

State with No Army, Army with No State Evolution of the Palestinian Authority Security Forces, 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.

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