

The Clinton Parameters

by [Sammy Stein](#) (August 2025)



Prime Minister Ehud Barak of Israel, President Bill Clinton and the Palestinian leader Yasir Arafat at Camp David in 2000. (Ron Edmonds/Associated Press)

As the UK Prime Minister recently [declared](#) that Britain will recognise a Palestinian state at the UN General Assembly this September unless Israel explicitly reaffirms support for a two-state solution, it is worth recalling when the most credible opportunity for that solution was squandered and by whom.

The Clinton Parameters, presented in December 2000, were a major attempt by the United States to broker a comprehensive peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians. They

followed the failure of the Camp David Summit earlier that year and came amidst escalating violence during the early months of the Second Intifada. With Israeli elections looming and with the polls showing Prime Minister Ehud Barak facing likely defeat, President Clinton nearing the end of his term made a final effort to deliver a peace solution.

On 23 December 2000, President Clinton laid out his proposal to both parties. Known as the "Clinton Parameters," the plan was intended to resolve all core final-status issues. He asked for a definitive response by 27 December.

The plan addressed five central areas:

1. Territory

A Palestinian state would be established on 94–96% of the West Bank and all of Gaza. Israel would annex the remaining 4–6% of the West Bank, encompassing major settlement blocs housing 80% of the Jewish settler population. In exchange, Israel would compensate the Palestinians with land swaps amounting to 1–3% of Israeli territory. The Palestinian state was to be contiguous, and the annexed areas minimised in size and population impact.

2. Jerusalem

The city would be divided along ethnic lines. Jewish neighbourhoods, including settlements in East Jerusalem, would remain under Israeli sovereignty. Arab neighbourhoods, including much of East Jerusalem, would fall under Palestinian sovereignty. The Western Wall would belong to Israel. The Temple Mount would be under Palestinian sovereignty, with Israel having "symbolic ownership" and shared oversight on archaeological issues.

3. Refugees

Palestinians would relinquish any claim to a wholesale “right of return” to Israel. Instead, refugees could resettle in the future Palestinian state, remain in host countries, emigrate to third-party nations, or, in limited cases, be accepted into Israel subject to Israeli discretion. Israel would acknowledge the suffering of Palestinian refugees caused by the 1948 war, and contribute to an international effort to address the issue. Both sides would agree that UN General Assembly Resolution 194 had been fulfilled.

4. Security

The IDF would withdraw from the Palestinian territories within 36 months, replaced by an international force. Israel would maintain a limited military presence in the Jordan Valley for an additional three years under international supervision. Israel would also retain three early-warning stations in the West Bank, subject to periodic review.

In emergencies, Israel would retain the right to deploy forces in pre-agreed areas, with prior notification to international monitors. The Palestinian state would have full control over its airspace, with exceptions for Israeli security needs. It would be demilitarised but permitted to maintain robust internal security forces.

5. End of Conflict

The agreement would constitute a full and final end to the conflict and all claims, enshrined in a UN Security Council resolution confirming the implementation of Resolutions 242 and 338.

On 28 December 2000, Israel formally accepted the Clinton Parameters, albeit with reservations. These included concerns about ambiguity surrounding the refugee “right of return,” which could potentially be exploited in future negotiations. Israel also hoped to retain 8% of the West Bank rather than 4–6%, aiming to limit the number of settlers uprooted. Nonetheless, the Barak government made clear it was willing to proceed within the Clinton framework.

Yasser Arafat initially withheld any clear response. Under international pressure, he later conveyed a vague acceptance “with reservations.” However, as President Clinton noted in his 2005 memoirs, these Palestinian reservations effectively gutted the core of the proposal and placed them outside the Parameters.

- **Borders:** The Palestinians rejected the 4–6% land swap proposal and demanded it be reduced to just 2%. This would have forced Israel to dismantle up to 50% of its West Bank settlements which was an unfeasible proposition politically and logistically.
- **Jerusalem:** The Palestinians refused to recognise Israeli sovereignty over the Jewish neighbourhood of Har Homa and also challenged Israeli control over parts of the Armenian Quarter. This directly contradicted the proposed ethnic division of the city.
- **Refugees:** Clinton’s proposal offered a symbolic “right of return” to the Palestinian state and acknowledging the suffering of refugees. Yet the Palestinian side insisted on full right of return into the State of Israel itself and demanded Israel take complete responsibility for the refugee problem. This open-ended

stance signaled that the Palestinians wanted to keep the refugee issue unresolved even after a peace agreement, something the Clinton Parameters explicitly rejected.

In short, while Israel accepted the Clinton Parameters in principle and showed willingness to negotiate within them, the Palestinians imposed conditions that effectively rendered the plan unworkable.

In January 2001, with Clinton's presidency ending and the Second Intifada raging, Israeli and Palestinian negotiators met again at Taba. In a final attempt to salvage a deal, Israel went beyond even the Clinton Parameters. Barak offered 100% of the West Bank (up from Clinton's 94–96%), docking rights at Israeli ports, and even a tunnel linking Gaza and the West Bank.

Both sides later acknowledged they had never been closer to agreement. Palestinian negotiator Ahmed Qurei said they were "within reach of an agreement." Yet time had run out. Barak lost the February election to Ariel Sharon, who opposed the Oslo process and declared the talks over.

Once again, Palestinian leadership proved unable or unwilling to say "yes" to a historic opportunity. While much of the world blames Israel for the absence of a two-state solution, the Clinton Parameters reveal a more complex and inconvenient truth.

Peace was within reach in 2000–2001. Israel was ready to make painful compromises. The Palestinians were not. The current UK government might reflect on that history before endorsing yet another diplomatic gesture that rewards rejection rather than realism.

So once again, the Palestinians did not miss an opportunity to miss an opportunity for peace with Israel.

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