

# Comparing Oslo (1993) and Lausanne (2015)

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 Times of Israel  
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Although the focus is very different, the Lausanne agreement between Iran and the 6-nation group, led by the US and EU, has many similarities with the failed Oslo agreement of August 1993.

In both cases, what was announced was a framework (in the case of Oslo, the official name was a Declaration of Principles), which, in theory, guides the negotiators towards an actual agreement. Lausanne ended with a short announcement that was read publically, first in [English by EU Vice President Frederica Mogherini](#), and then in Farsi by Iranian Foreign Minister Zarif.

In contrast to the public statements, the Lausanne announcement reflects the failure to reach agreement on key aspects of the Iranian nuclear program, despite many months of intense negotiations. Perhaps in part due to the criticism from PM Netanyahu, the intense bargaining did not resolve the key conflicts, including over ending economic sanctions on Iran, free access in Iran for inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency, the continued Iranian refusal to provide evidence related to illegal activities over the past 20 years, and other issues. But instead of acknowledging the vast gaps, the negotiators papered over their differences with a largely ceremonial “framework agreement”.

Similarly, more than 20 years ago, the language of the Oslo “agreement” was highly ambiguous. The Labor government led by Rabin, Peres, Beilin and Savir was ready to take major risks, but could not negotiate terms that were acceptable to the Israeli public on Jerusalem, Palestinian refugee claims, and demands for a return to the pre-1967 boundaries. A general Declaration of Principles, with a number of annexes was the best that they could do.

The Lausanne framework, like Oslo, promises an agreement on all the complex issues within a defined time period – in 1993, two months were allocated for the first Gaza-Jericho phase, and 5 years for all the other issues, and for Lausanne, three months (until the end of June). But in any complex international negotiations, the adoption of an artificial time limit is very problematic. For the side that is most eager for an agreement and fears the stigma of failure (Israel during Oslo, and Obama, Kerry and the EU now), a stop-watch accelerates retreat from core interests.

Another important similarity concerns the motivations of Arafat and the Palestinians in 1992, and the Iranian leadership in 2014. In both cases, behind the rhetoric of peace and international harmony, the core goal was to end costly political and economic isolation. Faced with widespread protest, Arafat needed to reverse the impact of his disastrous alliance with Saddam Hussein during the invasion of Kuwait and subsequent war with the US. By appearing to be interested in peace and going to Oslo, Arafat ended the isolation and restored the massive flow of international aid. Similarly, for Iran, simply by showing up for negotiations with the Great Satan, they achieved the first stage of sanctions relief, reducing the domestic pressures facing the regime.

As in the case of Oslo, the fundamental ambiguity in the framework for negotiations with Iran was disguised by a massive sales campaign to create the facade of an historic and even messianic breakthrough. President Obama and Secretary of State Kerry have worked non-stop to portray what they call the “Parameters for a Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action” as the only realistic alternative to a terrible war. In contrast, critics of the Lausanne framework – particularly Prime Minister Netanyahu – are denounced as war mongers, just as the critics of Oslo were attacked over 20 years ago.

In this sales campaign, success is defined in terms of the process, including the smiles and handshakes for the cameras. This media blitz reflects a very distorted and misleading understanding of

dimensions of interests, power, and willingness to use force to achieve national objectives.

Taking advantage of the Western faith in symbols and personal relations, and the assumption of shared values and goals, Iran's Supreme Leader Khameni focused on interests and power. For Iran, the primary objective is to end the sanctions immediately, without giving up any significant elements of Iranian power. In selling the Oslo declaration, smiles and handshakes gave Arafat the basic requirements to end his isolation, while efforts to gain more substance were denounced as a form of humiliation.

Under Oslo, the Declaration of Principles was eventually followed by detailed agreements with hundreds of pages that were supposed to govern the transition from terror to peace. Most of these details were never implemented; Arafat achieved his objectives and restored international legitimacy simply by participating in the process. In the case of the Lausanne framework, the Iranian regime has already reaped many of the benefits, without giving up any significant capability on its path towards nuclear weapons.

Finally, the Oslo process and Lausanne referred to an international community with structures and processes which are supposed to deter and respond forcefully to violations of the agreements. In reality, there was no significant international response to the Palestinian mass terror attacks that marked the failure of Oslo; on the contrary, it was Israel that was punished for using force in response. And with Iran, history shows that evidence of violations of a final agreement, if one is signed, will first be denied, and then negotiated through a series of compromises, justified by the need to avoid catastrophic war.