

The Palestinians: Between State Failure and Civil War

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Despite functioning as a de facto state since its creation in 1994, the Palestinian Authority has long been crippled by "the four Fs": fawda (chaos), fitna (strife), falatan (lawlessness), and fassad (corruption). These conditions -- the hallmarks of state failure -- continue to define life in the PA-controlled West Bank and show signs of returning in Hamas-controlled Gaza. How did this state of affairs come to pass? And what can the Palestinians, Israel, and the international community do to avert the worst-case scenarios of outright collapse or civil war?

In this Policy Focus, Michael Eisenstadt diagnoses the many longstanding ails that have kept the PA from governing effectively. The Palestinians face numerous obstacles to meaningful reform and stability, including economic stagnation, unsustainable population growth, a self-defeating strategy of armed struggle, and Yasser Arafat's enduring legacy of corruption and unaccountability. These problems have been exacerbated by -- and, in many cases, have given rise to -- external obstacles such as Israeli security restrictions, international sanctions against Hamas, and continued interference from Iran and Syria. Failure to formulate a comprehensive, multilateral plan for overcoming these obstacles could have untold implications for the Palestinians, the regional security equation, and overall U.S. interests in the Middle East.

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