

With the perpetual clamour in the news media on the situation in the Middle East, especially with regard to the unresolved problems between Israel and the Palestinians, it is easy to believe that little has been achieved in recent years. One event that is a success has been the institution of the postal system of the Palestinian Authority. It stands as a major achievement in the transfer of power, involving cooperation between the Israeli and Palestinian authorities. The event is also a collectors' dream come true; the opportunity for documentation of the day-to-day institution of the new system, replacing the military administration. In this article the problems that occurred in the issuing of its stamps will be discussed.



The Palestinian National Authority Part 1: The early issues

By Professor Paul J Phillips



Typical first day cover of the 'illegal' mils stamps printed and issued in Germany with 'Gaza - Jericho' postmark

- Area A – full control of the Palestinian Authority.
- Area B – Palestinian civil control and Israeli security control.
- Area C – full Israeli control, except over Palestinian civilians. These areas were Israeli settlements and 'security zones'.

Together with the principles, the two groups signed Letters of Mutual Recognition—The Israeli government recognized the PLO as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, while the PLO recognized the right of the state of Israel to exist, renouncing terrorism, violence and its desire for the destruction of Israel.

In order that the Palestinians should govern themselves according to democratic principles, free and general political elections were to be held for the ruling council of the Palestinian National Authority. Jurisdiction of the Palestinian Council would cover the West Bank and Gaza Strip, except for issues that would be finalised in the permanent status negotiations. The five-year transitional period would commence with Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and the city of Jericho. The designated responsibilities of the Palestinian National Authority included education and culture, health, social welfare, direct taxation, and tourism. It would also establish a strong police force, while Israel would continue to carry the responsibility for defending against external threats.

Rabin and Arafat reached agreement in Cairo on the first stage of the transfer to Palestinian rule on 4 May 1994 (Oslo I). The agreement included an Israeli withdrawal from about 60 per cent of the Gaza Strip, and the West Bank town of Jericho. The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) withdrew from Jericho on 13 May and from most of the Gaza Strip on 18 and 19 May 1994.

On 5 June 1967, the Six Day War began and by 8 June, the whole West Bank of Jordan came into Israeli hands. Thereafter, an Israeli military administration [ZAHAL] was installed, terminating 20 years of Jordanian rule. Following many years of economic change and interdependence of the Israeli and Palestinian populations, accompanied by guerilla warfare and many failed negotiations, the situation started to change in 1994 when the Oslo Accords laid the framework for an independent Palestinian state.

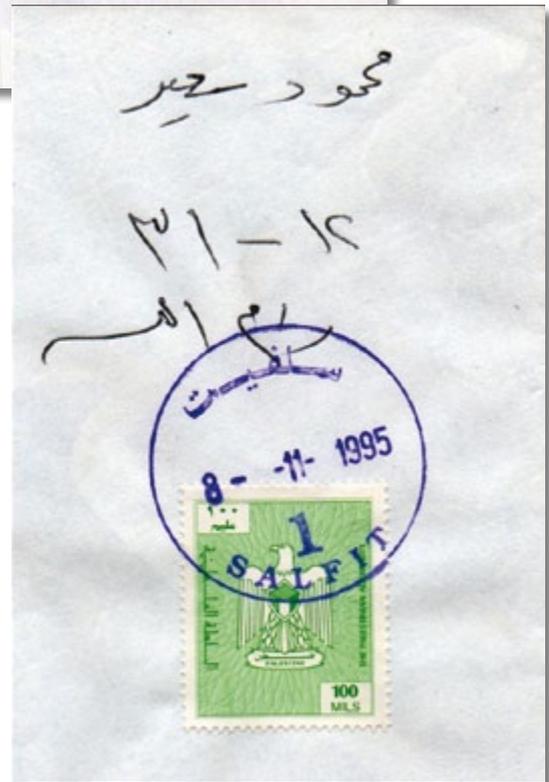
The Oslo Accords, officially called the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements or Declaration of Principles (DOP) was a milestone in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict being the first direct, face-to-face agreement between Israel and the Palestinians in which some Palestinian factions publicly acknowledged Israel's right to exist. It was also a framework for the future relations between Israel and the anticipated State of Palestine, which would follow when all outstanding final status issues between the two states had been addressed and resolved. The Accords were finalized in Oslo, Norway, on 20 August 1993, and subsequently officially signed at a

public ceremony in Washington DC on 13 September 1993, with Yasser Arafat signing for the Palestine Liberation Organization and Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin signing for the State of Israel. The new entity created was not a state, but more akin to an autonomous region, envisioned as being of short-term duration, an antecedent of a State of Palestine. The name agreed upon by all participants was The Palestinian National Authority.

Implementation of the Oslo accords

In essence, the accords called for the withdrawal of Israeli forces from parts of the Gaza Strip and West Bank and affirmed self-government within those areas. The interim self-government was to be granted in phases. Until a final status accord was established, the West Bank and Gaza would be divided into three zones:

In 1994 the Oslo Accords laid the framework for an independent Palestinian state



Top: Official opening day envelope from Gaza dated 1 January 1995, showing the scarce bridge type postmark on the Monuments mills issue

Above: Typical official fils overprint with the German first day cancellation

Right: First day usage of the rubber handstamp of Salfit with 'illegal' official Eagles stamp (note the diminutive 'PALESTINE' in the tablet under the eagle's feet

On 24–28 September 1995 the Taba/Washington Agreement (Oslo II) was signed. The major immediate impact of this agreement was for the seven major Palestinian centres in the West Bank to be transferred to the PNA. These cities, designated Area A, are Nablus, Kalkilya, Tulkarm, Ramallah, Bethlehem, Jenin and, with special arrangements to be negotiated, Hebron (the Hebron agreement was not concluded until 1997). A further 450 towns and villages, designated Area B, were to be handed over for Civil Jurisdiction only, Israel retaining control of security.

Transfer of postal services

The transfer of postal services from the Israeli military government to the hands of the Palestinian Authority occurred in two stages, in parallel with the agreements between the two sides:

Oslo I Accord under which the small West Bank City of Jericho and the entire Gaza Strip (involving a total of 17 sites) were transferred to Palestinian control in May 1994.

Oslo II Accord under which portions of Judea and Samaria (the West Bank of the Jordan) were transferred to Palestinian control. These offices were largely in urban areas and, in the initial transfer concerned 39 sites, well beyond the list of seven cities. This transfer was carried out in November 1995.

Parts of the Oslo Agreements covered the currency to be used, the name that could be used on the stamps and the fact that the PNA was not a member of the Universal Postal Union. Non-adherence to some of these provisions caused problems, which were ultimately resolved.

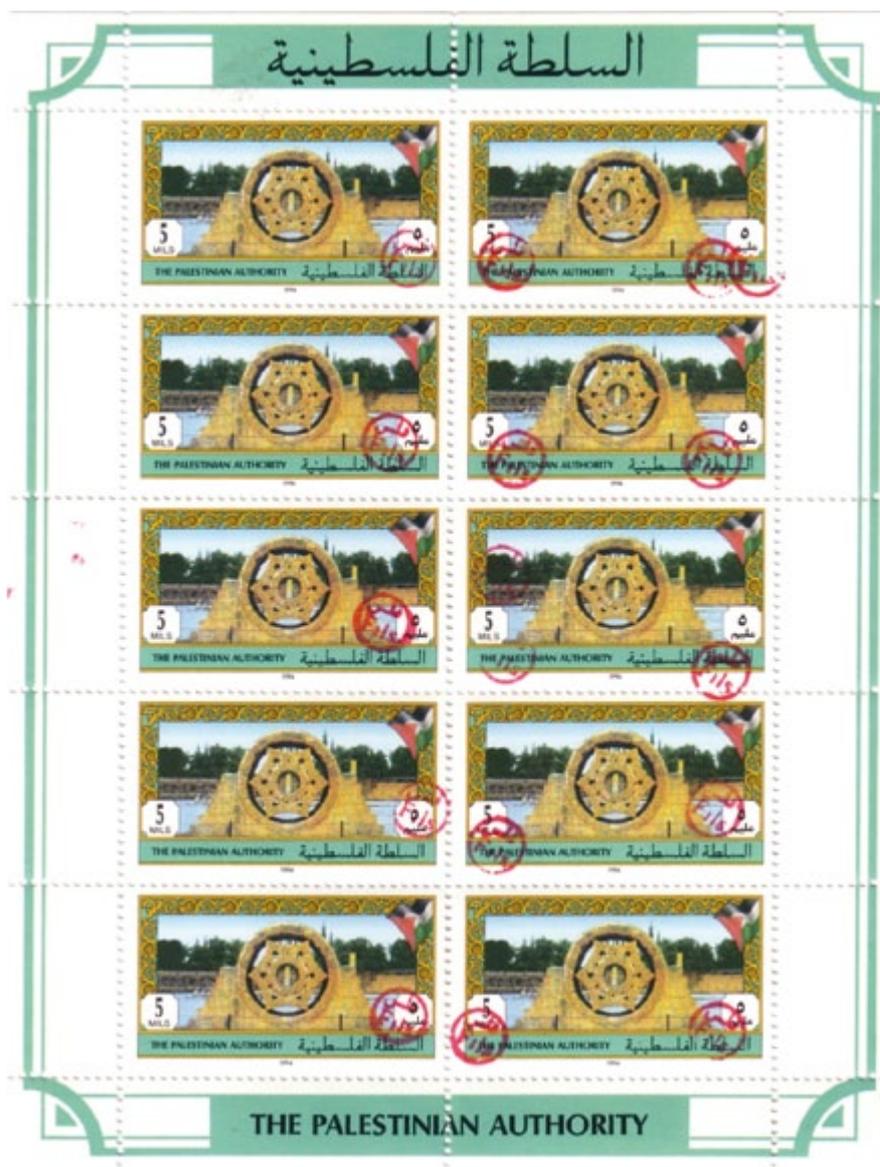
The Palestinian National Authority was not given the right to print its own currency or to mint its own coins. The agreement reached was that the PNA's fils currency would equal

the Israeli agorot. In other words 100 fils equals 100 agorot equals 1 NIS (new shekel). So, in practice, the stamps are denominated in fils, but all financial transactions are conducted in NIS, requiring postal clerks to be continually making currency conversions. This fact is responsible for the number of commercial covers bearing stamps which do not correspond exactly to postal rates.

Under the terms of the agreement with Israel, the postal tariffs within the Palestinian

The stamps on stamps issue containing the word 'PALESTINE' and mils currency in the illustrated Mandate stamps. The values of the issued stamps were in fils as expected in the accords, and the issuing agency was The Palestinian Authority as expected also, but they were still defined as illegal by Israel





Authority were to be identical to those in Israel at any given time. During 1998 there was a change in the 'monetary value' of the stamps used by the Palestinian Authority or a 'devaluation' of the currency. The original rate of exchange had been 100 fils to NIS 1.00 but the new 'rate' was 200 fils to NIS 1.00. Thus the face value of stamps needed to send a letter doubled overnight, but the actual money needed to buy those stamps remained the same since all purchases involve the use of Israeli currency. The tariff remained the same as that in Israel.

Under the agreement the name of the governing entity was to be The Palestinian National Authority and not Palestine. This led to problems with some of the stamps which were issued by the PNA, as they contained the word 'Palestine' in the design, but had Palestinian Authority as the name of the issuing entity. The offending stamps were, initially, the Flags and Monuments issues (see later) and the so-called 'official' Eagle stamps, the latter actually used by the general public. The currency on the first stamps issued was stated in terms of 'mils' where 100 mils equals 100 agorot equals NIS 1.00. Israel protested at the use of mils which were reminiscent of the currency of the Palestine Mandate and some of the stamps were overprinted so that the currency stated was 'fils'.

The PNA stamps were authorized for use only within the Palestinian autonomous territories. Mail for the outside world had to be sent via Israel, using Israeli stamps, as the PNA was not a member of the Universal Postal Union. The 'mils' stamps and the 'Palestine' stamps could not be used on mail into Israel as they were regarded as illegal by the Israeli authorities. In November 1995 mail between the PNA and Israel, and to the outside world through Israel, began, but problems remained because of the printing of 'illegal' stamps, i.e. those contrary to the agreements.

The issued stamps

The PNA issued its first stamps in Europe on 15 August 1994. They had been printed in Germany by the Bundesdruckerei and first day covers were also produced there. This first issue consisted of the Flag stamps with a special cancel inscribed GAZA – JERICHO and the date of issue. Similarly the next two issues, the Monuments and the Eagles, were issued on 1 September 1994. However, none of these stamps were used in Palestine at this time. All of these stamps were issued using the mils currency and were regarded as illegal by Israel.

The stamps first appeared in Gaza and Jericho post offices in October and November 1994, however postmarks were not

A scarce complete sheet of the 10mils Monuments issue with the red fils overprints applied unofficially by the Jericho postmaster. Note the errors of misplacement and the complete absence of the overprints on the left side of the sheet

provided. What little mail there was had to be pen-cancelled with the date handwritten, generating some very scarce items. Mail could only be sent within the PNA territories and not even to Israel. Mail originating in the Gaza Strip was routed via the Mevo Azza branch of Israel and mail from Jericho was passed to Jerusalem. The Jericho office sold both PNA and Israeli stamps for postage. Bilingual registration labels were in use during January 1995.

On 1 January 1995 the first postmarks were brought into use in Palestinian Authority post offices. These provisional marks were of the Egyptian 'bridge' type. However, the 1 January date was only the official day of opening of the Jericho office and the offices in the Gaza Strip. The cancels were not used in those offices on commercial mail until 10 January, which is the actual date of opening of the offices. These postmarks were in use for about two months and were then replaced by permanent metal postmarks of the single circle type manufactured in Germany. However, they still occasionally reappear.

It should be noted that bridge postmarks, and even early dates of the steel datestamps are practically unknown on commercial covers. The bridge postmarks are of considerable rarity.

According to the Oslo Agreements, the stamps were not to carry the word 'Palestine' and the issuing authority was only to be the Palestinian Authority. The tariff for a letter posted within the Palestinian Authority was 100 fils with an additional 340 fils for registration. Outgoing letters to Israel bearing PNA stamps, having the 'Returned for Postage' cachet and bearing added Israeli stamps do exist, but are not plentiful.

It should be noted that the long time span between the institution of the postal system of the PNA in Gaza and Jericho and its institution in the West Bank generally, a period of ten months, led to envelopes bearing both the postmarks of the PNA and Israel.

More offices on the West Bank

Subsequent to the transfer to the PNA of additional, mainly urban, areas of Judea and Samaria (the West Bank of the Jordan) under the Oslo II accords, postal services in this area were also transferred to the Palestinian Authority. The last day of Israeli military government post in these areas was 2 November 1995.

The first day of the Palestinian Authority postmarks in the West Bank (except Jericho) was 8 November 1995. This was postponed from the intended date of opening on 5 November 1995 because of the assassination of Prime Minister Rabin on the 4th. Palestinian-manufactured rubber postmarks were introduced into all the postal units in the new areas under Palestinian Authority control. In all, the immediate opening of the PNA post offices encompassed many more than the seven cities mentioned in the Oslo Accords and a total of 39 offices were opened on that day.



Left: Illegal mils issue souvenir sheet on German first day cover
 Below: The official fils overprint on German first day cover
 Bottom: The unofficial Jericho Postmaster Provisional issued in Jericho (first day cover) using the special steel c.d.s. specific to Jericho reading 'JERICHO/OLDEST CITY IN THE WORLD'

In the larger cities some of the rubber postmarks were later replaced by metal ones. Villages and small towns continued to use the rubber postmarks. In some offices there was simultaneous use of rubber postmarks and the permanent metal postmarks, especially in the initial period after the introduction of the metal postmarks. As with the bridge postmarks of Gaza and Jericho, early uses of postmarks of the West Bank are generally known only on philatelic covers, as commercial usage was virtually non-existent.

Turning point

A major turning point occurred on 8 November 1995; the Palestinian Authority postal services were permitted to send postal items carrying Palestinian Authority stamps to Israel and the rest of the world. This was a concession made by the late Prime Minister Rabin to Chairman Arafat and it was subject to several conditions.

The PNA had pressed ahead and ordered the stamps from Germany before all of the political issues had been resolved. The obvious approach would be to overprint the stamps bearing the mils designation with the fils designation, but the same could not be done for those having the word Palestine in the design. This procedure would take time as the stocks of stamps would have to be recovered before they could be overprinted. The same problem arose with the souvenir sheets that had been ordered to celebrate the accords, bearing the images of Rabin, Arafat and Clinton.

The overprinted Flags and Monuments issues were re-issued on 10 April and the Women's Costumes issue, the second set with fils in the design, was issued on 31 May. Between those two issues a small high value set appeared having fils in the design (17 May), which caused further problems,



as this was a stamps-on-stamps issue, even though the stamps themselves had the correct currency designation. The problems arose because the Mandate stamps illustrated, had the word 'Palestine' and the mils currency of the Mandate period. Hence the Women's Costumes set was, in fact, the first set to be printed which strictly followed the Oslo Agreements.

The postmaster at Jericho was provided with a small rubber stamp by the postal authority of the PNA to be used as an emergency overprint should the Fils overprints not arrive from Germany in time. This small stamp had the word Fils (in Arabic and English) inside a 7.5mm diameter circle. As a favour to a collector, and without having received an order from his superiors to proceed, the postmaster of Jericho decided to act on his own and hand-overprinted the mils designation in the offending issues using three coloured inks: red, black and purple. These marks were applied to the Flags and Monuments issues, the Eagle ('official') issue and the Peace Agreement souvenir sheet. There are also errors of stamping, such as misplacements and extra strikes. So this issue was not a forgery, but an unauthorized use of the emergency overprint by a postal official.

Despite the fact that these actions were not approved by the authorities and were strictly a private overprint, stocks of these stamps spread throughout the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Post offices and postal clerks all over the Palestinian territories appear to have had no reservations about using these unauthorized overprints. The earliest dates I have seen (all using legal postmarks) are 9 July 1995 in Jericho and 10 July 1995 in the Gaza Strip.

However, the Peace Agreement (Clinton, Arafat, Rabin) souvenir sheet was produced on first day covers for the mils issue (German-made Gaza-Jericho postmark, 7 October 1994), official fils overprint (German-made Gaza-Jericho postmark, 10 April 1995) and the Jericho postmaster's overprint (14 June 1995, actual Jericho postmark). All are uncommon, but the local Jericho issue is quite difficult to locate.

Following these 'mishaps' the PNA has continued to issue many beautiful stamps, some of which are difficult to find on commercial covers. It has especially taken care to ensure that the Christian holidays are commemorated every year, very often issued from Bethlehem, with souvenir booklets similar to the British type.

However, there have been many interesting events of a postal historical nature, involving the intifada and boycotts as well as issues which have been confiscated by Israel. All of these will be discussed in the second part of this series of articles.

I am grateful to Dr Josef Wallach, my co-author of an extensive review of the subject which appeared in the *2009 Congress Book* [American Philatelic Congress] who provided much chronological information on the subject. Additional information was provided by Tobias Zywiez and his website, www.zobbel.de, and Gordon Bonnett of maganstamps.co.uk

The Table here is reproduced from Phillips and Wallach, pp. 89–120, 'The Birth of a New Postal System: The Palestinian National Authority 1994–2008', *The Congress Book 2009*, American Philatelic Congress.

Chronology of events 1994–95

Remarks	Activity	Location	Background	Date
Actual last day of Zahal post in this area	End of usage of Israeli stamps & retrieval of postmarks	Gaza Strip	Rabin & Arafat sign the Cairo Autonomy Agreement	4 May 1994
Formal & actual last day of Zahal post	Retrieval of Zahal postmark & Israeli stamps	Jericho		9 May 1994
Cancellation of 'last day' covers	Formal last day of Zahal post in Gaza Strip	Gaza Strip	Agreement signed handing over Gaza area to PNA	17 May 1994
	Post offices open only for distribution of incoming mail	Gaza Strip	No Postmarks No stamps	May–Oct 1994
Outgoing mail with Israeli stamps routed via Jerusalem	Office open for incoming mail & selling Israeli stamps	Jericho		
	Outgoing mail of Gaza Strip routed through this branch	Erez checkpoint in Gaza Strip	Opening of MEVO AZZA [ZAHAL] branch	1 Aug 1994
Definitive stamps	15 Aug 1994 – Flags 1 Sept 94 – Landscape 1 Sept 94 – 'Officials'	Europe	Introduction of PNA stamps, printed in Germany	Aug–Sept 1994
Manuscript cancellations	PNA stamps supplied, but no postmarks	Gaza Strip & Jericho		Oct–Dec 1994
Egyptian made bridge postmarks	Official first day of PNA postmarks	Gaza Strip & Jericho		1 Jan 1995
Start of actual use of postmarks in all offices	De facto first day of PNA postmarks	Gaza Strip & Jericho		10 Jan 1995
	Bridge postmarks replaced by German steel postmarks	Gaza Strip & Jericho		Feb–Mar 1995
Usage of all stamps (Mils & Fils) restricted to PNA territory	Introduction of stamps in Europe with Fils overprint	Israel protests PNA stamps using mils currency and unauthorized Palestine inscription on 'Official' Eagles		10 Apr 1995
Use spreads rapidly to Gaza	Local Fils overprints	Jericho		June 1995
	Opening of additional offices in Zawaida, Abassan & Al-Mughazi	Gaza Strip		1 July 1995
	Last day of Israeli stamps & ZAHAL postmarks; Jewish settlement posts remain unchanged	West Bank (Judea & Samaria)	Second Oslo Agreement giving West Bank Civil Administration, including Postal Affairs, to PNA	2 Nov 1995
Use for outgoing mail restricted to Fils stamps. Mils and Eagles used only within Authority	First day of PNA stamps & postmarks in West Bank	West Bank (Judea & Samaria)		8 Nov 1995
There was NO outgoing PNA mail until this date	First day of outgoing mail from PNA territories to Israel & the whole world	West Bank Gaza Strip Jericho		
	Last day of Israeli stamp usage in Jericho	Jericho		13 Nov 1995