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Author(s): Philip Leech

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After 'Security First': An Analysis of Security Transition and 'Statebuilding' in the West Bank 2007-11

PHILIP LEECH*

ABSTRACT *The Palestinian Authority's (PA) imposition of order after the end of the al-Aqsa Intifada has been generally interpreted as a success. Not only did the PA consolidate its power in the West Bank and restore good relations with Israel and the West, it also appeared to obtain popular legitimacy by cracking down on its political opponents. This paper discusses the impact of the PA's imposition of order in Nablus, a town which had endured lawlessness and disorder under an Israeli siege (2001-7) and had been the focus of the PA's security agenda. It argues that, though the PA's security agenda initially enjoyed popular consent, this does not demonstrate public endorsement of the PA's legitimacy. Rather the consent that such measures produced was superficial and, in the long term, the acceleration of the PA's shift towards authoritarianism is likely to be profoundly debilitating for Palestinian society in general.*

In December 2012, the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) achieved an elevation in its status to that of a 'non-member observer state' at the United Nations General Assembly. The President of the PLO, Mahmoud Abbas, presented this move as both the fulfilment of a long standing Palestinian right to self-determination and also as a product of a two-year state building project that had been undertaken by the Palestinian Authority (PA) since 2009.¹ In broad terms, the statebuilding project appeared to be the kind of solution to the so-called 'Palestine Question' that the world had been waiting for. It adopted an internationally recognised framework for a peace settlement based on the creation of an independent Palestinian state in the territories occupied by Israel in 1967. The PA also eschewed violence, prioritised the enforcement of order and embraced a model of liberal economic development.²

* Philip Leech is a Lecturer in International Relations at the University of Liverpool. His research focuses on political economy, democratization, globalization and political thought with particular reference to the Middle East. He is the author of *Building the Palestinian state: Drivers and Impediments* (forthcoming: Ashgate, 2015).

¹ "Full Transcript of Abbas Speech at UN General Assembly," *Haaretz.com*, September 23, 2011, <http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/full-transcript-of-abbas-speech-at-un-general-assembly-1.386385>; "Abbas' Speech to the UN General Assembly, November 2012," *Council on Foreign Relations*, accessed April 24, 2013, <http://www.cfr.org/palestinian-authority/abbas-speech-un-general-assembly-november-2012/p29579>.

² Viewed from the outside, this model is obviously somewhat aligned with the principles of 'economic peace', which had been promoted by the Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, although the PA itself rejected this comparison. See Netanyahu. "Netanyahu: Economics, Not Politics, Is the Key to Peace," *Haaretz.com*, accessed March 11, 2012, <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/netanyahu-economics-not-politics-is-the-key-to-peace-1.257617>; Barak Ravid, "Palestinians Reject Netanyahu's 'Economic Peace' Plan," *Haaretz*, July 9, 2009, <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/palestinians-reject-netanyahu-s-economic-peace-plan-1.279616>.

Furthermore, the PA's claim to statehood could be understood as a fulfilment of the two-state agenda that had been accepted by both the PLO and Israel during the 1990s. This was formalised through a Declaration of Principles signed in 1993 following secret negotiations known as the Oslo Accords.³ Yet, while *prima facie* the Oslo Accords appeared to offer a path towards a comprehensive peace settlement, in reality these agreements entrenched both the power imbalance between Israel and the Palestinians and the material structures of Israel's dominance over life in the occupied territories. In other words, the Oslo Accords effectively enabled continuity in Israel's power over Palestinians in the West Bank⁴ and the Gaza Strip through political, economic and security mechanisms with the full legal backing of international institutions.⁵

The PA itself was created as part of the Oslo Accords. Ostensibly, it was intended to serve as an interim government for the Palestinian population while further negotiations between Israel and the PLO finalised a peace agreement. However, if this was the real purpose of the PA, then it was critically flawed from the outset. These flaws were evident in practice as the PA was burdened with most of the responsibilities of government but, at the same time, prevented from utilising any of the real powers that would have enabled the effective fulfilment of that role.⁶ The government of Israel – the arms of which were manifest in the occupied territories through a continuous military presence and the structures of occupation and colonisation⁷ – remained the ultimate authority. In other words, the PA served as a mechanism for coordinating and containing the Palestinian population without being a sovereign body itself.

The asymmetrical structure of the Israel-PA relationship was further exacerbated in the aftermath of the second major Palestinian uprising beginning in 2000. Known as the al-Aqsa Intifada, this came at a time of near total collapse of the PA's grip on public confidence. Further, such was the ferocity of Israel's military response to the uprising that much of the PA's infrastructure was decimated. Yet, after this particular period of intense hostility had

³ They were known as the 'Oslo Accords' because the secret negotiations took place in the Norwegian capital. The full text of the Declaration of Principles is available online: "Text: 1993 Declaration of Principles," BBC, November 29, 2001, sec. Middle East, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/in_depth/middle_east/israel_and_the_palestinians/key_documents/1682727.stm.

⁴ The 'West Bank' here also includes East Jerusalem, which – despite its status being deliberately left unresolved until later negotiations – has been under de facto Israeli control since 1967. See *Legal Status of East Jerusalem and Its Residents* (B'tselem: The Israeli Information Centre for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, January 1, 2014).

⁵ This was not universally accepted among Palestinians. Indeed several extremely prominent Palestinian figures rejected the DOP, including Edward Said and Mahmoud Darwish. Though the DOP did gain backing from a critical group of Palestinian capitalists that went on to help fund the PA's institution building. See Adam Hanieh, "The Internationalisation of Gulf Capital and Palestinian Class Formation," *Capital & Class* 35, no. 1 (February 22, 2011): 81–106, doi:10.1177/0309816810392006; Markus E. Bouillon, *The Peace Business: Money and Power in the Palestine-Israel Conflict*, First Edition (I. B. Tauris, 2004).

⁶ A range of critical perspectives exists within the literature, including claims that Israel was deliberately outsourcing aspects of the occupation to the PA as client regime. See: Neve Gordon, *Israel's Occupation* (University of California Press, 2008); Sara Roy, *Failing Peace: Gaza and the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict* (Pluto Press, 2006); Amira Hass, "The VIPs' Hush Money," *Haaretz.com*, January 18, 2012, <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/opinion/the-vips-hush-money-1.407887>; Amira Hass, "Israel's Closure Policy: An Ineffective Strategy of Containment and Repression," *Haaretz.com* 31, no. 3 (2002): 5–20 inter alia.

⁷ One useful explanation of the nature of Israel's occupation is provided by Halper's concept of a "matrix of control". This, according to Halper, is "an interlocking series of mechanisms, only a few of which require physical occupation of territory, that allow Israel to control every aspect of Palestinian life in the Occupied Territories. The matrix works like the Japanese game of Go. Instead of defeating your opponent as in chess, you win by immobilising your opponent through gaining control of key points of a matrix so that every time s/he moves s/he encounters an obstacle of some kind" J. Halper, "The 94 Percent Solution: A Matrix of Control," *Middle East Report* 30, no. 3; ISSU 216 (2000): 14–19.

peaked (2003-4),⁸ Israel – supported by the United States and other allies – sought to restore the PA as a form of Palestinian self-government contained under a highly restrictive military occupation, albeit under different leadership.⁹ In this context of near total containment of Palestinian political agency, the very notion of the PA genuinely undertaking steps to build a Palestinian state under occupation was clearly questionable.¹⁰

More specifically, the statebuilding project comprised a range of elements that proved to be problematic. The most significant of these was the acceleration of an already on-going shift towards authoritarianism in the PA's domestic governance. The particular manner in which this authoritarianism manifested itself was twofold. First, it involved the strict reassertion of domestic order following the al-Aqsa Intifada (2000-c.2005) and the schism between Palestine's two main political groups, Fatah and Hamas (2006-7). Second, this fierce politicisation of policing and security activity was accompanied by the re-enforcement of existing social fragmentation, the consequence of which was the disempowerment of broad sections of the Palestinian population.

Within this context, this article argues that the Palestinian statebuilding project not only failed to represent a realistic means of achieving independence from Israel's domination, but also entailed an important element in the acceleration of the PA's overall shift towards authoritarianism. Thus, greater authoritarianism was an inevitable product of the structural conditions that constrained and penetrated Palestinian political agency and the statebuilding agenda embraced by the PA. In making this argument, this article first engages in a theoretical examination of the apparent dichotomy between 'liberalism' and 'authoritarianism' in the context of the Palestinian statebuilding project, and maintains that neither is entirely applicable to the case of contemporary Palestine. Following from this, it seems that Palestine cannot be understood in the traditional 'post-conflict' framework. The article then outlines the important structural constraints on the PA's agency with particular reference to the issues of 'security' and 'policing' in relation to the PA's asymmetrical relationship to external actors, and the complex legacy of the PLO as a revolutionary, national liberation organisation. It subsequently surveys the recent history of the Palestinian political environment by drawing on third party accounts and on field research conducted between 2008 and 2011 in the northern West Bank.¹¹ This research included participant observation, interviews, focus groups and textual analysis, with an added focus on issues of policing, security and the impact of economic development policies. The article concludes by arguing that the PA's shift towards authoritarianism has been profoundly debilitating to the

⁸ For statistics, see: *Fatalities before Operation "Cast Lead"* (B'tselem: The Israeli Information Centre for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories), accessed January 19, 2014, <http://www.btselem.org/statistics/fatalities/before-cast-lead/by-date-of-event>.

⁹ Following the death of Yasir Arafat in 2004, Mahmoud Abbas was elected President of the PA and Chairman of the PLO.

¹⁰ There are historical examples of 'Statebuilding' undertaken under foreign occupation, for example in post-war Germany and Japan, or indeed the pre-1948 Jewish settlements in then British Mandate Palestine. However, a notable distinction between these examples and that of the context of the PA's 'statebuilding' efforts is that in the cases of Germany, Japan and Israel, the foreign occupying force was not engaged in settler colonialism *per se* and also withdrew as the 'statebuilding' efforts neared completion; thereby allowing the new state to achieved independence.

¹¹ The majority of this field research was undertaken in 2009 and in the summer of 2010. Additional research comprised a month long pilot study during the Easter vacation in 2009 and a final short trip for ten days in December 2011. In total, the analysis in this article is based on interviews with 82 different informants, some of whom were met multiple times. This included four focus groups with three or more informants. The majority of these interviewees were members of the Palestinian public, though others included PA officials, representatives of foreign governments, INGOs and other experts. Only a selection of these data are referenced directly here, though the broader picture developed through undertaking this study provides the conceptual framework for this article's arguments and conclusions.

prospect of either authentic resistance to Israel's occupation or meaningful progress towards a negotiated peace.

Liberalism, Authoritarianism and Statebuilding in the Palestinian Context

Issues around post-conflict statebuilding have spawned a growing field of literature.¹² For the most part, this literature has tended to draw on a variety of case studies in order to identify and abstract successful practices.¹³ In general, this has tended to discriminate between the practices that simply bring a cessation of violence and those that help to create a political environment in which disagreements can be dealt with through established institutions rather than armed conflict.¹⁴ In the terminology utilised by peace theorist Johan Galtung, this distinction represents the difference between mere "negative peace" – the absence of overt violence – and "positive peace," reconciliation based on mutually beneficial cooperation and the reduction in structural inequality between antagonists.¹⁵

However, more critical accounts have noted an important mismatch between the goal of peace-building and some models of statebuilding. For example, as Menocal notes, despite the fact that international institutions such as the United Nations Development Programme and the World Bank have essentially embraced a link between "statebuilding" and "peace-building", tensions still exist between the two.¹⁶ Specifically, this occurs around the key issue of the post-conflict state's political character.¹⁷ That is to say, successfully constructing a functioning state may not lead to an outcome of sustainable peace if the nature of the state is one which cannot be detached from broader political dynamics that produced, resulted from, or perpetuated conflict. Although *prima facie*, this may seem obvious, the implications of this conclusion are indeed quite profound. In short, this suggests that statebuilding is an unsuitable path to peace-building when state institutions serve (or appear to serve) the interests of one antagonist over others and/or when the state itself fails to counteract existing structural inequalities effectively.

Indeed, much of the statebuilding literature focuses on evaluating processes evident across various case studies according to a positivist set of standards. For example, Paris and Sisk refer to "the construction of legitimate, effective government institutions" as a key goal

¹² Susanna P. Campbell, "When Process Matters: The Potential Implications of Organisational Learning for Peacebuilding Success," *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development* 4, no. 2 (2008): 20–32; Susanna Campbell, David Chandler, and Meera Sabaratnam, *A Liberal Peace?: The Problems and Practices of Peacebuilding*, ed. Susanna Campbell, David Chandler, and Meera Sabaratnam (Zed Books, 2011), <http://zedbooks.co.uk/>; Timothy D. Sisk, *International Mediation in Civil Wars: Bargaining with Bullets* (Routledge, 2008); Roland Paris and Timothy D. Sisk, *The Dilemmas of Statebuilding: Confronting the Contradictions of Postwar Peace Operations* (Routledge, 2008); Timothy Sisk, *Statebuilding* (John Wiley & Sons, 2013); Johan Galtung, *Peace by Peaceful Means: Peace and Conflict, Development and Civilization* (International Peace Research Institute, Oslo (Sage Publications Ltd, 1996); Michael Barnett, "Building a Republican Peace: Stabilizing States after War," *International Security* 30, no. 4 (2006): 87–112.

¹³ David Chandler, *Bosnia: Faking Democracy After Dayton* (Pluto Press, 2000); Colin Knox and Pádraic Quirk, *Peace Building in Northern Ireland, Israel and South Africa: Transition, Transformation and Reconciliation* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000).

¹⁴ Oliver Ramsbotham, Tom Woodhouse, and Hugh Miall, *Contemporary Conflict Resolution 2nd Edition: The Prevention, Management and Transformation of Deadly Conflicts*, 2nd edition (Polity Press, 2005).

¹⁵ Galtung, *Peace by Peaceful Means*.

¹⁶ Alina Rocha Menocal, "'Statebuilding for Peace': Navigating an Arena of Contradictions," *ODI Briefing Paper*. London: Overseas Development Institute, 2009, <http://dspace.cigilibrary.org/jspui/handle/123456789/24858>.

¹⁷ Ibid.

in post-conflict peace-building,¹⁸ while Jones and Campbell have considered the importance of organisational learning – in other words, the importance of taking account of the specific dynamics of a particular conflict – in the pursuit of sustainable peace.¹⁹

With this observation in mind, the Palestinian Authority, supported by international donors, pursued a model of statebuilding directed towards the introduction of an ostensibly liberal form of governance. Yet this was conducted under conditions of on-going occupation and colonisation by Israel, with the PA being a non-sovereign government with limited powers. These statebuilding efforts included attempts to stimulate private sector growth in the economy, the utilisation of democratic rhetoric to legitimise policy, and the re-organisation of the public sector in accordance with internationally-recognised norms known as ‘good governance’.²⁰ Such a range of policies might appear to be the fulfilment of the ideal of peace-building – in as much as it comprises the construction of a framework for a liberal and democratic society – but liberalising policies are considered ill-suited to genuine progress towards peace, as Barnett has pointed out.²¹ Barnett’s alternative to liberal peace-building is one based on republican values of “deliberation, constitutionalism and representation”.²² However, a more focused analysis of the Palestinian example suggests that the inadequacy of the liberalising approach has instead given way to more authoritarian tendencies. In broad terms, as Brown has put forward, this is predicated on the existence of a range of dynamics within the PA’s institutional politics which have been similar to those of other Arab states during their periods of state-formation at the end of European colonialism. This has allowed for the development of crony capitalism and corruption within the dominant classes, and a growing gulf between the elites and the general population.²³

Examples of the shift towards greater authoritarianism are also apparent in the context of security and policing. As Sayigh suggests, “in the West Bank ... the security sector is increasingly called on to mediate between the PA government and society.”²⁴ In other words, the security forces have accrued greater political power at the expense of the civilian leadership of the PA. Further to this, Sayigh also notes the deleterious effects of both the partisan nature of the security forces and the lack of any meaningful mechanisms of accountability. In particular, he holds that, “in the West Bank, the intelligence agencies are emerging as autonomous power centres that acknowledge no higher, constitutional authority”.²⁵ This may lead to the serious debilitation of the civilian leadership of the PA.

¹⁸ Paris and Sisk, *The Dilemmas of Statebuilding*, 1.

¹⁹ Bruce D. Jones, “The Challenges of Strategic Coordination,” *Ending Civil Wars: The Implementation of Peace Agreements*, 2002, 89–115; Campbell, “When Process Matters.”

²⁰ “What Is Good Governance” (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 2012), <http://www.unescap.org/pdd/prs/ProjectActivities/Ongoing/gg/governance.asp>; Mushtaq Husain Khan, “Evaluating the Emerging Palestinian State: ‘Good Governance’ Versus ‘Transformational Potential’,” in *State Formation in Palestine: Viability and Governance During a Social Transformation*, ed. Mushtaq Husain Khan, Inge Amundsen, and George Giacaman, 1st ed. (Routledge, 2004).

²¹ Barnett, “Building a Republican Peace,” 89.

²² Ibid.

²³ Nathan J Brown, *Palestinian Politics after the Oslo Accords: Resuming Arab Palestine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); See also for a comparison of the PA, Egypt and Tunisia Clement Moore Henry and Robert Springborg, *Globalization and the Politics of Development in the Middle East* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), chap. 4.

²⁴ Yezid Sayigh, “*We Serve the People*”: *Hamis Policing in Gaza* (Brandeis University, Crown Center for Middle East Studies, 2011), 109, <http://www.brandeis.com/crown/publications/cp/CP5.pdf>.

²⁵ Yezid Sayigh, “Policing the People, Building the State: Authoritarian Transformation in the West Bank and Gaza,” February 2011, 26, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2011/02/28/policing-people-building-state-authoritarian-transformation-in-west-bank-and-gaza/jke>.

Lia's analyses of the PA have identified a range of critical factors that help explain some of the background to this authoritarian shift. These include the existence of various policing cultures that preceded the formation of the PA and were rooted in the actions and structures of the coercive mechanisms of the PLO. Such cultures tended to focus on partisan loyalty and self-interest rather than on a more textbook ethos of "public service and impartiality".²⁶ Ineffective training programmes and the (often half-hearted) efforts by international actors to improve these programmes, however, resulted in greater pressure on police forces to conform to the concerns of international actors with little positive impact on their relations with the general population.²⁷

In addition to the issues raised by such pre-existing policing cultures, Lia notes that the specific context within which the PA security forces operate is unique. The Oslo Accords designated the PA security forces as responsible not only for normal domestic policing, but also for the safety and security of Israeli interests, including the welfare of Israeli settlers within the occupied territories.²⁸ The prioritisation of counter-terrorism was added to this by influential external actors. Such structures effectively locked the PA into a position of inevitable and irrevocable weakness compared to Israel, resulting in an asymmetrical structural relationship. As argued by Khan, this arrangement effectively created "an open-ended period of limbo in which the disengaged territories are neither truly sovereign nor technically part of Israel".²⁹

Thus, it is essential to acknowledge that the very nature of the Palestinian statebuilding process does not easily fit within existing models. This is for two primary reasons: firstly, whether Palestinian statebuilding can even be considered a 'post-conflict' process is highly contested. As various analyses have pointed out, the background to the initial formation of the PA was not one of a comprehensive settlement, nor was it one wherein a relationship based on parity between the PA and Israel would be founded.³⁰ However, and secondly, the manner in which this was put into practice has, in Sayigh's words, "contributed to systemic, probably irreversible collapse – 'state failure' – in the Palestinian Authority."³¹ This outcome was also predicated on the general practices of the donor community which encouraged Palestinian dependence on foreign aid while failing to hold Israel to account for its disruptions to the peace process. It was further accelerated by a US-led policy designed to undermine and overthrow the democratically-elected Hamas government following the 2006

²⁶ Brynjar Lia, *Building Arafat's Police: The Politics of International Police Assistance in the Palestinian Territories After the Oslo Agreement* (Ithaca, 2006).

²⁷ Ibid.; Brynjar Lia, *A Police Force Without a State: A History of the Palestinian Security Forces in the West Bank and Gaza* (Ithaca Press, 2006).

²⁸ Lia, *A Police Force Without a State*; Lia, *Building Arafat's Police*.

²⁹ Mushtaq Husain Khan, "'Security First' and Its Implications for a Viable Palestinian State," 2005.

³⁰ see Roy, *Failing Peace*; Gordon, *Israel's Occupation*; George Giacaman, "In the Throes of Oslo: Palestinian Society, Civil Society and the Future," in *After Oslo: New Realities, Old Problems*, ed. George Giacaman and Dag Jorund Lonning (Pluto Press, 1998); Mushtaq Husain Khan, "Post-Oslo State-Building Strategies and Their Limitations: Transcript of the Yusif A. Sayigh Development Lecture 2010" (MAS (The Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute), December 1, 2010), http://eprints.soas.ac.uk/2421/1/Prof_Mushtaq_Final_Transcript_Sayigh_Lecture.pdf; Philip Leech, "Who Owns 'the Spring' in Palestine? Rethinking Popular Consent and Resistance in the Context of the 'Palestinian State' and the 'Arab Spring'," *Democratization*, 2014, 1–19, doi:10.1080/13510347.2014.899584; M. Rabbani, "A Smorgasbord of Failure: Oslo and the Al-Aqsa Intifada," *The New Intifada: Resisting Israel's Apartheid*, 2001, 69–90 inter alia.

³¹ Yezid Sayigh, "Inducing a Failed State in Palestine," *Survival* 49, no. 3 (2007): 8, doi:10.1080/00396330701564786.

legislative elections.³² These actions, along with the Fatah leadership's compliance with them, not only demonstrated the insincerity of any claim to democratic legitimacy by the PA, but also actively encouraged further moves towards authoritarianism by established factions within the PA.³³

The period following the 2006 elections contributed to the PA's acceleration towards authoritarianism. This was when Hamas was identified as a critical threat to the security of Israel, the PA, and the US. The outcome of this determination was that Hamas was effectively purged from the West Bank during a period of inter-factional violence – a schism³⁴ – in 2006-2007. However, various leaked documents suggest that the UK's Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) had been planning a PA-led paramilitary campaign against Hamas since 2004 and there was a deep level of complicity between the PA security forces and foreign clandestine operatives. For example, in the aftermath of this schism, it emerged that SIS had assisted PA forces in organising extra-judicial internment for suspected Hamas members and that British officers were often present while detainees were being tortured.³⁵ It is also known that the PA president himself had been personally involved in co-ordinating the campaign and working with Israel during this period.³⁶

Before further analysing the implications of these events on the acceleration of authoritarianism under the PA, it is worth reviewing the events that led up to the Hamas-Fatah schism of 2006-7, as this background information provides important context to the discussion on public responses to the 'statebuilding' agenda.

Background to the Schism

The schism between Hamas and Fatah (2006-7) established the backdrop for the PA's statebuilding agenda. This was because, once tensions between Hamas and Fatah developed into violent confrontation, Fatah – traditionally the dominant party within the PA – was able to step away from both the uneasy truce it had endured with Hamas, and using the cover of an emergency situation, abandon its observance of democratic limitations on its power. Though still confined by Israel's occupation in the wake of the schism, the PA became freer to align itself more directly with the interests and demands of international donors. More specifically, the schism made it possible for the PA to openly attack its opponents and undermine the legitimacy of any criticisms it faced (at least in the West Bank). At the domestic level, this gave the PA greater political freedom to act than it had enjoyed since its formation in the 1990s. Yet once this freedom was won – albeit at the expense of losing Gaza to Hamas – the

³² According to the Palestinian Basic Law (2003), the PA is organised along the principle of a separation of powers between the executive, embodied by the President and government, the Legislative Council and the Judiciary. The President and the Legislative Council are elected in separate elections. Mahmoud Abbas, the current President of the PA won election in 2005 while the second legislative elections took place in 2006. Since the events of the schism, the status of the Palestine basic law is ambiguous, while – having invoked emergency provisions – President Abbas and his government holds *de facto* legislative and executive power, albeit within the restrictions imposed by Israel's occupation. See "2003 Amended Basic Law | The Palestinian Basic Law," accessed January 15, 2014, <http://www.palestinianbasiclaw.org/basic-law/2003-amended-basic-law>.

³³ Sayigh, "Inducing a Failed State in Palestine," 16.

³⁴ The term 'Schism' is used as a translation of the Arabic *shiqāq* which has been used frequently in the Arabic press.

³⁵ Ian Cobain, "CIA Working with Palestinian Security Agents," *The Guardian*, December 17, 2009, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/dec/17/cia-palestinian-security-agents>.

³⁶ Avi Issacharoff and Amos Harel, "Fatah to Israel: Let Us Get Arms to Fight Hamas," *Haaretz.com*, June 7, 2007, <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/fatah-to-israel-let-us-get-arms-to-fight-hamas-1.222473>; Sayigh, "Policing the People, Building the State," 13.

PA was able to pursue a statebuilding agenda that followed more-or-less directly a framework for development set out by international actors. In order to put this into context, this section briefly discusses the development of tensions between Hamas and Fatah prior to the split before looking at how the consequences of the schism helped frame the public's response to the statebuilding agenda.

Hamas emerged as a significant force in Palestinian politics during the first major popular uprising against Israel's occupation (1987-1993). Alongside its Islamism and fierce resistance to Israel, support for Hamas rested on the organisation's development of, and support for, a complex network of community and civil society institutions.³⁷ When Palestinian and Israeli delegates announced the Oslo Accords in 1993, Hamas rejected them and engaged in various acts of resistance. As Milton-Edwards and Farrell argue, Hamas' goals at the time were both to resist and reject Israel and also to undermine the PA.³⁸ However, by 2000, in the context of escalating violence and provocative electioneering,³⁹ the Oslo process effectively collapsed. Both Hamas' armed wings and Israel's occupation forces escalated their violent campaigns and the PA effectively lost all control of the situation. Despite being militarily overwhelmed by Israel's re-invasion of the West Bank during the second Intifada, Hamas' network of charity and community welfare organisations proved better able to serve the needs of a general population suffering the strains of the violence.⁴⁰ The PA splintered and many of its security forces fell back onto personal loyalties and organised criminality.⁴¹ It was in this context that the 2006 legislative elections took place.⁴²

Despite the fact that Hamas achieved an overwhelming victory, there was no smooth transition of power. Tensions between the two sides surfaced between March and December 2006. The situation grew more violent and continued to escalate into early 2007, despite Saudi Arabian-sponsored negotiations and an agreement signed on 8 February in Mecca. The unity government, established on 17 March, lasted only ninety-nine days, coming to an end on 14 June when Hamas cadres seized the headquarters of the Preventative Security Forces in Gaza. Fatah forces responded with force in Nablus and Jenin, Abbas dissolved the government and declared a state of emergency. He then appointed an emergency government

³⁷ While a plethora of analyses have read nefarious intent into Hamas' connections to civil society, Sara Roy notes that the relationship is far more complex and that the work of Hamas in this respect had a genuinely productive impact particularly on Gazan society under the very difficult conditions imposed by Israel's occupation. See Sara Roy *Hamas and Civil Society in Gaza: Engaging the Islamist Social Sector* (Princeton University Press, 2011).

³⁸ Beverley Milton-Edwards and Stephen Farrell, *Hamas: The Islamic Resistance Movement*, 1st ed. (Polity, 2010).

³⁹ Ariel Sharon, the prime ministerial candidate of the Likud Party who undertook this provocative electioneering, was well known for his role in orchestrating the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, in which massacres of Palestinian refugees in Sabra and Shatila refugee camps were carried out by Israeli-allied Phalangist militias. His campaign to win the Prime Ministership in 2000-1 involved touring the Temple Mount (or *Haram a-sharif*, a holy site for Muslims and Jews and a symbol of Palestinian nationalism) with an accompaniment of some 4,000 police and security personnel. This move sparked widespread protests.

⁴⁰ Neve Gordon and Dani Flic, "The Destruction of Risk Society and the Ascendancy of Hamas," in *The Power of Inclusive Exclusion: Anatomy of Israeli Rule in the Occupied Palestinian Territories*, by A. Ophir, M. Givoni, and S. Hanafi (Zone Books, 2009), 457-87.

⁴¹ International Crisis Group, *Squaring the Circle: Palestinian Security Reform Under Occupation* - International Crisis Group, September 7, 2010, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/middle-east-north-africa/israel-palestine/98-squaring-the-circle-palestinian-security-reform-under-occupation.aspx>.

⁴² Citing the PA as a product of an illegitimate compromise, Hamas had boycotted all elections, but in 2006 it pragmatically changed position and chose to participate. See Khaled Hroub, *Hamas: A Beginner's Guide* (Pluto Press, 2006).

under the ostensibly apolitical former International Monetary Fund official, Dr Salam Fayyad.⁴³

In the wake of this rift, the PA pursued a new set of objectives: removing the remaining structures of Hamas' influence and ending the plurality of armed force. With international support, the PA utilised two main methodologies. The first was to consolidate its primacy within Palestinian politics in the West Bank.⁴⁴ The second strategy was to position itself as the only possible legitimate government, and its institution-building agenda as the only reasonable means to achieving Palestinian independence. This campaign focused primarily on the city of Nablus, a site associated with a long history of independent agency and resistance, and a stronghold of Hamas in the West Bank. Indeed, during the intifada, Nablus had suffered badly under an Israeli siege which banned normal law enforcement activity and allowed conditions of lawlessness to proliferate.⁴⁵

Thus, with Israeli support and international backing, the PA undertook a military 'surge'. It shut down Hamas' social and civil society infrastructure throughout the West Bank, arrested scores of Hamas members and exercised censorship even in mosques. It also moved against militant forces of al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades – who are loosely aligned with Fatah – though this process was seen to be much more gradual and consensual than the campaign against Hamas.⁴⁶ Fayyad, in particular, promoted a view of the future of Palestinian politics which essentially precluded political alternatives to the PA. He justified the numerous arrests of Hamas members and dissolving *Zakat* Committees (Islamic charity organisations which the PA claimed were associated with fundraising for Hamas) by explaining that Hamas had politicised the question of poverty and stressed how the plurality of arms had contributed to a situation of lawlessness in Nablus prior to the PA's takeover.⁴⁷

Fayyad's influence effectively served as the driver for Palestinian reform and statebuilding processes. Fayyad and a group of similarly minded technocrats authored the

⁴³ See Alaa Tartir, "Fatah and Hamas: An Elusive Reconciliation," *Open Democracy*, April 9, 2012, <http://www.opendemocracy.net/ala-tartir/fatah-and-hamas-elusive-reconciliation> for more detail on failed negotiations.

⁴⁴ International Crisis Group, *Squaring the Circle*.

⁴⁵ Discussions of Nablus' status as a centre for resistance can be found in Beshara Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine: Merchants and Peasants in Jabal Nablus, 1700-1900* (University of California Press, 1995); B. Doumani, "Scenes from Daily Life: The View from Nablus," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 34, no. 1 (2004): 37–50; Philip Leech, "Why Jabal an-Nar? Researching Nablus," *Bulletin of the Council for British Research in the Levant*, September 2012, <http://www.cbrl.org.uk/bulletin.html>. Evidence of Hamas' popularity in Nablus is demonstrated by the distribution of votes during the 2006 legislative election. Nablus had also been the site of numerous clashes between Fatah and Hamas during the Schism. See *The Second 2006 PLC Elections: The Final Results for the Electoral Districts* (Palestine Central Elections Commission, n.d.), <http://www.elections.ps/Portals/0/pdf/FinalresultsElectoralDistricts2006.pdf>; International Crisis Group, *Squaring the Circle*. For details of the lawlessness see Doumani, "Scenes from Daily Life"; Associated Press, "Nablus Mayor Quits over PA Failure to Crack down on Militants," *Haaretz*, February 27, 2004, <http://www.haaretz.com/news/nablus-mayor-quits-over-pa-failure-to-crack-down-on-militants-1.115218>; Hazel Ward, "Lawlessness Grips Nablus," *Middle East Online*, June 21, 2005, <http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=13816>.

⁴⁶ It is also worthy to note that the Palestinian security forces which undertook this operation were not US-trained, but were rather some of the long-standing battalions. Therefore, the imposition of order in both Nablus and Jenin cannot be interpreted as the product of a particular type of training. Jim Zanotti, "U.S. Security Assistance to the Palestinian Authority" (Congressional Research Service, January 8, 2010), 25.

⁴⁷ Milton-Edwards and Farrell, *Hamas*, chap. 9, 14; K. Farraj, C. Mansour, and S. Tamari, "A Palestinian State in Two Years: Interview with Salam Fayyad, Palestinian Prime Minister," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 39 (n.d.): 58–74; David Rose, "The Gaza Bombshell," *Vanity Fair*, April 1, 2008, <http://www.vanityfair.com/politics/features/2008/04/gaza200804>; Ian Black and Seumas Milne, "Palestine Papers Reveal MI6 Drew up Plan for Crackdown on Hamas," *The Guardian*, January 25, 2011, sec. World news, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/jan/25/palestine-papers-mi6-hamas-crackdown>. Access date

Palestinian Reform and Development Plan (PRDP) and subsequent related documents,⁴⁸ with guidance from the UK government's Department for International Development.⁴⁹ The broad thrust of the reform agenda was to institute changes that were supposedly designed to re-affirm Palestinian political agency. In reality, these changes depended on a huge influx of donor aid and integrated parts of the Palestinian security infrastructure into a *de facto* alliance with the US. The PRDP outlined its intended consequences for these changes: "If a combination of political progress and an improved security environment accelerates the lifting of the occupation regime beyond current expectations, the level of public investment and private sector activity could increase significantly."⁵⁰ However the PRDP offered little detail on the specific methodologies that the PA would employ.⁵¹

It is possible to conclude from these actions that one of the PA's chief concerns was to rebuild its relationship with Israeli and American security and military establishments which had broken down in the late 1990s and were completely undermined during the al-Aqsa Intifada. In practical terms, this meant that three processes were put into motion: the streamlining and re-organisation of Palestinian security forces; the renewal of overt operational links with the Israeli military, the US and its allies; and the imposition of order in the West Bank, which began with a 'surge' in the northern West Bank (Jenin and Nablus) and progressed to other cities. It was the last of these that was designed to rid the West Bank of the remnants of Hamas as a serious political force in the West Bank, and to enable the PA to use a freer hand in domestic policy.⁵²

⁴⁸ The PA launched the PRDP at a conference of international donors in 2007. It outlined a range of reforms and development programmes that to be undertaken over a fixed period of two years. Though this document did not explicitly identify itself as 'statebuilding', subsequent documents - that followed in the same vein as the PRDP - did. "Palestine Reform and Development Plan (PRDP)" (Palestinian Authority, Ministry of Planning, 2007), http://www.mop-gov.ps/web_files/issues_file/PRDP-en.pdf; see also: "Ending the Occupation, Establishing a State. The Program of the Thirteenth Government." (Ministry of Planning, Palestinian Authority, n.d.), http://www.mop-gov.ps/issues_main.php?id=13; "Homestretch to Freedom" (Palestinian Authority, Ministry of Planning, 2010), http://www.mopad.pna.ps/en/?option=com_content&view=article&id=6&Itemid=142&hideNav=true; for more context on the continuity of these plans see: *Talk to Jazeera - Salam Fayyad*, 2011, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wCVWzP78X40&feature=youtube_gdata_player; *PM Salam Fayyad Delivers Keynote Address at ATFP 6th Gala*, 2011, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XwUOknqSR0c&feature=youtube_gdata_player; Farraj, Mansour, and Tamari, "A Palestinian State in Two Years."

⁴⁹ This information was confirmed in interviews undertaken 2008-11 with representatives of the UK Government, former ministers of the PA and well-connected third parties.

⁵⁰ "Palestine Reform and Development Plan (PRDP)."

⁵¹ Though the PRDP pledged to spend \$257 million on "Security Sector Reform and Transformation" - by far the largest area of spending and nearly four times that which was allocated to the next largest area - there is no clear break down of how this would be spent, nor what short and medium term goals would be pursued.

⁵² Though there had been some significant ties, particularly between western intelligence agencies and the branches of the security forces personally loyal to Abbas prior to 2007. See: Jim Zanotti, "U.S. Security Assistance to the Palestinian Authority" (Congressional Research Service, January 8, 2010); ICG, *Palestine: Salvaging Fatah*, Middle East Report (Ramallah/Gaza City/Brussels: International Crisis Group, November 12, 2009), <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/middle-east-north-africa/israel-palestine/091-palestine-salvaging-fatah.aspx>; International Crisis Group, *Squaring the Circle: Palestinian Security Reform Under Occupation - International Crisis Group*, September 7, 2010, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/middle-east-north-africa/israel-palestine/98-squaring-the-circle-palestinian-security-reform-under-occupation.aspx>.

The Public Response

By the end of 2008, as a result of the 'surge', the atmosphere within the city of Nablus had changed dramatically. The police presence had become virtually ubiquitous within the limits imposed on it by Israeli forces. Moreover, the return of both foreign aid and direct investment from Palestinian sources allowed a range of infrastructural development projects to start, and promotional commercial events to take place. Even in the refugee camps which had traditionally been handled at arm's length due to their distinct legal status, the PA's authority was no longer openly challenged, though the presence of police/security forces was not as obvious. Furthermore, based on my own observations at the time, there also appeared to be general popular consent toward the PA following its 'surge' in the northern West Bank.

However, a closer examination of data obtained through field research proved that this was not in fact as clear-cut as it might at first appear. In essence, while there was indeed strong evidence to suggest popular consent among Nabulsiis, both in the form of polling results and through more qualitative data provided by field research, this consensus was superficial and did not last. In April 2012, polling suggested that the level of popular consent for the Fayyad government was slipping overall. Those who perceived the West Bank as safe and secure fell from fifty-nine per cent to fifty-one per cent. Further, the positive view of Abbas and Fayyad's leadership dropped from sixty-seven per cent to sixty per cent, and from forty-four per cent to thirty-four per cent, respectively.⁵³

This decline in popularity could be partially explained by proximate causes, such as the fiscal crisis of 2011 and the re-emergence of allegations of corruption against senior figures within the PA. However, evidence from field research gathered in Nablus during 2008-11 suggests that the PA's narrative had never fully been accepted by its constituency. Instead, it is more likely that popular consent was in fact tied to the relative improvement in conditions since the violence of the al-Aqsa Intifada and the modest achievements of the PA in restoring some basic services that had been cut off during Israel's re-invasion of the West Bank's main cities during the uprising.

Data from research interviews conducted in Nablus initially appeared to reveal two broad narratives in popular attitudes toward the PA. These narratives can be categorised as consensual – suggesting acceptance of the PA's actions and the status quo – or rejectionist – opposition to the PA's actions and the status quo. However, over time it became clear that what distinguished these two were largely superficial factors, and that neither camp endorsed, nor necessarily believed, the PA's legitimising narrative. Rather, both the consensual and rejectionist narratives accepted that conditions in Nablus had improved. Nonetheless, both main narratives also expressed significant doubt that the PA could achieve its stated goals of Palestinian independence, or even a general long-term improvement in conditions through its agenda of institution-building. However, a key difference between the two narratives was the scope of historical context in which each situated recent events.

Examples of such narratives tended to revolve around a general consensus about the violent clampdown by the PA's security services. Such a clamp down was accepted as a necessary means through which order and civil responsibility were restored to the city, even though allegations of human rights abuses, torture and maltreatment by the security forces were well known. It was also generally understood that the PA had collaborated with Israel and foreign governments in order to restore order through coercion and the suspension of democracy, although the consensus also held that the state of lawlessness that had developed

⁵³ These are comparative figures taken over a period of three months. See Khalil Shikaki and Walid Ladadweh, *Palestinian Public Opinion Poll No. (43)*, Palestinian Public Opinion Polls (PSR - Survey Research Unity, April 3, 2012), www.pcpsr.org/survey/polls/2012/p43efull.html#finaicialcrisis.

during the Israeli siege warranted such a response. The following examples represent a narrow cross-section of research interviews conducted with a total of 82 different interviewees across the West Bank during 2008-11. The broader study analysed the impact of the PA's statebuilding agenda in different contexts based primarily on a critical geographic variable (i.e. comparing a major urban centre, a large refugee camp and two villages existing under direct Israeli occupation). The examples presented here were chosen due to their relevance to the question of the PA's security agenda. This sample was also chosen because, being ordinary citizens who were not overtly aligned to either Hamas or Fatah, this group represented a key constituency to which the PA's legitimising narrative was intended to appeal.⁵⁴

A former civilian police officer – interviewed in Nablus in late 2009 - justified the role played by the PA security forces by suggesting that the security forces' actions should be seen as an essential moderating force in extreme circumstances. He stated that the police's role was to "tame people and teach them to respect the law."⁵⁵ Moreover, a senior business official at the Nablus Chamber of Commerce (interviewed at approximately the same time as the police officer) offered similar support for the PA security forces' actions based on the essential need for public order, so that a basis for development could be formed, and upon which businesses in Nablus could and should capitalise.⁵⁶ This interviewee's comments were generally in line with the parameters of the PA's narrative and essentially focused on a range of outcomes that had resulted from the activities of the PA security services, particularly the improved environment for economic activity. However, this interviewee would not even address the particular goal of Palestinian independence directly, instead responding by iterating the necessity for a "political solution."⁵⁷ Resistance, on the other hand, amounted to merely "a personal matter, something that you do in your heart."⁵⁸

However, not all endorsements of the PA's security forces' actions were quite so all-encompassing, though they did tend to focus on the same broad parameters to frame their narratives. For example, a middle-aged mother who was studying English with a local non-governmental organisation tied her perspective to personal experiences of hardship under the siege and during the period of lawlessness. Nevertheless, unlike the previous two examples, this interviewee was particularly focused on Israel's culpability for creating the harsh conditions during the Intifada. She had experienced a military invasion of her home in 2006 and the arrest and detention of several male relatives on different occasions. She explained how, in her opinion, there was no longer an appetite for violent resistance to Israel in Nablus as the city had been forced to suffer the wrath of Israeli retaliation. She further remarked that there was no longer any real resistance to Israel at all beyond steadfastness, and that people were "waiting for the situation to get better"⁵⁹ as the PA pursued other means towards its political goals. However, she admitted that both she and her friends were reluctant to speak openly and critically of the security forces out of fear of reprisals. Additionally, her statements demonstrated an acceptance of the threat of brutality as part of that daily life: "Girls are protected by the police. They are good for family safety - they will beat men for harassing families."⁶⁰

⁵⁴ All interviews have been anonymised for the safety of the interviewees, except in the case of Professor Abdl Sattar Qassem who rejected the offer of anonymity and also referred to similar statements that had been published elsewhere.

⁵⁵ Interview by the author, 22 November 2009, Nablus.

⁵⁶ Interviews by the author, 18 November 2009, and 9 December 2009, Nablus.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Interview by the author, 14 December 2009, Nablus.

⁶⁰ Interview by the author, 14 December 2009, Nablus.

In a similar vein, a shop owner in central Nablus, who I interviewed frequently throughout December 2009, and again in late 2011, was initially strongly supportive of the PA. His comments were framed directly by prioritising his family's interests and he expressed support for the PA's security agenda through the positive impact it had had, directly and indirectly, on their welfare. Like the English student, the shop owner framed his interpretation of the security situation in direct relation to his family's experiences. For example, during the Intifada, he had stayed away from the city centre whenever there was a high risk of fighting because of responsibilities to his family. After the imposition of order by the PA security forces, he and his wife felt much safer in the city.⁶¹ By late 2011, however, the shop owner's attitude was remarkably different. He told me that he was angry with the PA leadership because new accusations had emerged about corruption. The shop owner expressed some hostility towards the PA as being ultimately responsible for the worsening economic climate in the West Bank. Evidently, the combination of alleged corruption at the highest level and the worsening conditions for ordinary businesses like his own was enough for this informant to feel a kind of detachment from the PA's agenda that he had not expressed previously.

Obviously, there are some important distinctions between the perspectives of the different interviewees, particularly in terms of the specific extent to which they accepted the legitimising narrative of the PA. Clearly the first two interviewees (the former police officer and the high ranking member of the Nablus Chamber of Commerce) held a much more positive view of the PA than the other two. However, both were speaking from standpoints that were closely aligned to the PA because both shared important interests – usually a concern for security and stability – in common with the PA. On the other hand, the two other interviewees oriented their concerns with more direct reference to their familial responsibilities and the welfare of the general public.

An alternative, rejectionist account was also apparent. This tended to situate interpretations of the PA's security agenda within a much broader historical context. It highlighted the PA's dependence on the support of foreign governments and the integration of the PA's security agenda with foreign militaries, and implied that the security services had prioritised the concerns of those international actors over the interests of the general population. In contrast, the narratives of consent stressed that the violent clampdown by the PA's security services was seen as a necessary means through which order and civic responsibility were restored to the city. These consensual narratives were thus framed by a much narrower reading of history, focusing primarily on events since the end of the Intifada and emphasising the immediate benefits of relief from such conflict. In essence, while the consensual view stressed the significance of short-term domestic events, the rejectionist view embraced a more holistic approach to the situation.

The history of the conflict framed the rejectionist narratives and gave more profound meaning to both the crackdown on Hamas and the notion of an underlying reciprocal relationship between the PA, Israel and other external parties (particularly the US and its allies). This can be demonstrated by the account of Abdul Sattar Qassem, a nationally known political figure and university professor. Qassem was a harsh critic of the PA since its inception because he perceived it to represent elite interests at the expense of Palestinian national concerns. According to Qassem, the PA was a compromised institution which helped Palestinian elites dominate what amounted to a proxy government for Israeli and US interests while the general Palestinian population were disenfranchised. In his view, the violent role played by the PA's security institutions was central to this relationship. He explained that

⁶¹ Interviews by the author, throughout June, 2010, Nablus

particular figures within the PA's elite (who he described as "gangsters"⁶²) used the security services as personal armies prior to, and during, the last Intifada. These intra-Palestinian conflicts essentially constituted a distraction which was manipulated by Israel and its allies in order to weaken the Palestinian resistance to the occupation.⁶³

According to Qassem, the schism between Hamas and Fatah was always a possible outcome of this process and demonstrated a colonial policy of divide and rule.⁶⁴ Moreover, the contrasting treatment of Gaza and the West Bank after the schism demonstrated Israel's ability to use Palestinian dependency to manipulate the population of the occupied territories through practices of punishment and reward. He stated that, "Israel has created a system of dependence for Palestinians wherein we [the Palestinians] are provided with enough to live, but not enough to co-ordinate resistance. The PA is [and the PLO was] complicit in this throughout Oslo."⁶⁵ Qassem further clarified that this was a very real and material economy where the PA played a central and enabling role. For example, the sheer quantity of jobs available in the security services (comprising approximately half of the total public sector) ensured that large numbers of Palestinians remained dependent on the PA security infrastructure for their livelihoods. On the other hand, those who made public statements critical of the PA and its relationship with Israel could be targets of the PA's retaliation. Qassem explained that he had experienced this personally through attacks on his person and property.⁶⁶

Another prominent member of Nablus' intelligentsia provided a similar analysis to Qassem's. Importantly, this interviewee was based in Nablus' old city during the siege and had experienced a number of threats against himself and his family by armed gangs during the period of lawlessness. He then had taken part in the reconstruction effort. Through this intimate connection with the damage to the city, he also endured the violence of the siege. He viewed the schism and the PA's imposition of order through a lens that focused on the Israeli occupation as the ultimate power in determining the fate of the Palestinians. In this context, the PA was, at best, postponing an inevitable Israeli assault. In fact, he stated that an assault on Nablus and other cities in the West Bank comparable to the 2008-2009 bombardment of Gaza – named by the Israelis as "Operation Cast Lead" – was almost inevitable at some point in the future. As he put it, "there is no doubt, what happened in Gaza will happen here. It is only a matter of time."⁶⁷

Another common element in the narratives of the rejectionists was that they accepted that, at a basic level, the conditions in Nablus had improved. The interviewees articulating a rejectionist narrative also suggested that living conditions in Nablus could potentially improve more under the PA. However, all of these suggestions clashed somewhat with the

⁶² Qassem at an informal lecture at Project Hope offices on the 21 October, 2009.

⁶³ Though the long term impacts of the PLO-Hamas pact of April 2014 cannot yet be known, the fact that – in response to the deal – Israel has withdrawn from all negotiations with the PA and engaged in hyperbolic rhetoric would seem to support Qassem's argument. An example of this is that Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, stated: "instead of choosing peace, Abu Mazen [Palestinian Authority president Mahmoud Abbas], formed an alliance with a murderous terrorist organisation that calls for the destruction of Israel." See Matthew Kalman, "Israel Halts Peace Talks after Palestinian Unity Pact," *Financial Times*, April 24, 2014, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/055d5df0-cbc6-11e3-9f27-00144feabdc0.html#axzz30mMGbt00>. Include access date

⁶⁴ This conclusion has been suggested by other analysts, in particular with reference to the 'village leagues'. See Milton-Edwards and Farrell, *Hamas*.

⁶⁵ Qassem at an informal lecture at Project Hope offices on the 21 October, 2009.

⁶⁶ Qassem explained these events in more detail in an interview with *The Electronic Intifada*. See Marcy Newman, "Interview with PA Dissident: 'Quote I Cannot Just Stay Silent'," *The Electronic Intifada*, November 26, 2009, <http://electronicintifada.net/content/interview-pa-dissident-i-cannot-just-stay-silent/8551>.

⁶⁷ Interview by the author, 15 December, 2009, Nablus.

respective logics that each interviewee had employed in describing the current conditions. Qassem, for example, repeated a number of times that “history is in a state of flux”⁶⁸ implying that as yet unpredicted factors could have an impact on Israel’s capacity to control the Palestinians through the PA. Qassem argued that the Palestinians remained resilient, as did the city of Nablus itself. He further noted that throughout its centuries of history, the city had suffered strife on many occasions but had survived and flourished. He was particularly explicit in his acknowledgement of the efforts of ordinary people to rebuild their lives and that, in spite of everything that had happened in Nablus during the invasion, one could derive hope from the fact that the damage to the Old City, the symbolic centre of Nablus’ cultural heritage, had been repaired through collective efforts.

Thus, framed by the disastrous events of the Intifada, the PA was able to restore some semblance of order and provision of services. Of course this perspective was not held universally, and it is worth noting that in some particular respects the difference between the narratives of those rejecting the PA’s rhetoric and those consenting to it, was not that great. Although the rejectionists couched their perspectives in a longer-term view of history, they also tended to accept the reality that the PA’s ‘surge’ had brought limited short-term improvements in basic conditions. Further, for those that had consented to the PA’s rule, there was little genuine belief that the goal of independence could be realised. Over time these doubts extended even further and the belief in the PA suffered. Even the shop owner – who was strongly concerned with stability for the sake of his familial responsibilities – had begun to replicate the kind of criticisms voiced by the rejectionists.

Conclusion

The PA’s post-2007 security agenda did not, in fact, serve to establish the groundwork for effective statebuilding. Rather, as Yezid Sayigh has argued, the alliances between the PA and its external sponsors were in fact the main weaknesses in the security programme.⁶⁹ The PA’s statebuilding agenda was deeply penetrated by foreign institutions. Furthermore, progress towards genuine independence was undermined when political conditions in the US and Israel proved unfavourable to constructive political developments, and were harmed further by the PA’s evident acceleration towards authoritarianism.⁷⁰

Broadly speaking, the inhabitants of the West Bank were well aware of the statebuilding agenda’s limitations and did not accept the PA’s legitimising narrative *per se*. Rather, the effective imposition of order by the PA’s security forces following the schism with Hamas was generally accepted because of the relative stability following a profoundly traumatic period. However, the PA was unable to capitalise on that immediate period of consent by making genuine progress towards independence. On the contrary, Palestinian society has grown more fragmented and the gulf between the Palestinian population and its leadership has widened. More specifically, the PA leadership was seen as a stooge of Israeli and American interests by some interviewees. In their minds, it has worn the rhetoric of a democratic and liberal statebuilding project down to an obvious husk. In other words, the ‘state’ that is being built in the occupied Palestinian territories is one that, as a product both

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Sayigh, “Policing the People, Building the State.”

⁷⁰ This shift in the political environment was clearly understood by Fayyad himself who, in 2011 distanced himself from the PLO’s statehood bid, stating that “conditions are not ripe for resumption of a political process capable of delivering an end to the Israeli occupation” at a public meeting in Amman. Taylor Luck, “Politics Not Ripe for Palestinian Statehood Bid - Fayyad,” *Jordan Times*, December 21, 2011, <http://archive.jordantimes.com/?news=43959>. Add access date

of weak design and a hostile environment, serves established interests while at the same time essentially abrogating public accountability.

As a final point, it should be noted that while the context faced by the PA statebuilding project is exceedingly complex – and it is certainly clear that the odds are very much stacked against the emergence of a genuinely democratic form of governance – it does not necessarily follow that the only alternative is authoritarianism. Under current circumstances, the PA may not be fully capable of basing its claims to legitimacy on either the kind of ‘republicanism’, advocated by Barnett,⁷¹ nor – in the wake of the devastation of the al-Aqsa Intifada – on a foundation of revolutionary rhetoric. At the same time, the acceleration of the PA’s authoritarian shift was (and is) not inevitable. Greater emphasis on holding the security forces to account, avoiding overt politicisation of security and policing agendas and the dialling back of statebuilding rhetoric (even if such measures are undertaken imperfectly) may go some way to reduce the gulf between the powerful and the powerless in Palestinian society. Although such an agenda is unlikely to challenge the pervasiveness of Israel’s occupation or make much serious progress towards meaningful liberation, a more unified Palestinian polity is much more likely to be capable of withstanding growing pressures from external forces.

⁷¹ Barnett, “Building a Republican Peace.”

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