

State with No Army, Army with No State

Evolution of the Palestinian Authority Security Forces, 1994–2018

by [Neri Zilber \(/experts/neri-zilber\)](#), [Ghaith al-Omari \(/experts/ghaith-al-omari\)](#)

Mar 27, 2018

Also available in

[العربية \(/ar/policy-analysis/dwlt-bla-jysh-jysh-bla-dwlt-ttwr-qwat-amn-alslitt-alfstynyt-1994-2018\)](#)

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No institution embodies the move toward Palestinian self-determination quite like the Palestinian Authority security forces (PASF). Created in the wake of the Oslo Accords, the PASF encompasses a collection of gendarmerie, police, intelligence, and civil defense services that has played a crucial role, for both good and ill, in every subsequent chapter of Israeli and Palestinian life. Moreover, despite the steady backslide in Israeli-Palestinian diplomatic relations, security cooperation between the two sides endures. This is a testament to shared pragmatism as well as recognition of the cost of the alternative: chaos, violence, and renewed bloodshed. It may well be the most positive aspect of the entire U.S.-led peace process.

In this Policy Focus, Neri Zilber, a journalist, and Ghaith al-Omari, a former advisor to Palestinian negotiators, offer a thorough narrative of the PASF's development from 1994 until the present, filling a major gap in the literature. In doing so, the authors demonstrate how a dispassionate, ground-level analysis of the security situation in the West Bank—and the role of security coordination in particular—could impel a move from mere symbolism to substance in resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

[NERI ZILBER \(http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/experts/view/neri-zilber\)](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/experts/view/neri-zilber), a journalist and analyst on Middle East politics and culture, is an adjunct fellow of The Washington Institute. He was previously a visiting scholar at the Institute in 2014-2015, where his research focused on the Middle East Peace Process, with particular emphasis on Palestinian economics and state-building.

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