

## Peace through Security:

# America's Role in the Development of the Palestinian Authority Security Services

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### ABOUT THE AUTHORS



[Keith Dayton \(/experts/keith-dayton\)](/experts/keith-dayton)

Keith Dayton, a lieutenant general in the U.S. Army, served as the U.S. Security Coordinator for Israel-Palestinian Authority in Tel Aviv, Israel from December 2005 to October 2010. He delivered a keynote address to The Washington Institute's 2009 Soref Symposium.



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**O**n May 7, 2009, Lt. Gen. Keith Dayton delivered the Michael Stein Address on U.S. Middle East Policy at The Washington Institute's 2009 Soref Symposium. General Dayton currently serves as U.S. security coordinator for Israel and the Palestinian Authority, a position he has held since 2005. He recently accepted his appointment to the post for another two-year term.

*The following is a rapporteur's summary of General Dayton's address.*

Although the body I was appointed to head is called the "U.S. Security Coordinator's Team" (USSC), it is truly an international effort. Our ongoing work in the Israeli-Palestinian arena is shaped by significant contributions from Canada, the United Kingdom, and Turkey. More important, all of us believe that the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is in the best interests of all nations, and we are working toward that goal through security measures. We have become steeped in the context and dynamics of the conflict through daily interaction on the ground, which has helped us understand the situation from all perspectives and adjust the mission accordingly.

The USSC was created in March 2005 as way of helping the Palestinians reform their security services. It was tasked with establishing a body that could coordinate various international donors under one plan of action and mobilize resources, while at the same time allaying Israeli fears about the nature and capabilities of the Palestinian Authority Security Forces (PASF). Its mission also includes advising the PA on right-sizing its forces, restructuring and training these forces so that they can enforce the rule of law, and making them accountable to the government and the people.

Given the nature of these missions, USSC team members operate on the ground. Currently, most of the British members are based in Ramallah, while the Canadian contingent -- which includes highly proficient Arabic linguists -- travels about the West Bank freely. In other words, the entire team lives in the region and is thus able to gain a unique understanding of the conflict while building relationships.

The USSC was given permission to engage all parties except terrorists. Therefore, the team works with Palestinians and Israelis daily, makes frequent visits to Jordan and Egypt, and has reached out to the Gulf states as well. It also coordinates its efforts with other regional missions that focus on the Arab-Israeli conflict, such as the Quartet special representative, the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, and various UN initiatives.

When Hamas won the Palestinian Legislative Council elections in January 2006 -- soon after I assumed the title of coordinator in late 2005 -- the USSC's mission shifted overnight. We had to refocus on coordinating international activity to boost Gaza's economy, with efforts centered at the border crossings. Meanwhile, the PASF suffered from neglect under Hamas, which developed its own security forces with help from Syria and Iran. In June 2007, the USSC's mission changed again when Hamas launched a successful coup against the legitimate Palestinian authorities in Gaza. It changed a third time with the appointment of Prime Minister Salam Fayad, after which the team began to concentrate on the West Bank.

The USSC has made progress in four key areas. The first is the "train and equip" effort, which has focused on transforming the Palestinian National Security Forces into a gendarmerie. The training includes a four-month program at the Jordanian International Police Training Center, staffed by U.S. and Jordanian personnel. The U.S.-developed curriculum focuses on human rights, proper use of force, riot control, civil disturbances, unit cohesion, and leadership. Having Jordan host this program was a strategic decision, taking advantage of Israeli-Jordanian trust and enabling the PASF to train in an atmosphere free from domestic influences. As for equipment, all items given to the Palestinian forces are nonlethal, and their disbursement is fully coordinated with both the PA and Israel.

Approximately three battalions of 500 men each have graduated from the program, with a fourth currently in training. These young men (average age 20-22 years) have been vetted by U.S., Israeli, and Jordanian security services. In addition, the Jordanians have schooled them extensively on loyalty to the Palestinian flag -- when they graduate from the training program, they are in a sense new men. They believe that their mission is to build a Palestinian state, and upon returning to the West Bank, they have demonstrated motivation, discipline, and professionalism. Accordingly, they are seen not as collaborators with Israel, but rather as the men who will help bring about a new state. Their actions have made a positive impression on senior Israel Defense Forces (IDF) commanders as well.

A second area of visible USSC progress is capacity-building within the PA Ministry of Interior, which is vital to the formation of a stable government. In Palestinian governance, the interior minister is responsible for all of the president's and prime minister's security forces. When Gaza fell, the ministry fell with it -- actually a favorable development given its dominance by Hamas at the time. Over the past eighteen months, the USSC has invested funds and personnel into reviving the ministry and making it a leading arm of the Palestinian government, with the ability to establish budgets, develop strategies, and engage in operational planning. Such efforts are warranted because the Interior Ministry is the key to normalcy for Palestine.

Infrastructure is a third area of progress. For example, the USSC has worked with Palestinian contractors to build a training college for the Presidential Guard in Jericho, in addition to an operational base that houses personnel who have recently returned from training in Jordan. The USSC has plans to build another operational base in Jenin with the full support of the IDF, as well as to rebuild a police training center in Jericho. These infrastructure improvements have bolstered the pride and confidence of the Palestinian security forces.

A fourth area of progress is senior leader training, which has become the USSC's most popular program. Two classes have already graduated, composed of PASF majors, lieutenant colonels, and colonels. The eight-week course focuses on current problems and how to operate in accordance with international standards. The latter factor enables senior PASF leaders to feel as though they are entering the community of nations.

The results of the USSC security partnership with the PA, Jordan, and Israel have exceeded the most optimistic expectations. Over the past year-and-a-half, the Palestinians have engaged in a series of security offensives throughout the West Bank. In coordination with the IDF, the battalions have sustained the rule of law and have begun to reestablish the PA's authority. More specifically, these campaigns have clamped down on armed gangs, dismantled illegal militias, countered Hamas activity, and reinforced safety and security for Palestinian citizens.

Of course, no security challenge in the West Bank has come close to that of maintaining law and order during Israel's recent Operation Cast Lead in Gaza. Some predicted the operation would spark a third intifada in the West Bank, but the "days of rage" called for by Hamas failed to materialize. The professionalism and competence of the new security forces guaranteed a measured and disciplined approach. They allowed demonstrations but prevented them from becoming violent, keeping the protestors away from Israelis. For their part, Israeli forces trusted the PASF and deliberately kept a low profile, staying away from demonstrators and coordinating their activities with their Palestinian counterparts. The IDF even felt comfortable enough to deploy major units away from the West Bank in order to help in Gaza. Throughout this period, the lack of support for Hamas was clear, as most Palestinians seemed to blame the group for bringing chaos to Gaza. As such, the demonstrations against the Gaza operation, while widespread, remained under control and peaceful.

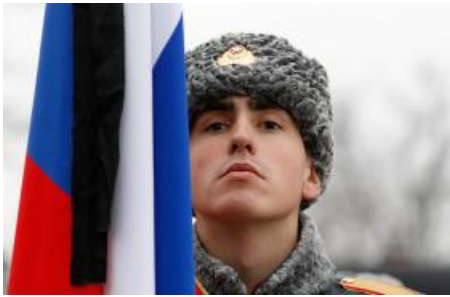
Moving forward, the USSC will continue working with the PA Interior Ministry to transform, professionalize, and restructure the security forces in the West Bank. This will entail more training and equipment, increased capacity-building, intensified work with the European Union, and additional infrastructure projects. The USSC will also carry on with a number of other key plans, such as training and equipping three more battalions in Jordan; building two more operational base camps in the West Bank; expanding the senior leadership training program to include midlevel officers; working with the Israelis to explore ways of reducing the IDF footprint in the West Bank as Palestinian capabilities grow; improving the capacity of the Palestinian Civil Defense, which includes EMTs, firemen, and other first responders; and continuing a series of courses on logistics, leadership, first aid, English language, and driver education. In addition, the USSC is aware that there is a need for a functional administrative and logistical structure unique to the PA, and it hopes to design one in tandem with the Interior Ministry.

It is difficult to say whether peace can truly be achieved through security measures, and all parties involved have a long way to go and many formidable challenges to overcome. Serious work needs to be done with regard to terrorism, and the USSC is actively exploring options on this issue with the Palestinians, Israelis, and Jordanians. There is also critical work ahead on managing borders and crossings. Moreover, Gaza and the armed Hamas cadres therein present major challenges to future Palestinian statehood. The situation is not hopeless, however. The USSC's continuous presence is beginning to pay off, building new facts on the ground and developing genuine partnerships. The road to peace is a very difficult one, but compared to past years, we are on that road and are moving forward. ❖

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