Madrid Conference

In October/November 1991, just after the Gulf War, the United States and Russia convened an Arab-Israeli peace conference in Madrid. The historic conference marked the first time that Israel, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and a Palestinian delegation (which was officially part of the Jordanian delegation) sat at the same table to negotiate. The participants agreed to establish two tracks for negotiations: a bilateral track for direct negotiations between Israel and Syria, Israel and Lebanon, and Israel and the Jordanian/Palestinian delegation; and a multilateral track for region-wide negotiations on issues such as water, environment, refugees, arms control and economic development.

A series of bilateral negotiation sessions were held in Washington over the next 18 months. The negotiations were significant on a symbolic level, but yielded very few practical results. A number of multilateral working groups were also convened, laying the groundwork for cooperative regional projects on issues such as the environment, water, arms control, economic development and refugees. The bilateral track was essentially halted by the surprise announcement of an Israeli-Palestinian agreement in August 1993.