statehood-by-institutions through international bodies and legal forums, pressuring Israel while bypassing negotiations. The asymmetry is now routine: Israel is condemned for status-changing moves, while the PA's status-changing end-runs are hailed as diplomacy and often actively supported.

The milestones are clear—and Norway endorsed the trajectory early. It voted to admit "Palestine" to UNESCO on October 31, 2011, and voted for the UN General Assembly upgrade to "non-member observer State" on November 29, 2012. In 2024 Norway, following the same logic, recognized a Palestinian state. This recognition was a unilateral shortcut around Oslo's core premise: final-status questions were meant to be settled by direct negotiations, not external conferral. Coming so soon after October 7, the move read less like a diplomatic adjustment than a reward delivered in terrorism's aftermath.

Norway also keeps the PA solvent. By chairing the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee (AHLC) – the main donor forum created after Oslo to coordinate aid to the PA – Norway helps sustain an often inept authority even when "reform" remains largely rhetorical. After October 7, when Israel withheld parts of the Palestinian tax revenues it collects on the PA's behalf, Norway helped broker a workaround that unlocked a tranche. In July 2025, it added NOK 200 million (about $20 million) in direct budget support to help cover PA public-sector salaries.

Even after strong evidence that some UNRWA staff in Gaza were involved in the October 7 attacks – and many donors froze funding – Norway chose the opposite course. It said it would keep supporting UNRWA, increase its funding, and urge others to resume.

In March 2024, Norway's Foreign Ministry said it was working to counter "perceptions in many countries in the Global South that Western countries have double standards"—but then seemed ironically to confirm them, albeit in reverse. The report declared Israel's Gaza campaign a clear breach of international humanitarian law and argued that it fails to distinguish between civilians and combatants.

Meanwhile, it relegated Hamas's systematic war crimes – including the October 7 mass murder, indiscriminate rocket fire, and the use of human shields to maximize

casualties – to a secondary note rather than the engine of the battlefield. The result is a familiar Norwegian pattern: maximal moral certainty when reprimanding Israel, and a striking reluctance to hold Palestinian actors consistently accountable. Abbas's visit to Oslo made the symbolism unavoidable: Oslo's "spirit" is being buried in Oslo, by the country that claims to guard it.

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