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THE PALESTINIAN NATIONAL SECURITY DEBATE

NAOMI WEINBERGER

A critical determinant of the outcome of the transitional stage of Palestinian self-rule is whether Palestinians will successfully take charge of security in the West Bank and Gaza. A transfer of authority for internal security to the Palestinian leadership would facilitate progress toward fuller Palestinian autonomy and eventually sovereignty. If, by contrast, violence recurs and escalates within the Palestinian community, the experiment in self-rule may prove short-lived and may even be reversed.

How do Palestinians view the security arrangements negotiated by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and Israel? Will the Palestinian Authority (PA) achieve sufficient legitimacy to enforce internal security through its fledgling police force? In the longer term, will security be safeguarded in a future Palestinian state through the creation of an army, or is the state destined to be demilitarized?¹

Palestinian Concept of National Security

As opposed to Israel's long-term preoccupation with national security, this topic has rarely been debated within the Palestinian community. This is because Palestinians, lacking sovereignty, lacked an

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appropriate context for a national security debate. Palestinians' perceptions of security have evolved over three phases.

For the first decade after the founding of the PLO in 1964, the doctrine of "armed struggle" conveyed a determination to challenge the territorial status quo. Operating as a guerrilla organization hosted by various Arab states, the PLO sought "secure bases" from which to pursue operations against Israel. The vast majority of civilians in the Palestinian diaspora, however, were not even assured of personal security.

During a second stage, PLO strategy evolved from "armed struggle" to diplomacy. In 1974, the Palestine National Council (PNC) proposed a "national authority" in part of Palestine, initiating the basis for the "two-state solution" endorsed by the PNC in 1988. Since then, the paramount concern of the Palestinian leadership under Yasir Arafat was to gain international recognition of the Palestinian right to sovereignty.² The contention that a Palestinian state would pose a threat to Israeli security was viewed by Palestinians as an invalid pretext to deny their national claims.

In a third stage, initiated by the Oslo Accord of 13 September 1993, Palestinian scholars began seriously to consider security requirements in anticipation of the onset of Palestinian self-rule. Three scholars who have sought to define a Palestinian concept of national security are Yezid Sayigh, Ahmad Khalidi, and Khalil Shiqaqi. All three emphasize a striking asymmetry between Palestinian and Israeli security requirements, deriving, first, from the *status* of Israel as a state and the Palestinians as a nonstate actor; second, from the disparity between Israel's *assets* as a military power and the Palestinians' lack of military assets; and third, from the fundamentally different *threat perceptions* of both parties.

Yezid Sayigh believes that only once the Palestinians attain sovereignty will they be able to achieve security. Until a Palestinian state is created, the individual and collective status of the Palestinian people reflects their vulnerability under Israeli military occupation or in the diaspora. Even once statehood is achieved, the Palestinian state is most likely to face threats to its political, rather than its physical security. As a result, "the military dimension is only one component of security, and not always the most important one at that." Due to the precariousness of the Palestinian national enterprise and a lingering challenge to its legitimacy by elements within Israel, the international community must uphold its sovereignty and territorial integrity. Instead of seeking to match Israel's military capabilities, Palestinians should opt for a trade-off, "exchang[ing] a military capability that cannot serve their basic purposes in return for political and territorial gains they really need."³

A different conclusion is reached by Ahmad Khalidi, who contends that the capacity for self-defense is an essential component of a

Palestinian national security doctrine. He advocates the creation of a Palestinian Self-Defense Force once a state is established, while accepting the inevitability of quantitative and qualitative limits on the capabilities at its disposal. Second, Khalidi argues that "external reinforcement" through the introduction of international peacekeeping forces may compensate for Israel's preponderant military assets. Finally, "regional linkage" through close security bonds with other Arab states is the third element of the Palestinian security doctrine.⁴

A more pessimistic voice, raising doubts about Palestinian prospects for a secure and independent future, is that of Khalil Shiqaqi. Shiqaqi believes that Israel's objective in negotiations is to perpetuate its security hegemony in the West Bank and Gaza. He views the relationship between Israel and the Palestinians as one of "supremacy and subordination," for which the asymmetrical distribution of military power is a critical determinant. Any concessions that Israel may make in turning over security responsibilities to the Palestinians will, in his view, "only occur within the framework of its hegemony."

Shiqaqi is especially troubled by the implications of emerging security arrangements for the prospects of democratic change within Palestinian society. He believes that a "solid wall of security exigencies" which Israel will insist upon as a condition for surrendering authority "will constrain the Palestinian Authority and make it vulnerable," exposing it to "internal ridicule and external schemes." The result may be increased polarization in Palestinian society, which could lead to "bloody conflict," giving Israel a justification to resume direct military control.⁵ Shiqaqi's assessment calls attention to the precariousness of the peace process from the perspective of Palestinian negotiators and residents of the West Bank and Gaza.

Interim Arrangements: The Palestinian Police

In the interim stage of Palestinian self-rule, the police and security forces are the designated arm of the PA for maintaining internal security. According to the Oslo Accord, the transition to Palestinian self-rule would begin when the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) withdraw from Gaza and Jericho, and

[a]rrangements [are made] for the assumption of internal security and public order by the Palestinian police force consisting of police officers recruited locally and from abroad (holding Jordanian passports and Palestinian documents issued by Egypt).

The transfer of responsibilities to the Palestinian police is to be "accomplished in a phased manner." The police are specifically instructed to "guarantee public order" when elections are held for a Palestinian Council "under agreed supervision and international observation."⁶

The constraints on Palestinian security responsibilities are, however, repeatedly highlighted in the Oslo Accord. As elaborated in Annex XI:

It is understood that, subsequent to the Israeli withdrawal, Israel will continue to be responsible for external security, and for internal security and public order of settlements and Israelis. Israeli military forces and civilians may continue to use roads freely within the Gaza Strip and the Jericho area.

Palestinian negotiators later sought to increase the scope of security responsibilities transferred by departing Israeli forces to the PA. This effort was unsuccessful, and if anything the detailed Cairo Agreement of 4 May 1994 offers a more circumscribed interpretation of the prerogatives of the Palestinian police than the ambiguous September agreement.

The primary function assigned to the Palestinian police in the Cairo Agreement is "public order and internal security."

Their duties include protecting the public and its property; preventing crime; and securing public installations. In addition, the police in Gaza are held responsible for preventing infiltrations and introduction of arms. In their mobile operations, the Palestinian police are tied into a network of coordinating mechanisms with residual IDF personnel. These include "joint patrols" to assure the security of the roads, and "joint mobile units" for rapid response to emergencies.⁷

The composition and structure of the Palestinian police is spelled out in some detail in the Cairo Agreement. The police are considered "one integral unit" under the control of the PA, with four branches—the civil police, public security, intelligence, and emergency services units—subordinate to a single command. The total number of the Palestinian police is limited to 9,000, of which a maximum of 7,000 may be recruited abroad. Israel has a veto over the selection of policemen, whose identity "shall be agreed on by both sides," and who may not have been convicted of serious crimes or participated in terrorist activities in the past. The arms and equipment that the police may use are enumerated, and "civilians may not carry weapons without a license" granted by the PA.

From the outset, a lively debate arose among Palestinians over the role that the police were likely to play. When residents were asked about their expectations shortly after Palestinian police began arriving in Gaza and Jericho, 61 percent of Gazans and 45 percent of West Bankers said they thought "that the Palestinian police will treat all Palestinians equally." Conversely, 10 percent of Gazans and 20 percent of West Bankers said they thought the police "will oppress the Palestinian opposition." The more optimistic responses of Gazans reflected the

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warm welcome extended to the incoming police, many of whom had relatives in Gaza, and the relief to see Israeli forces departing. What is especially interesting is that 34 percent of total respondents who identified with the Islamic opposition group Hamas nonetheless said that they expected the police to be fair.⁸

The new commanders of the Palestinian police aimed to reassure the public of their benevolent intentions. Colonel Sa'ib al-'Agiz, security chief in the northern Gaza Strip, appealed to every citizen "to help the police forces and be cooperative with them to spread security." He pledged to defuse any chance of civil war and announced that "no gun will be pulled out in the face of any Palestinian citizen regardless of his political affiliations." Colonel Ghazi al-Jibali of the Military Liaison High Committee asserted that "the Palestinian security system is a neutral system and is not working to serve any group." He maintained that the Palestinian security forces "will preserve the dignity of the Palestinian citizen," and will avoid searching houses without a warrant.⁹

Nonetheless, police commanders expressed toughness toward those likely to challenge their authority. Upon assuming overall command of the Palestinian police, General Nasr Yusif announced that his "first urgent task" was to contain the spread of arms. The West Bank commander of the new intelligence agency, the Preventative Security Force, threatened to disarm any Palestinian who interfered with implementation of the self-rule agreement.¹⁰

From the outset, members of the Palestinian opposition, who rejected both the Oslo and Cairo agreements, expressed fears that the police would become a "repressive tool" in the hands of the PA. Opposition views toward the police must be seen in the broader context of their objections to the Oslo and Cairo agreements. For example, Ibrahim Ghawshah, a spokesman for Hamas in Gaza, predicted that the Cairo Agreement "will create self-rule as the maximum," not as the start of a Palestinian state. Similarly, Fathi Shiqaqi, the exiled leader of Islamic Jihad, declared that the agreement "confirms the occupation as a permanent reality and confers legitimacy upon it." In his view, the self-rule authority bears no chance even of being transformed into a "mini-state," and would "always be at the mercy of the Israelis as an economic and security satellite." Nonetheless, Hamas officials declared that they would not resist the self-rule plan using force, but only by "words, political action, and propaganda." And while declaring that "the Palestinian police forces are our brothers," Hamas warned that it would "not respond to orders to disarm as long as the occupation continues."¹¹

Members of the secular opposition condemned the Cairo Agreement for the nondemocratic method by which it was negotiated and its potential for engendering Palestinian authoritarianism. Nayif Hawatmah, secretary general of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), complained that "[w]hat is dangerous is that the self-rule au-

thority has come—against the will of the people—to execute the Cairo-Oslo concessions through Palestinian hands.” He called for a national legislative election under international supervision to decide the future of the security agreement and “to elect a new leadership which will rebuild national unity within the PLO.” In a similar vein, although George Habash, leader of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), welcomed the entry of the Palestinian police and pledged cooperation with them, he warned that the Palestinian people “will stop any effort to impose a repressive regime” and that the police must not be “transformed into a tool for repression or to serve a certain group.”¹²

Once the Palestinian police entered Gaza and Jericho to a warm public reception in May, and Arafat arrived in Gaza to head the PA in July, opposition groups found themselves on the defensive. It became harder to dole out criticism without coming up with a positive alternative. Neither the Islamic nor secular opposition developed a coherent, short-term political program in the face of the new realities of self-rule. Opposition groups were ambivalent about whether to participate in elections for the Palestinian Council, whose jurisdiction would apply to the entire West Bank and Gaza. These elections, initially scheduled for July 1994 but later repeatedly deferred, will mark the beginning of the second stage of Palestinian self-rule. Despite official statements that they would boycott the elections, opposition spokesmen hinted that they might reconsider if acceptable power-sharing arrangements gave the opposition a meaningful voice in a new regime.

As the largest opposition group, Hamas’s tentative moves toward coming to terms with self-rule set the pace for other players. In April 1994, Hamas signed an agreement with Fateh pledging not to hinder the Gaza-Jericho agreement and to refrain from acts of violence within the self-rule area. Over the next few months, official spokesmen repeatedly announced that Hamas would not participate in elections for a Palestinian Council, so as to avoid any appearance of “legitimizing this losing deal.” Nonetheless, Hamas was prepared to take part in “free democratic elections, under the condition that they will be under international supervision and not under the occupation supervision.”¹³

A poll conducted in December 1994 indicated that 43 percent of those questioned were committed to vote for Fateh, 17 percent for Hamas, 3 percent for Islamic Jihad, 7 percent for the PFLP, and 1 percent for the DFLP. Other groups with a politically significant following were the Nationalist Independents (5 percent) and Islamic Independents (4 percent). Fifty-seven percent of the respondents said they would vote even if the Palestinian opposition called for a boycott of elections, while 26 percent said they would join the boycott.¹⁴

The Oslo agreement states that Israeli military forces will redeploy in the West Bank and Gaza “not later than the eve of the elections for the council . . . guided by the principle that its military forces should be

redeployed outside populated areas." Palestinian police will assume security responsibility in the areas from which the IDF withdraws. Afterwards,

[f]urther redeployments to specified locations will be gradually implemented commensurate with the assumption of responsibilities for public order and internal security by the Palestinian police force.¹⁵

Progress during the transitional period of self-rule is thus contingent

Progress during the transitional period is contingent on the Palestinian police's success in maintaining internal security.

on the success of the Palestinian police in maintaining internal security. Palestinian spokesmen have observed that this principle of "conditionality," linking Israeli redeployment to Palestinian performance, provides Israel with ample opportunities to delay withdrawal from the West Bank.

Preliminary Performance

Within a few months, Palestinian optimism about their new police force in Gaza and Jericho had turned to widespread disillusionment. The highly visible police and intelligence services consumed a large share of the self-rule administration's meager financial resources and were widely viewed as abusive of citizens' rights and an instrument of the Fateh-dominated PA against its political opponents.

By September 1994, there were 7,200 Palestinian policemen and 500 intelligence personnel in Gaza—a ratio of approximately one security officer for every one hundred Gazans. Most policemen were former members of the Palestine Liberation Army (PLA), the military wing of the PLO. Five PLA brigades contributed forces to the Palestinian police: the al-Aqsa brigade from Iraq sent members to Jericho; the 'Ayn Jallud, Badr, Hittin, and al-Yarmuk brigades from Egypt and Jordan sent members to Gaza. These soldiers-turned-policemen varied in their training and attitudes, depending on their countries of origin, sometimes creating estrangement between them and the local population.¹⁶

In the early stages of recruitment, Palestinian Police Chief Maj. Gen. Mudar Yusuf insisted that the police "are not factional forces," explaining that the PLA includes elements of all Palestinian factions. Indeed, "a large number [of individuals] from factions opposed to the Oslo agreement have sent us applications to join these forces." Nonetheless, Hamas spokesman Mahmud Zahhar complained that the security service "belongs completely to Fateh," charging that when two Hamas members tried to join a police training camp, an officer beat them and jailed them. One branch of the intelligence services, the Preventative Security Force, was reportedly composed primarily of former members of Fateh's military wing, the Fateh Hawks.¹⁷

Police salaries have been an enormous drain on the PA's revenues, costing approximately \$7 million a month; total tax revenues collected in September 1994 were \$3 million. The shortfall was made up through international aid channelled through United Nations agencies, thus diverting resources urgently needed for social services. The economic burdens were also felt on the popular level: when the police first arrived in Gaza and Jericho, the local population often invited them to their homes, but later policemen continued demanding free meals and gasoline and ran up large debts with local traders. Hamas publications began to refer to the police as "an army of beggars."¹⁸

Excessive use of force by Palestinian police was revealed in July when Farid Abu Jarju' died in a Gaza prison, apparently after having been tortured. In a scathing editorial in *al-Quds*, the chairman of the Legal Committee of the PA, Anis al-Qasim, declared that Palestinians must have "a police force that respects the rights of the people—equally to its role in maintaining law and order." He expressed "serious doubts about the quality of training of the Palestinian security forces at the hands of the Arab security forces," and criticized the failure of the PA to ratify a draft constitutional code explicitly prohibiting torture.¹⁹

Members of the political opposition charged that Arafat and his associates were using the security forces as instruments of repression. In a typical complaint, a member of Fida (the Palestinian Democratic Union) remarked:

Our people have begun to express their indignation at the spread of the security services and the way in which the Preventative Security Service operates. Numerous field commanders still have not comprehended the fact that the authority does not belong to Fatah and that Gaza and Jericho are not another Lebanon.

A Hamas leaflet warned Gen. Nasr Yusuf, commander of the Palestinian police force, that "civil war will take place" if he continued to repress the movement's activities.²⁰

Three incidents during the early months of self-rule are especially revealing. On 17 July 1994, a riot broke out at the Erez checkpoint in Gaza when hundreds of Palestinian workers without valid work permits, waved through the Palestinian positions, were stopped at the Israeli checkpoint. Denied entry into Israel, they began to riot; dozens threw petrol bombs at Israeli soldiers. IDF troops pushed the workers back to the Palestinian checkpoint, where the Palestinian police tried unsuccessfully to restrain them. In the violence that ensued, Palestinian police fired on the workers and began exchanging fire with the IDF.²¹

According to Israeli Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Ehud Baraq,

The event originated from the failure of the Palestinian police to adhere to a commitment . . . that the only Palestinians who may reach the Erez checkpoint are those who have work permits and who were

previously checked by the Palestinian police and found to be clean of any weapon whatsoever.

Arafat, for his part, blamed Israel for the clash. Claiming that Israeli soldiers and settlers, rather than Palestinian police, had fired on the rioters, he demanded deployment of international observers in the area to help avert similar incidents. However, a Fateh spokesman in Gaza, Hisham 'Abd al-Razzaq, conceded that the behavior of Palestinian policemen at the Erez checkpoint was "inappropriate," and acknowledged that opposition groups exploited the situation in order to inflame popular passions. The dissident PFLP-General Command declared that an "ugly bloody massacre" had been committed by "the Zionist enemy forces," and that "Arafat's police took part in the massacre."²²

For all the variation among Palestinian accounts, there was consensus that the real source of the riots was the hunger of the workers, rather than political instigation. Chief PLO negotiator Nabil Shaath indicated that Israel had agreed to allow 30,000 workers to enter daily from Gaza into Israel but had recently limited the number to 20,000; in contrast, as many as 100,000 Gazans had worked in Gaza daily prior to the intifada. An editorial in *al-Quds* asserted that in the absence of international aid, the PA could not resolve widespread unemployment in Gaza (estimated at 40 percent overall and 50-60 percent in refugee camps). The Erez riot was precipitated by Israel's hard line on workers' permits, as well as "the humiliating and abusive treatment at the crossing point and by the arrangements that forced Palestinian workers to wait for long periods every morning." Such incidents are likely to recur, especially since poverty deepens every time the crossing is closed by Israel in retaliation for acts of Palestinian violence.²³ In these circumstances, concentration of resources on police and security forces will not achieve stability unless a comprehensive economic program is introduced.

More ominous than the Palestinian-Israeli clashes were confrontations between the Palestinian police and the public. On 11 October 1994, an Israeli soldier, Nahshon Wachsmann, was abducted by members of Hamas's military wing, the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, who announced that his life would be spared if Israel released some two hundred Palestinian prisoners. Although the incident ended in the soldier's death on 14 October after an abortive Israeli rescue attempt, its major significance for Gaza's Palestinian residents was the role played by the Palestinian security services. Palestinian intelligence assisted the IDF in locating Wachsmann, and during the crisis, Palestinian police arrested and jailed four hundred alleged Hamas supporters.

Hamas spokesmen expressed "extreme resentment and anger at the disgraceful role played by the . . . intelligence organs in serving the enemy authorities." In a demonstration on 17 October, several thousand Hamas supporters surrounded Gaza's central prison where the four

hundred were being held, demanding their release. Hamas spokesman Mahmud Zahhar, by urging the demonstrators not to clash with the hundreds of Palestinian policemen on the scene, averted what might easily have turned into a violent conclusion to this episode.²⁴

Among supporters of the PA, there were differences on how to deal with the challenge represented by the Hamas kidnapping. On 12 October, Arafat characterized the kidnapping as an "act of defiance" against his authority, warning that he would not tolerate "attempts aimed at embarrassing the Palestinian Authority." However, the Supreme Strategy Committee of Fateh, Arafat's main base of support, dissented from his decision and called on the PA to release the detainees, which it did within a few days. As one PLO spokesman put it, "if we try to force Hamas into a confrontation, we will have a bloody conflict in Gaza that can be controlled neither by ourselves, nor by the Israelis."

Many PA supporters complained that Israel had held them responsible for an act of violence that had originated in the West Bank, outside Palestinian jurisdiction. Palestinian Culture and Information Minister Yasir 'Abid Rabhu complained of Israel's delays in extending Palestinian authority in the West Bank, withdrawing the IDF from populated areas, and permitting elections for the Palestinian Council. Unless Israel continued to implement the transitional phase agreement, how could it hold the PA responsible for security arrangements?²⁵ In summary, while the Erez episode illustrates the difficulties in implementing provisions for Palestinian-Israeli security coordination, the kidnapping incident reveals the impossible political situation of the Palestinian police, who are "damned if they do and damned if they don't." If they live up to the terms of the Oslo and Cairo accords and curb acts of terrorism, the Palestinian opposition portrays them as Israeli stooges. If, on the other hand, they do not prosecute offenders with sufficient vigor, Israel charges them with incompetence and refuses to extend Palestinian self-rule.

By far the most serious incident was the confrontation between the Palestinian police and the public at the Filastin Mosque in Gaza on 18 November 1994. At the end of the Friday noon prayers, worshipers began a demonstration against the PA's arrest of opposition members. The Palestinian police, after trying to disperse the demonstration, opened fire on the crowd. Street battles continued for several hours, with rioters heading for the central police station, and several police vehicles were set afire. By the time the violence ended, after the PA reportedly imposed a curfew and Hamas leaders exhorted the crowd to go home, thirteen Palestinians were dead and about two hundred wounded.²⁶

Accusations were traded by the PA and Hamas about responsibility for the clashes. A Palestinian police statement charged that the first shots were fired, not by the police, but by "a group of renegades," who

"suddenly opened fire on some policemen" in a premeditated provocation. Fateh leaders in Gaza announced that " Hamas and Islamic Jihad implemented foreign plots" in planning the incident. Arafat initially suggested Israeli involvement in "trying to prove that our people are weak . . . in order to continue the occupation." Later, he alluded to a conspiracy by Iran, some of whose leaders were "bent on meddling in Palestinian affairs and creating a climate conducive to crime and terror."²⁷

Hamas spokesmen immediately disclaimed any responsibility for the clash, charging that "Arafat decided to begin the liquidation operation against the Palestinian opposition" at the mosque on orders from Prime Minister Rabin. Spokesmen for Islamic Jihad similarly charged that the incident was arranged by Arafat as a means of proving his power to act against the Islamic movement.²⁸ In an opinion poll in the West Bank and Gaza on responsibility for the incident, 7 percent of respondents blamed Hamas and other opposition groups, whereas 18 percent blamed the PA, 33 percent blamed Israel, 29 percent blamed all three, and 13 percent blamed "other parties."²⁹

The mosque incident aroused widespread fears of civil war. PFLP leader George Habash, for example, warned that civil war was likely "if Arafat continues to do what the Israelis want and oppresses the Palestinian forces that reject the Oslo-Cairo agreements." By contrast, PA spokesman 'Abid Rabbu, saying that "we absolutely do not expect a civil war," depicted 18 November as an isolated incident and explained that "we gave clear instructions to the Palestinian police . . . to avoid being lured into provocations of that kind." Within a few days, mediators worked out an agreement between the PA and Hamas, whereby only the police would be permitted to carry arms in public during demonstrations.³⁰

In a revealing interview, Hamas leader 'Imad al-Faluji emphasized that Hamas had tried hard to avoid confronting the PA, because "we are well aware that any efforts to embarrass and frustrate the PA will result in the return of the Israeli occupation troops, which we deem undesirable." Nonetheless, he expressed grave doubts that the PA would honor any agreement with Hamas. He warned that "if the authority remains inclined to engage in clashes with Hamas," there was a real possibility that "this could lead to an explosion."³¹ Similar incidents in the future could escalate, undermining the fragile stability that has thus far prevailed in Gaza and Jericho, mobilizing public sentiment against the PA and the police, and perhaps even culminating in civil war.

Given the volatility displayed in Gaza in the early months of self-rule, it is appropriate to ask how Israel would respond in the event of a complete collapse of Palestinian internal security. Two obvious options come to mind. First, Israel could revoke the authority granted to the Palestinian police or even, in an extreme case, reoccupy Gaza (a burden

it would hesitate to assume unless there were violence against the Jewish settlements). A second option, in response to Palestinian violence, could be bringing in international forces. This response may seem unlikely in view of Israel's long-standing resistance to the introduction of international peacekeepers in the West Bank and Gaza, as advocated by the PLO. Nonetheless, given a civil conflict that could become a quagmire for the IDF, Israel might adopt this option by default.³²

Final Status: Is Demilitarization Desirable?

Having considered worst-case scenarios that could preclude progress in implementing Palestinian self-rule, it is worthwhile also to consider best-case scenarios. If Palestinians and Israelis overcome obstacles to implementing their interim agreements, what is the most propitious plan in final status negotiations for promoting Palestinian security in the long term?

Palestinian analysts acknowledge that even if Israel eventually acquiesces to the creation of a Palestinian state, the latter's ability to engage in autonomous defense planning will be constrained. Israel harbors serious apprehensions about external security threats through the West Bank (although these have been considerably alleviated by the Israeli-Jordanian peace treaty signed on 26 October 1994) and is therefore likely, in final status negotiations, to insist that its "minimal security requirements" be met through the demilitarization of any future Palestinian "entity" or state.³³

Is demilitarization acceptable from a Palestinian point of view? In a discussion at the Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs (PASSIA) in Jerusalem in April 1994, some Palestinian participants felt that a case for demilitarization could be made. First, the Palestinian state will be strapped for resources, so it would be better not to divert its meager funds to an army. Second, the negative example of military regimes in the Arab world, with their interference in politics and disregard for citizens' rights, could make it seem easier to achieve democracy in the absence of an army. But even Palestinians who favor demilitarization insist it should be voluntary: demilitarization imposed by Israel would be intolerable for its implication that Palestinians were punished for their use of violence and terrorism in the past.³⁴

Even Palestinians who favor demilitarization insist it should be voluntary.

The case against demilitarization is presented by Ahmad Khalidi, who argues that "it is not in Israel's own interest to have such a weak and vulnerable entity on its borders." Palestine will need at least limited military capabilities "for defense against external aggression and/or internal subversion." The army's internal value is primarily symbolic,

since possession of an army is a basic attribute of sovereignty and a source of national prestige. An army would enhance the authority of the fledgling Palestinian regime, whereas "perceived vulnerability is a recipe for instability."³⁵ Similarly, Yezid Sayigh asserts the Palestinian state's need to deter "covert operations by Palestinian individuals or groups opposed to the peace with Israel." However, the critical observer may wonder how an army can perform this function more effectively than a well-trained police force. Indeed, a blurring of functions between the police and army would arguably not be in the long-term interest of the Palestinian state.

More weight, therefore, should be given to the argument that a Palestinian army would have important external security functions. Sayigh argues that Palestinian forces will not be capable of deterring a *major* conventional assault from any source. Instead, what Palestine needs is "sufficient military means to assure its basic security against small-scale attack or cross-border infiltration," originating either from Israel or from neighboring Arab states. Sayigh anticipates possible actions by former Israeli settlers, who might join clandestine terrorist networks, or even by maverick IDF officers. Alternatively, the Israeli government might "over-react to the action of agents-provocateurs in Palestine or neighboring Arab states, and launch military operations against the Palestinian state prematurely or unnecessarily." Moreover, if Israel anticipated an Arab attack originating from Syria, Iraq, or Jordan, it might "view occupation of Palestine as a necessary, preemptive counter-measure."³⁶

The possibility of Israeli reoccupation of the West Bank is a major factor in the internal Palestinian debate over demilitarization. Some ask what, in the absence of a Palestinian army, would deter Israel, especially under a successor government, from reentering on the pretext of reprisal for terrorist activity? Even a small army, especially if buttressed by the presence of international forces, would make it harder for Israel to reassert control.³⁷ In this line of reasoning, therefore, a Palestinian army would become the first line of defense for Palestinian sovereignty.

What types of military assets would a Palestinian army require? Ahmad Khalidi advocates a "phased, gradual build-up of Palestinian forces," subject to quantitative and qualitative limits negotiated with Israel. Demilitarized or limited forces zones may be demarcated along the Israel-Palestine border, so long as Israel accepts reciprocal (but not necessarily symmetrical) limitations on its territory. A projected arms control regime would be upheld through bilateral verification measures in coordination with a permanent Joint Military Commission.³⁸ While this set of proposals is unlikely to achieve Israeli approval in the early stages of "final status" negotiations, it represents a realistic assessment of Palestinian "minimal security requirements" in the long term.

In conclusion, the fundamental asymmetry between Palestinian and Israeli positions is apparent in every stage of the negotiating process. Israel's military presence has only been conditionally modified through the implementation of the first phase of the Oslo Accord in Gaza and Jericho, and the transfer of police responsibilities to the Palestinian Authority is potentially reversible. Even more significant, the enlargement of the Palestinian sphere of authority for security hinges upon Israel's assessment that the first phase of the experiment has succeeded. Only Israel's withdrawal of forces from additional locations in the West Bank will reveal its preparedness to move forward on the path toward Palestinian sovereignty.

NOTES

1. I wish to express my gratitude to the Center for Palestine Research and Studies (CPRS) in Nablus (West Bank) and to its director, Dr. Khalil Shiqaqi, for making primary sources available to me, and to acknowledge the research assistance of Mr. Ammar Kamel.
2. See Muhammad Y. Muslih, *Toward Coexistence: An Analysis of the Resolutions of the Palestinian National Council* (Washington: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1990).
3. Yezid Sayigh, "Redefining the Basics: The Security of the Palestinian State," in *Regional Security in the Middle East: Arab and Israeli Concepts of Deterrence and Defence* (Washington: United States Institute for Peace, forthcoming).
4. Ahmad Khalidi, "A Palestinian Settlement: Towards a Palestinian Doctrine of National Security," Israeli-Palestinian Peace Research Project Working Paper Series (Jerusalem and Rome: Arab Studies Society, Harry S. Truman Research Institute for the Advancement of Peace and the Institute for International Affairs, 1992), p. 4.
5. Khalil Shiqaqi, "Al-Haymana al-amniyya al-Isra'iliyya wa al-mufawadat al-siyasiyya" (Israeli security hegemony and the political negotiations), *Al-Siyasa al-Filastiniyya* 1, no. 1-2 (Win.-Spr. 1994): 40-48.
6. See Annex II.3.c; Annex IV.8; Article VIII; and Art. III.1 of the Oslo Accord. The text of the accord is reproduced in JPS 23, no. 1 (Aut. 1993), pp. 115-21.
7. See Art. VII.1 in particular. References to the agreement below are cited from the text provided by the Consulate of Israel.
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