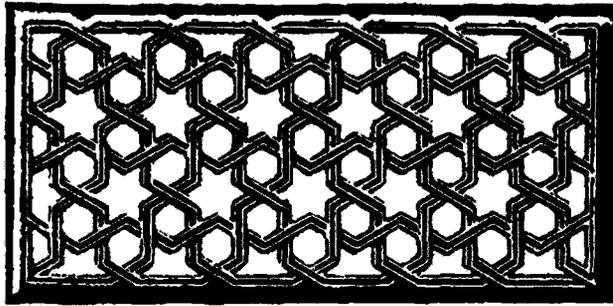


POLICY FOCUS

**THE PALESTINIAN
SECURITY SERVICES:
BETWEEN POLICE AND ARMY**

GAL LUFT

THE WASHINGTON INSTITUTE



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RESEARCH MEMORANDUM

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About the Author

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Understanding the PSS

Five years after the signing of the Oslo Accords, the Israeli and Palestinian societies are still ambivalent about them, and the debate about their historic significance remains vibrant. Regardless of whether Oslo was a positive development or an irreparable error, one factor is indisputable: The agreement gave birth to a new armed force west of the Jordan River—that is, the Palestinian Security Services (PSS)—a dominant new player in the Israeli–Palestinian arena that cannot be ignored.

This Policy Focus answers the question of whether the PSS is oriented solely toward police work in compliance with the definitions of the Oslo Accords or whether it is the foundation for a future Palestinian army that will come to life if or when statehood is declared. It then shows how the PSS could be a potential adversary to the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) in the event of a future armed confrontation in the territories resulting, for example, from a unilateral declaration of Palestinian statehood.

Background

The formation of the PSS was a complicated process. The newly arrived force included many Palestinian Liberation Army (PLA) veterans who had to accommodate to new surroundings among the local Palestinian residents. The PLA veterans had to adapt mentally to the transformation from a military to a law enforcement body—a difficult change, because as PSS officers they lacked necessary training and logistical support. Their reliance on the local population for daily provisions often disturbed their security cooperation with the IDF and frequently created tension. The wave of Hamas terrorist attacks on Israel in October 1994 led the Palestinian Authority (PA) to the verge of an open confrontation with Palestinian opposition movements, culminating on November 18, 1994, when the Civil Police (one branch of the PSS) opened fire on thousands of Hamas demonstrators in Gaza. “Black Friday,” as the incident was called, became a watershed in the PA’s relations with its opposition and led to a series of reforms and priority changes within the PSS emphasizing the objective of regime preservation and the containment of domestic threats.

An Army in the Making?

The PSS today is a cumbersome, multifaceted security apparatus consisting of no fewer than twelve different branches; the Oslo II agreement, however, allowed only six branches (seven including the Coast Guard). The proliferation of the units as well as the difficulty in defining

their exact responsibilities often cause their jurisdictions to overlap, in turn leading to street clashes, confusion, and inefficient work. The commanders of the different branches are often at odds with each other. Practicing the strategy of divide and rule, Yasir Arafat, the commander in chief of all the security forces, has built his security establishment in such a way that only he can arbitrate among the different forces. This system of command ensures that none of the security forces becomes powerful enough to pose a threat to his leadership.

There is a discrepancy between the number of PSS officers the PA is believed to have, the number it is allowed to have according to the Oslo II agreement, and the official number confirmed by the Palestinians. The PA forwarded to the Israelis a payroll of only 18,600 named officers (it did not want to name the others, as Oslo II gives Israel the right to veto PSS candidates), but Oslo II allows the PSS to have 30,000 officers. Many Israelis assert the real number, however, is well over 40,000. If true, that makes the PA the most heavily policed territory in the world, with a ratio of one officer for every fifty residents. (By comparison, the U.S. ratio is 1:400.) A further discrepancy exists regarding the number and types of weapons employed by the PSS. Despite the PA's vehement denials, many Israeli military analysts believe it has stockpiles of weapons that exceed by far the number allowed by Oslo. These analysts also assert that the PA has accumulated anti-tank and anti-aircraft missiles for use in a future confrontation with the IDF. These assertions raise the question of whether ensuring public law and order is the real *raison d'être* of the PSS or whether, under the auspices of a simple law enforcement body, the rudimentary army of a future Palestinian state is developing.

This paper concludes that the PSS in its present shape is a hybrid, too complex and overstaffed to be the police force required for the preservation of law and order in the Palestinian territories, yet lacking the infrastructure required for the creation of a regular standing army. Too many fundamental components that ought to exist in any military establishment—among them, a cohesive general staff, an organized officer corps, a training mechanism for the intermediate and high levels of command, and a nucleus of professional and technical corps—do not exist in the PSS. Furthermore, owing to the severe budgetary constraints under which the PA is operating, which result in a very low compensation rate for its recruits, the PSS has failed to become an attractive employer for educated young Palestinians. As a result, the force has turned into a refuge for the lowest socioeconomic level of Palestinian society. As a possible solution to the gradual deterioration of the PSS's human resources, the PA is considering mandatory military service, to be implemented after Oslo's limitations are removed. In summary, the PA has encouraged a militaristic ethos in Palestinian society and the future introduction of mandatory conscription would be a natural development once statehood is declared. Such mandatory service would ease the economic burden of the PA, as all the current officers are paid professionals; it will also enable the PA to conscript up to 100,000 soldiers in a relatively short time. For the time being, however, the PA is trapped between its financial constraints on the one hand and its aspirations for further expansion on the other, and it seems unlikely that it will be able to make any considerable progress toward the establishment of a standing army—and certainly not before May 1999—unless major economic improvements occur.

Future Clashes

The difficulties that the Israeli–Palestinian peace process is undergoing raise the question, What will be the role of the PSS in the event of a violent confrontation with the IDF? The most serious precedent of IDF soldiers exchanging fire with PSS officers occurred during the Hasmonean Tunnel riots in September 1996. The bloody riots, which inflicted a heavy toll on both sides, became a watershed in Palestinian–Israeli relations. The event taught the Palestinians that, despite their military inferiority in comparison with formidable Israeli forces, they were still strong enough to inflict numerous casualties on the IDF by using basic weapons and unsophisticated training methods. They also realized that the use of force against Israel could become a means to achieve political goals as well as a means to cripple Israeli national morale. The September 1996 riots, perceived by the Palestinians as a national victory, instilled in many of them a belief that an armed confrontation, even if not very desirable, is a viable option for which they should be prepared. The preparations for such a possibility reflect the lessons the Palestinians derived from the last conflict. They have introduced improved combat techniques, such as sniping and anti-tank and anti-aircraft abilities. The training of small formations such as platoons is also a new development—and one that is very uncommon among police forces.

In summary, the PSS—despite its rudimentary nature and feeble image, its lack of resources, and its constant scrutiny by Israel and the international community—has acquired sufficient capacity to become one of Israel’s most challenging adversaries. Its participation and capability in a future clash should not be underestimated.

Editor's Note

As one of the key questions explored in this study is whether the Palestinian Security Services (PSS) constitute a simple police force or a rudimentary army, this paper will refer to PSS field employees as “police officers” or “intelligence agents” rather than as “soldiers.”

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Addendum: This Policy Focus went to press prior to the signing of the Wye River Memorandum on October 23, 1998.

Introduction

As the clock continues to tick toward May 4, 1999, the date that marks the end of the Oslo Accord's five-year interim period, many Middle East analysts are trying to predict what Palestinian Authority (PA) chairman Yasir Arafat's next move will be should he not achieve his goal of statehood through negotiations by that date. One of the contingencies explicitly discussed by Palestinian officials is the unilateral declaration of a Palestinian state immediately after the deadline has passed.¹ This possibility has prompted analysts to envision numerous scenarios of confrontation.² One such scenario, propounded by many senior Israeli and Palestinian security experts, describes Arafat formally delivering a historic proclamation of independence and declaring the establishment of a Palestinian state. This state, according to the scenario, would be immediately recognized by most of the international community excluding, perhaps, the United States and another Israeli ally, Micronesia.³ Questions regarding Israel's potential reaction then arise. How would Israel react to this unilateral Palestinian step? Would it reciprocate by annexing parts or all of the West Bank and Gaza? Would it try to downplay the Palestinian action or even disregard it altogether?

The future is unpredictable, probably because the main players themselves have not yet agreed on their preferred strategies. Yet, one cannot avoid addressing some of the more discouraging and pessimistic scenarios for the "day after"—those which predict an outburst of violence resulting in an armed confrontation between Israel and the new Palestinian state. Two previous shootouts between the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and the branches of the Palestinian Security Services (PSS), as well as several other cases of tension that were defused at the last moment, prove that such a violent outcome is not only possible but probable—and dangerous for both sides.⁴ The next confrontation might challenge the IDF with one of the most complicated and costly types of warfare—that is, urban warfare—similar to that which the IDF experienced in the battles in Beirut during 1982. Some of the Palestinian veterans of that encounter, who fought for the Palestinian Liberation Army (PLA), are today the senior commanders of the uniformed, armed, and organized security branches of the PSS. Five years after the first PSS officers arrived in Gaza and Jericho from the Palestinian diaspora, an armed force that cannot be ignored has evolved in the territories.

This Policy Focus has two objectives. First, it will describe the structure of and major development trends in the PSS to explain what kind of security apparatus the PA is establishing under the auspices of the Israeli–Palestinian accords. It will examine whether the PSS is oriented toward police work or whether it is a foundation for a future Palestinian army that

will come to life if and when statehood is declared. It will also try to assess whether the PA has any plans for such a future metamorphosis of its security forces.

The second goal of this paper is to assess the strength of the PSS and its ability to pose a military challenge to the IDF if a clash between the two were to occur. After the Hasmonean Tunnel riots in September 1996, further Israeli–Palestinian clashes seemed imminent on several occasions when an impasse in the peace process seemed particularly acute.⁵ The use of force as a means of breaking the deadlock in the peace negotiations might be the last option for the Palestinians if the process were to reach a complete standstill. Some of the IDF’s most senior generals—including Lt. Gen. Amnon Lipkin-Shahak, the former chief of staff; Maj. Gen. Uzi Dayan, the former commander of the Central Command and current deputy chief of staff; and Maj. Gen. Moshe Ya’alon, the former head of Military Intelligence and current head of the Central Command—have recently expressed their concerns about the potential for war in the territories.⁶ Their concern reflects the overall perception that an armed conflict with the Palestinians is imminent and that the IDF is seriously preparing for it. This paper will examine the measures taken by both sides in their preparations for a scenario that, however undesirable, might become a reality.

Notes

- 1 For example, see Roni Shaked, David Regev, and Smadar Perry, “Arafat Threatens to Announce the Creation of a Palestinian State,” *Yediot Ahronot* (in Hebrew), March 2, 1997, p. 13.
- 2 “We Declare a State,” *Jerusalem Post* (international edition), May 23, 1998, p.14; Ze’ev Schiff, “What Will Happen on May 4th, 1999?” *Ha’aretz* (internet edition), April 24, 1998; and Isabel Kershner, “Palestine Rising,” *Jerusalem Report*, July 6, 1998, pp. 22–27.
- 3 Rami Tal, “Declaration–War,” *Yediot Ahronot* weekend supplement (in Hebrew), June 16, 1998, p. 10.
- 4 The first IDF–PSS shootout happened on July 17, 1994, when riots broke out at the Erez checkpoint. PSS officers fired at the Palestinian workers and later exchanged fire with the IDF. The second incident was in the Hasmonean Tunnel riots on September 26, 1996.
- 5 Following the Israeli building plans in Har Homa and Ras al-Amud in eastern Jerusalem, a serious clash in Gaza was averted after the IDF prevented a Palestinian supply convoy from passing through a security road. Palestinian and Israeli reinforcements soon arrived at the scene and the conflict was defused at the last moment. See Herb Keinon, Margot Dudkevitch, and Steve Rodan, “Clash in Gaza Averted,” *Jerusalem Post* (international edition), July 11, 1998, pp. 1–2; also David Regev, “The Palestinians Disconnected Gush Katif and IDF Tanks Were Put on Alert,” *Yediot Ahronot* (in Hebrew), July 3, 1998, pp. 1–2.
- 6 Alex Fishman interview of IDF Deputy Chief of Staff Maj. Gen. Uzi Dayan, “The Palestinians Are Preparing for War,” *Yediot Ahronot* weekend supplement (in Hebrew), June 26, 1998, pp. 14–15; Yoav Limor and Oded Granot, “Interview With Maj. Gen. Moshe Ya’alon” in *Ma’ariv* (in Hebrew), weekend supplement, April 16, 1998, p. 2; and interview with Lt. Gen. Amnon Lipkin-Shahak in Arieh O’Sullivan, “Army: PA Ready For Open Warfare,” *Jerusalem Post* (international edition), January 31, 1998, p. 3.

PSS Structure and Organization

The General Security Service (GSS) was established in May 1994 with the signing by Israel and the Palestinian Authority (PA) of the Cairo Agreement on the Gaza Strip and the Jericho Area (see Appendix II); the official title of the GSS is the Palestinian Directorate of Police Force, and in the Cairo agreement it is referred to simply as the “Palestinian Police.” In actuality, this term is misleading. The GSS is the umbrella organization nominally responsible for coordinating and maintaining most of the Palestinian security bodies and services—it includes not only police but also intelligence organizations. The GSS has a director general, Nasr Yusef, but the supreme commander is the chairman of the PA, Yasir Arafat. There are two separate headquarters, for Gaza and the West Bank; each operates independently. The GSS coordinates nine administrative departments responsible for training, logistics, communication, finance and political guidance. On the operational level it coordinates ten services. The two additional services, the Special Security Force (SSF) and *al-Amn al-Ri’asah* (Presidential Security), operate directly under Arafat’s guidance (see the organizational table). According to the Oslo Accords, however, the GSS should be the highest, and only, security authority under which all the other services would operate. Together, the GSS, SSF, and *al-Amn al-Ri’asah* constitute the Palestinian Security Services (PSS).

GSS Security Branches

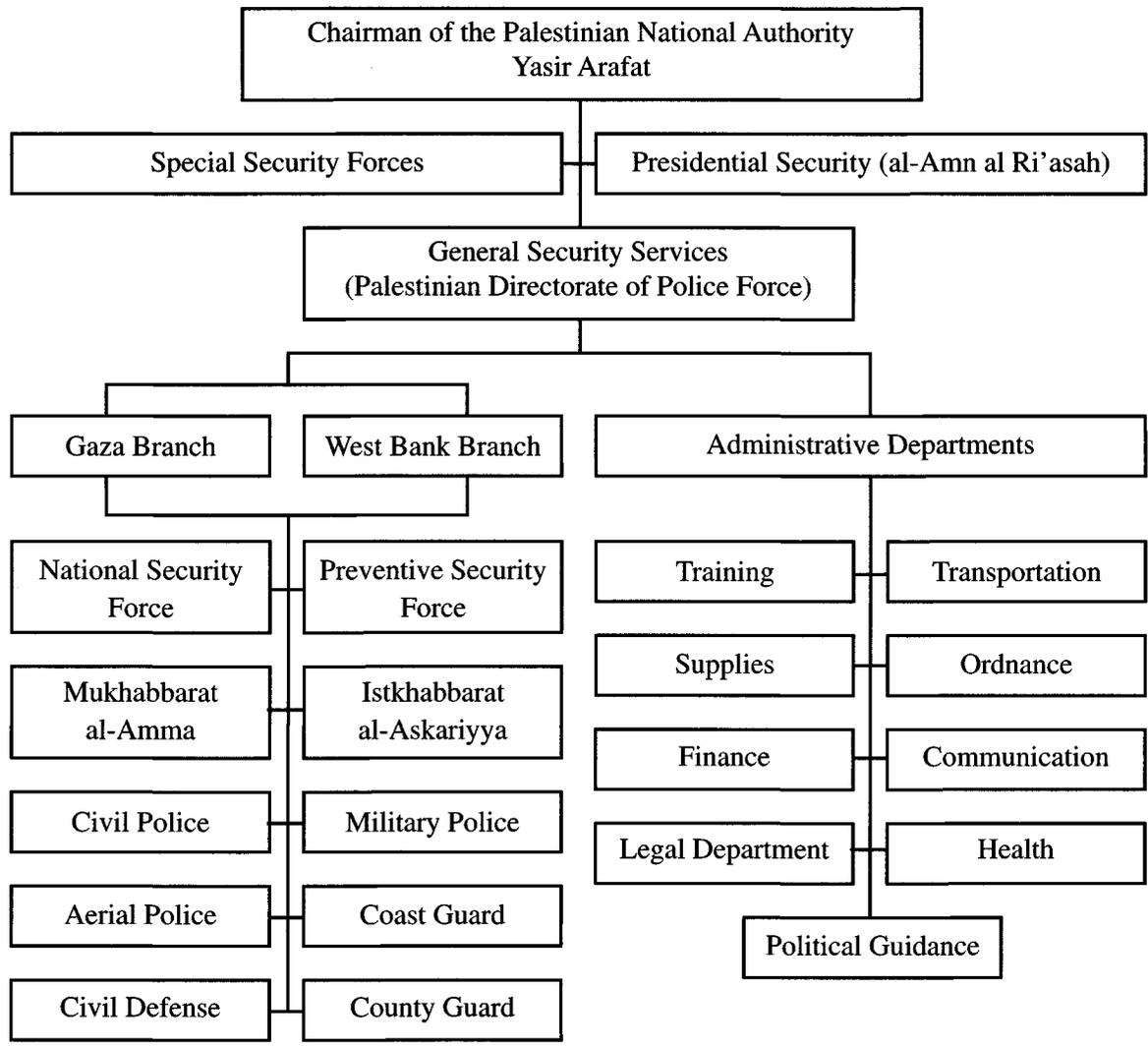
The ten services that fall under the rubric of the GSS include the following:

- **National Security Force (*Quwat al-Amn al-Watani*).** As the largest security service, with more than 14,000 officers, the National Security Force (NSF) is responsible for most of the missions along the borders of “Area A” (see map, p. 26) and inside the cities. Among these missions are the Israeli–Palestinian Joint Patrols (JPs), guarding checkpoints on the cities’ outskirts, and participating in other general security-related missions. The NSF recruited most of its officers from the Palestinian Liberation Army (PLA) and gradually added increasing numbers of local recruits. Gen. Nasr Yusef formerly commanded the NSF; its current commander is Saeb Ajez. This branch was first officially included in the GSS (as “Public Security”) in the May 1994 Cairo Agreement (see Appendix II).
- **Civil Police (*al-Shurta Madaniyya*).** The Civil Police, also known as the Blue Police, is the main law enforcement tool in the PA. Like the NSF, it was one of the original branches of the GSS mentioned in the Cairo Agreement. The Civil Police handles ordinary police functions such as directing traffic, arresting common criminals, and keeping public

order. Headed by Ghazi Jubali, it employs more than 10,000 police officers in the West Bank and Gaza. According to the September 1995 Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip—"Oslo II"—the Civil Police will also deploy in twenty-five selected villages throughout the West Bank commonly known as "Area B+." (Palestinians are generally not allowed to carry firearms in Area B, but officers in these villages are allowed to patrol, to carry firearms within the village territory, and to maintain public order.) The Civil Police also spearheads a 700-officer rapid-deployment special police unit that is trained to handle complex crises, such as severe riots and counterterrorism operations. Commanders of the unit received training in the former Soviet Union, and one of their important roles is to train instructors for the other GSS units.¹

- **Preventive Security Force (*al-Amn al-Wiqa'i*).** This plainclothes security force operates in the West Bank and Gaza with an estimated power of close to 5,000 agents and is

The Structure of the Palestinian Security Services



known to be the largest of the PA's intelligence forces. The PSF was first officially included in the GSS as part of Oslo II. Headed by Col. Jibril Rajoub in the West Bank and Col. Muhammad Dahlan in Gaza, this body is involved in preventive actions against terrorist and opposition groups as well as information gathering in Israel. Some of the PSF activities are associated with violence, abduction of civilians, interrogations, torture, and other illegal actions; indeed, the PSF has achieved a reputation for human rights violations including the death of tortured detainees.²

- **General Intelligence (*Mukhabbarat al-Amma*).** Headed by Maj. Gen. Amin al-Hindi, the Mukhabbarat is the official PA intelligence agency and was one of the original branches of the GSS, as delineated in the Cairo Agreement. With a current strength of about 3,000 officers, the Mukhabbarat is involved in intelligence gathering inside and outside the territories, counterespionage operations, and developing relations with other foreign intelligence bodies.
- **Military Intelligence (*Istkhabbarat al-Askariyya*).** A smaller intelligence body headed by Musa Arafat, the Istkhabbarat is a preventive apparatus that deals mainly with arrests and interrogations of opposition activists who might endanger the stability of the regime. This body also investigates some of the illegal actions of the PA's other intelligence and security bodies. The Istkhabbarat is mentioned in neither the Cairo Agreement nor Oslo II and is one of the PSS's five unofficially recognized bodies.
- **Military Police.** A subordinate body to the Istkhabbarat, the Military Police specializes in riot control, arrests, protection of important people and important installations, prison maintenance, and enforcement of order and discipline among the security bodies. Like the Istkhabbarat, this unit is not officially recognized in the Oslo Accords.
- **Coast Guard (*Shurta Bahariyya*).** This elite unit deployed mainly in Gaza consists of about 1,000 officers. Its official objective is the protection of the PA's territorial water mainly against arms- and drug-smugglers from Egypt. It owns five motorboats equipped with machine guns. Most of the members are recruits from the Palestinian diaspora who used to belong to the overseas naval unit of *Fatah*, Arafat's inner circle within the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). Upon their arrival to the PA areas, they received special commando training, making the unit highly valuable and able to deal with dangerous challenges. The Coast Guard is one of the original units designated in the Cairo Agreement.
- **Aerial Police (*Shurta al-Jawiya*).** A rudimentary aerial unit based on Force 14, *Fatah*'s aviation unit, the Aerial Police is responsible for operating and maintaining the PA's five helicopters, which are used mainly for the transportation of Arafat and other Palestinian leaders. This unit is not, however, mentioned in any of the agreements.
- **Civil Defense (*al-Difa'a al-Madani*).** Described officially in the Cairo Agreement as Emergency Services and Rescue (see Appendix II), Civil Defense consists of fire department and rescue services, which it coordinates in conjunction with other civilian services during emergencies. In normal times the body administers a massive program of first aid and rescue training for the civilian population.

- **County Guard (*al-Amn al-Mahafza*)**. This small force supplies security services to the county governors and their offices. The County Guard summons people for questioning and resolves local quarrels. It is not officially mentioned in any of the agreements to date.

Additional Security

Despite the Cairo Agreement's definition of the GSS as the highest and only security authority, Arafat also created two additional apparati outside GSS control and accountable only to the PA chairman himself. These units are the SSF and al-Amn al-Ri'asah.

- **Special Security Force (*al-Amn al-Khass*)**. The Special Security Force (SSF) is headed by Gen. Abu Yusuf al-Wahidi. It is the newest of the services (established January 1995) and probably the smallest. Its importance is great, however, as it works under Arafat's

Force	Commander	Estimated Troops	Equipment	Uniforms
National Security Force	Saeb Ajez	14,000	AK-47s	green; black or green beret
Civil Police	Ghazi Jubali	10,000	AK-47s, Karl Gustavs, pistols	blue; blue or black beret
Preventive Security Force	Jibril Rajoub, West Bank; Muhammad Dahlan, Gaza	5,000 total	AK-47s, pistols	plainclothes
Mukhabbarat al-Amma	Amin al-Hindi	3,000	AK-47s	plainclothes
Istkhbarat al-Askariyya	Musa Arafat	several hundred	AK-47s	green; red beret
Military Police	(unpublished)	several hundred	AK-47s	green; red beret and white belt
Civil Defense	(unpublished)	several hundred	AK-47s	black; black beret
Coast Guard	(unpublished)	1,000	AK-47s, M-16s, pistols, RPK machine guns	black and white; black beret
Special Security Force	Abu Yusuf al-Wahidi	a few hundred	unpublished	plainclothes
Presidential Security (<i>al-Amn al-Ri'asah</i>)	Faisal Abu Sharah	3,000	AK-47s, M-16s, pistols	green and brown camouflage; red beret
<i>Intelligence Unit</i>	<i>(unpublished)</i>	<i>100-200</i>	<i>AK-47s, pistols</i>	<i>white; black beret</i>
<i>Presidential Guard</i>	<i>(unpublished)</i>	<i>100-200</i>	<i>AK-47s, M-16s</i>	<i>black; black beret</i>

direct supervision. Although officially its main objective is to gather information about the activities of opposition groups in foreign countries, especially Arab ones, its actual function may be to gather information on the PA's other security services.³ The SSF also supplies Arafat with information about any corruption and illegal actions by PA officials. Technically, however, the SSF is not mentioned in any of the agreements.

- **Presidential Security (*al-Amn al-Ri'asah*).** Al-Amn al-Ri'asah is a high-quality security force commanded by Faisal Abu Sarah and estimated at 3,000 officers, a majority of whom were once members of Force 17, Arafat's security guard while he led the PLO in the diaspora. It is responsible for Arafat's personal security and operates under his direction, although, as originally defined in Oslo II, the unit was to be part of the GSS. The protection of the chairman, as well as other political personalities and important installations, is the main objective of al-Amn al-Ri'asah, but in addition it handles counterterrorism and is responsible for arresting opposition activists and suspects of collaboration with Israel. Two subsidiary bodies of al-Amn al-Ri'asah are the Intelligence Unit, whose main mission is information gathering about the activities of the opposition movements and other domestic threats, and the Presidential Guard, Arafat's most loyal and trusted inner circle. This latter unit provides the tight security around him, preventing any assassination attempts. Although officially Force 17 disbanded when Arafat returned to Gaza, the background of most of the officers in al-Amn al-Ri'asah leads most Palestinians to refer to this branch simply as Force 17.

Prominent Features and Personalities

The most prominent features of the PSS are the proliferation of its units and the difficulty of defining their different functions. There are, for example, eight different bodies dealing with intelligence and anti-opposition related activities. Their overlapping responsibilities often lead to street clashes, confusion, inefficient work, and—in more extreme cases—battles over blurred jurisdictions.⁴ Coordinating the services to prevent such unfortunate events is complicated because Arafat built the forces in such a manner that only the PA chairman could arbitrate between them, following the famous strategy of “divide and rule.”

Three distinct groups of generals are represented in the security establishment. The first consists of PLA veterans who arrived in the territories in 1994 as part of the Oslo Accords and were soon appointed to some of the most senior positions; these men include Nasr Yusef, commander of the GSS; Abdel al-Razzak Majaideh, commander of the GSS's Gaza units; and Ziad al-Atrash, representative to the Liaison Security Committee with the Israelis. These generals, all PLA leaders, brought with them varying levels of military experience, but the fact that they were “outsiders” who did not actively participate in the Palestinian *intifada* (uprising) affected their credibility and status in Palestinian society.

Strong popular support was given to the second group of leaders, including Jibril Rajoub and Muhammad Dahlan, who represent the heritage of the Palestinian struggle for independence during the *intifada*. Rajoub, who spent a total of sixteen years in Israeli prisons, was one of the original leaders of Fatah in the West Bank wing of the United National Leadership of the Uprising (UNLU). Dahlan was arrested eleven times by the Israeli security

Name	Security Body	Place, Year of Birth	Brief Biography
Jibril Rajoub	Preventive Security Force, West Bank	Dura, West Bank, 1953	After 1967, Rajoub became a member of Fatah, and in 1968 he was sentenced to eighteen years in jail for throwing a grenade on an Israeli bus. He was released in 1985 and became one of the leaders of the intifada in 1987. He was deported to Tunis in 1988 and there became a close aide to Arafat. He is fluent in Hebrew.
Muhammad Dahlan	Preventive Security Force, Gaza	Khan Yunis, Gaza, 1961	As the leader of Fatah's <i>Shabiba</i> movement in Gaza, Dahlan was arrested eleven times by the Israelis and was finally deported to Tunis in 1988. He returned to Gaza in 1994 by Arafat's invitation and assumed command over the PSF in Gaza.
Nasr Yusef	General Security Services	Bet She'an, Mandatory Palestine, 1943	Yusef received his military training in Southeast Asia and was also trained in Sudan. He became a key leader of the Palestine Liberation Army in Lebanon and was a senior commander of Fatah forces there. He arrived in the territories in 1994. In the last few years he has lost Arafat's favor and his position has weakened.
Amin al-Hindi	<i>Mukhabbarat al-Amma</i> (General Intelligence)	Gaza, 1949	Hindi grew up in Gaza and was a member of Fatah. In 1972, he participated in planning the massacre of Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympics. Wanted by the Israelis for many years, he "disappeared" in Tunis and was recalled by Arafat in 1994 to assume command of the <i>Mukhabbarat</i> .

forces when he was the Gaza leader of the Fatah *Shabiba* (youth) movement. Both Rajoub and Dahlan were deported in 1988 and their life stories are resplendent with Palestinian heroism and struggle. A wave of popular support, which surpassed by far the support for the PLA generals, accompanied their 1994 return to the territories. Support for these two leaders has been diminishing lately since the PSF, which they command, has been associated with many cases of human rights violations, violence, and intimidation; among other incidents, Rajoub apparently ordered the PSF to harass Palestinian politicians through violent means.⁵ Yet, his controversial image evokes a mixture of awe and admiration, and he has even been mentioned as a possible successor to Arafat.

In his effort to maneuver between the two schools of commanders, Arafat gradually introduced a third group of officers, who were brought to the territories from abroad to command the more sensitive security bodies. The main figure in this category is Brig. Gen. Amin al-Hindi, head of the *Mukhabbarat*, who had "disappeared" after his involvement in the 1972 massacre of Israeli athletes in the Munich Olympics. Other commanders in this third category are Abu Yusuf al-Wahidi, commander of the SSF; Faisal Abu Sharah, who com-

mands al-Amn al-Ri'asah; and Ghazi Jubali, commander of the Civil Police in Gaza. All of the above officers are known to be extremely loyal to Arafat, and this could explain why he entrusted to them his most important security bodies.

Looking again at the whole picture, it seems that Arafat, by keeping his security forces under the command of a heterogeneous group of generals who are often at odds with each other, has managed to prevent the formation of a cohesive general staff with excessive power, along the lines of those responsible for the overthrow of so many Arab regimes in the Middle East.

One can discern two primary reasons for the abundance of intelligence-related services—one that answers “why” and the other “how.” As to why, the PA must constantly monitor and be wary of Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad to diminish the political threat they pose. The intelligence services therefore represent Arafat’s emphasis on counteropposition and counterterrorist activities and his attempt to weaken Islamist activists as much as he can. More important, and in answer to how Arafat has increased the size of his force, intelligence officers are mostly plainclothes agents who look and dress like regular civilians. The PA can thus greatly inflate the number of security personnel without apparently violating the interim agreement quotas on employing police officers.

As for training, each of the security services recruits and trains its own men. It started as a training system in which, according to GSS commander General Yusef, “every unit is improvising.”⁶ In time, however, it turned into a continuously improving system with several training bases in Gaza and the West Bank. Although Britain, Austria, the Netherlands, Egypt, and Scandinavian nations have all helped to train some of the men, the PSS as a whole still lacks the resources for an extensive program. Training usually runs from ten days to one month of intensive courses. For more elite units like al-Amn al-Ri'asah, the training is three months.⁷ Daily contact with the IDF has also had a positive influence on the quality of the Palestinian forces. Although Israel was never directly involved in the instruction of Palestinian forces, it was only natural that the NSF, for example, simply by operating alongside a well-equipped standing army like the IDF, would soon be tempted to emulate and adopt many of the Israelis’ drills and techniques. These included new disciplinary measures, battle drills, ways to operate radio equipment, and regulations for handling weapons. This constant improvement-by-emulation had a positive effect on the improved operational capabilities of the PSS.

Notes

- 1 The only unclassified information about this unit was aired by Russian television in May 1998 after the PSS had sent to Russia a request for assistance in supplying special-purpose equipment for the unit. “Palestinian Special Purpose Police Want Russian Equipment,” *Moscow NTV*, May 28, 1998, in FBIS-NES-98-150 (Foreign Broadcast Information Service—Near East and South Asia, daily report online), June 2, 1998.
- 2 See a report from the Israeli human rights organization B’Tselem, *‘Neither Law nor Justice’: Report on the Palestinian Preventive Security Service* (Jerusalem: B’Tselem, August 1995). Also, *Amnesty*

International Report 1997: Palestinian Authority (online at www.amnesty.org/ailib/aireport/ar97/MDE21.htm), specifying, "At least 1,200 people were arrested on security grounds. . . Torture of detainees was widespread. Four people died in detention, including three who died after torture. At least 10 people were killed by members of the Palestinian security services. . ."

- 3 Graham Usher, "The Politics of Internal Security: The PA's New Intelligence Services," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 25, no. 2 (Winter 1996), p. 24.
- 4 Such a battle led to the killing of an al-Amn al-Ri'asah member by the PSF after both forces interfered in a local family feud. Louise Lief and David Makovsky, "Mourning Without End?" *U.S. News & World Report*, February 6, 1995, p. 46.
- 5 Members of the Palestinian Legislative Council were physically attacked in Ramallah by PSF agents on August 25, 1998. According to their testimony, the attack came as a direct order from Jibril Rajoub and they demanded that Arafat put Rajoub on trial and fire him. See Mona Eltahawy, "Arafat Orders Inquiry on Attacks on Lawmakers," Reuters (online), August 27, 1998.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Interview with GSS Commander Gen. Nasr Yusef in Niel MacFarquhar, "How Palestinian Policemen Were Drawn into the Conflict," *New York Times*, September 29, 1996, p. 1.

The Growth of the PSS

The preliminary deliberations between the Israeli and Palestinian delegations that preceded the signing of the Cairo Agreement in May 1994 raised the issues of the structure and the size of the Palestinian security forces that would be stationed in Gaza and Jericho (see Appendix II).¹ The Palestinian negotiators demanded that the main core of the 9,000 police officers agreed upon would be “imported” from the existing formations of the Palestinian Liberation Army (PLA) spread throughout the Arab world. The rationale was simple: The PLA units were the only formations available for immediate deployment in the territories. They were relatively well-trained, had a defined command echelon, and—perhaps most important—were outsiders, unassociated with the new leadership that had been forged in the territories during the *intifada* (uprising). The Israelis acquiesced and 7,000 police officers from abroad were granted permission to relocate to Gaza and Jericho, accompanied by their spouses and children.² The redeployment took place in mid-May 1994. Buses brought the new Palestinian officers into the two areas, and they quickly took over the security mandate from the Israel Defense Forces (IDF).

For the new officers of the Palestinian Security Services (PSS), the beginning was difficult. Coming from seven different Arab countries, the officers evoked the image of a Tower of Babel; differences in mentality, level of military proficiency, and even language made coordination difficult. The relations with their Israeli counterparts were also problematic. There was mutual suspicion between the PSS and IDF officers, aggravated by daily threats of gunpoint and rifle cocking performed in most cases by the Palestinian side.³ Many of the soldiers on both sides who were given field assignments were not familiar with the details of the complicated Cairo Agreement, causing even more friction and tension. Nevertheless, the PSS succeeded in maintaining a relatively steady working relationship with the IDF, mainly because the Cairo Agreement included and imposed a well-defined structural mechanism to coordinate its Israeli and Palestinian members. The Joint Security Committee (JSC), which is the highest liaison apparatus, directs the two Palestinian–Israeli Regional Security Committees (RSCs): one in the West Bank and the other in Gaza. These RSCs are responsible for solving local disputes and for enhancing mutual security by ensuring that both sides fulfill their obligations according to the agreement. Interestingly, the degree of JSC coordination is subject to changes in the political climate, but this has not been the case for the RSCs. That is, whenever the peace process has faced difficulties, JSC cooperation has subsequently been minimized. Yet, at the lower level of the coordination mechanism—among junior commanders in the field—the eight district coordination offices (DCOs) in the

West Bank and the two in Gaza are staffed by Palestinians and by Arabic-speaking IDF officers (mostly of Druze origin) with good communication skills. The DCOs have benefitted from plenty of mutual patience, benevolence, and goodwill, and they have had a decisive effect on preserving a level of coordination that sustained even the most serious crises of the limping peace process.

But whereas the PSS eventually stabilized relations with its Israeli partners, officers still faced serious hardships with respect to their relations with the local Palestinian population. The newly arrived officers, lonely and detached from their extended families and lacking necessary logistical and organizational support—such as laundry services, cooked meals, showering facilities, and a sufficient supply of uniforms—started to depend on the local residents who hosted them, fed them, and opened their doors to them. This bond with the host population soon affected their ability to pursue freely the mission of enforcing law and order under their jurisdiction. The Palestinian population had high expectations from the armed and uniformed officers patrolling their cities. This institution symbolized national independence, heroism, and the prevalence of public order. Yet, the local population's hope and trust faded quickly. The PSS officers, frustrated and underpaid, soon showed signs of corruption—raiding businesses, collecting protection money, and using excessive force.⁴ These were the first ominous signs of the development of a police state.⁵

On July 17, 1994, less than three weeks after Palestinian Authority (PA) chairman Yasir Arafat's arrival in Gaza, the PSS failed its first serious test. A large riot erupted at the Erez checkpoint in the Gaza Strip when hundreds of Palestinian workers were denied entry into Israel. The various branches of the PSS on the scene soon lost control over the demonstrators, opened fire on the crowd, and subsequently began exchanging fire with the IDF. This incident raised doubts in many Israelis' minds about the Palestinian officers' level of training and their ability to control riots. Even worse was the damage to the delicate fabric of trust that had begun to emerge between the Palestinians and the IDF soldiers. It was not only the relationship with the Israelis that was affected; the PSS's relationship with the local population was about to deteriorate as well.

In October 1994, Israel was struck by an unprecedented series of terrorist attacks, carried out by Hamas suicide-bombers, and was shocked by the drama of the abduction of an IDF soldier, Nachshon Wachsman, who was later killed by his kidnappers. The IDF's relations with the PA reached a new low. Arafat began to realize that the ruthless attacks, carried out by Islamic opposition movements, might not only terminate the peace process but also endanger his own political survivability, which in turn could force his return to Tunis. It was time to unbridle his security forces and allow them to act freely against the opposition movements. This policy change led to a supposed golden age for the security and intelligence services as they began a massive wave of arrests and preventive action against the opposition activists, but it also created an uproar in Palestinian society, which by then had lost much of its faith in the PSS. The Palestinian officers were perceived as Israeli collaborators and as a new version of the South Lebanese Army, which Palestinians believe does Israel's "dirty work" in Lebanon.

The emerging tension culminated in bloodshed after the PSS and thousands of Hamas demonstrators clashed outside the Filastine Mosque in Gaza on Friday, November 18, 1994. The result was thirteen dead and about two hundred wounded, and it brought the Palestinians to the verge of a bloody civil war. “Black Friday,” as the incident was called, was a seminal event in the development of the PSS, because it emphasized the vulnerability of Arafat’s regime and the extent of the domestic threats to his authority. The incident exposed an internal dispute within the Palestinian security establishment concerning the policy toward opposition movements. The convoluted structure of the security forces and the blurred chain of command led to serious confusion among the various PSS branches as to Arafat’s preferred method of confronting the opposition. The different security services were often given contradictory orders. Whereas the Civil Police adopted a more moderate line, the Preventive Security Force (PSF) and *al-Amn al-Ri’asah* (Presidential Security) were allowed a rougher approach when dealing with the opposition. The crisis also exposed signs of disloyalty to Arafat’s regime among some of the components of the PSS. Those components suspected of showing empathy to the Islamic cause therefore required more scrutiny, which led Arafat to establish the Special Security Force, under the command of Gen. Abu Yusuf al-Wahidi, one of Arafat’s supporters.

Thus, in November 1994 the PSS was ordered to focus its energies on quashing the Palestinian opposition. In February 1995, after another wave of Hamas suicide attacks, Arafat announced the establishment of the State Security Court and gave it wide judicial authority. Thousands of opposition activists appeared before this court during 1995–1996. Many of them were arrested, sentenced, and imprisoned in Palestinian jails. The PA’s abolition of terrorism was Israel’s main precondition before redeploying the IDF from the main Palestinian cities in the West Bank. Arafat’s campaign against the opposition’s efforts to sabotage the peace process thus succeeded in calming Israel’s concerns and led to both the signing of Oslo II, in September 1995, and the implementation of the agreement in late 1995 and 1996.

Oslo II enabled the PSS—then approaching 30,000 members—to deploy its forces in “Area A”—the seven Palestinian cities of the West Bank—and also in twenty-five Palestinian villages of “Area B” chosen for their large size and population (see Appendix III). These villages are commonly referred to as “Area B+.” The agreement also allowed the PSS to increase the number of services from five to seven, officially adding the PSF and *al-Amn al-Ri’asah*; these two forces had been operating as de facto branches of the PSS long before they were recognized in the agreement.⁶ Their legitimization, however, turned them into the two most influential forces of the PSS. The PSF was then able to intensify its security cooperation with the Israeli General Security Service and the IDF. Both Col. Jibril Rajoub, the PSF’s director in the West Bank, and his colleague from Gaza, Col. Muhammad Dahlan, have enjoyed high credibility among Israeli officials. Their ability to communicate with their Israeli counterparts, their initial popular support among Palestinians, and their access to many sources of information have made them the two most influential Palestinian security officials.

Notes

- 1 The issue of the total number of policemen was discussed during the deliberations preceding the signing of the Oslo agreement. The Palestinian negotiator, Ahmed Qurie (Abu Ala), told the Israeli delegation that the Palestine Liberation Organization wanted “at least 16,000 people” to police Gaza, out of which 6,000 would be Palestinians and the others would be foreigners. See Shimon Peres, *Battling for Peace* (New York: Random House, 1995), p. 292.
- 2 Israel traditionally has opposed any Palestinian “right of return.” It therefore feared that allowing Palestinian police officers and their families to enter the territories would set an unfavorable precedent. The Oslo agreement allowed for the entry of 7,000 police officers recruited abroad from among individuals holding Jordanian passports or Palestinian documents issued in Egypt.
- 3 Nadav Ha’etzni, “The Palestinian Police—Nothing to Write Home About,” *Ma’ariv* weekend supplement (in Hebrew), June 22, 1994, pp. 14–15.
- 4 For a description of the extent of protection payment to the PSS officers, see Palestinians’ testimonies in Steve Rodan, “A Lack of Good Faith,” *Jerusalem Post* (international edition), July 19, 1997, p. 9.
- 5 The original use of the term “police state” in referring to the PA is attributed to Amos Perlmutter, “Arafat’s Police State,” *Foreign Affairs* (July/August 1994), pp. 8–11.
- 6 In January 1994, PSF commanders Muhammad Dahlan and Jibril Rajoub met in Rome with the former head of the Israeli General Security Service, Ya’akov Peri and the IDF’s then–deputy chief of staff, Amnon Lipkin-Shahak. In the meeting, the Israelis unofficially granted the PSF a free hand to ensure law and order throughout the West Bank and Gaza and to fight Hamas and other opposition groups. See Graham Usher, “Palestinian Authority, Israeli Rule,” *Nation*, February 5, 1996, p. 17.

Police or Rudimentary Army?

In assessing whether the Palestinian Security Services (PSS) constitute a police force or a rudimentary army, one should specify the standards and definitions according to which the issue will be addressed. A police force is generally defined as “an organized civil force for maintaining order, preventing and detecting crime, and enforcing the law.”¹ But a military force differs from a police force. It refers to an armed body with the objective of protecting territorial borders, skies, and coasts of the state from external threats, and in many cases also against domestic threats. Although both police and military forces are armed establishments, they also have some major structural differences. Military organizations employ armed personnel organized in formations of varying sizes, starting from small platoons and companies, continuing through the intermediate level of battalions and regiments, and culminating in formations with thousands of men at the levels of division and corps. All military bodies are managed by means of a general staff that coordinates the work of the different units. The general staff is responsible for the deployment and operations of the forces during times of war and peace. Its mandate is to direct military operations according to the instructions and directives of the political leadership. Apart from the combat units, the general staff directs the work of the professional corps such as signal, surgeon, logistic, and personnel branches. Finally, a military force is characterized by a well-developed officer corps—the backbone of the military organization—which is responsible for recruiting and training soldiers for the military units. In light of the above differentiation—rather than in terms of weaponization² or military goals—this chapter will consider which definition best describes the PSS in its present form: police, or rudimentary army?

A Police Force?

The Cairo Agreement first allowed the Palestinian Authority (PA) to establish a state security apparatus that includes police and internal security forces (see Appendix II). The goal of this police force, according to Article III of the security arrangement protocol, was to create an atmosphere of public order and internal security during the interim period. The agreement also limited to 9,000 the number of Palestinians to be employed by the security services. The agreed-upon number rose to 30,000 by December 1995 as a result of the Oslo II Interim Agreement on the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Yet, many analysts assert that the PSS is not complying with these quantitative limitations and that the actual number of security personnel employed in the different branches varies from 35,000—according to more cautious estimates—up to 50,000.³ If true, the PA has anywhere from 5,000 to 20,000 more officers

deployed than the accords allow. In fact, a June 1998 intelligence report submitted to the Israeli government, detailing alleged Palestinian breaches of the Oslo Accords, included as one of the main issues a list of the names of PSS officers, which the PA submitted to the Israeli government. The PA did not submit a complete list, but instead named only 18,600, for two reasons: It does not want Israel to know the real number of officers employed, and it does not want Israel to know their identities, as some are former terrorists who are wanted in Israel.⁴ According to Oslo II, Israel has the right to veto the employment of anyone who is suspected of being a security threat.

Analysts also think the PA is not complying with its quantitative limitations on firearms. Oslo II raised the Cairo Agreement's initial quantitative restriction to 15,000 weapons, of which 8,000 would be in the West Bank and 7,000 in Gaza. Yet, by one estimate, the PSS and the Palestinian population as a whole own approximately 40,000 additional weapons than are allowed by Oslo II.⁵ In addition, the PSS has managed to develop small manufacturing workshops for the production of hand grenades and other ammunition.⁶ These assertions have led observers to wonder as to the true *raison d'être* of the PSS: Is it designed simply to ensure public order in the territories, or is it a rudimentary army under development, camouflaged as a simple law enforcement body?

Although PA representatives such as Palestinian Legislative Council speaker Ahmed Qurie (Abu Ala), for example, insist that "the PSS is a police, not an army,"⁷ the figures enumerated above seem to indicate otherwise.⁸ The PA has become the most heavily policed territory in the world, with an officer-to-resident ratio of 1:50; the U.S. ratio for police officers and sheriff's deputies, in contrast, is 1:400. Presumably, the difference in these ratios exists not because corruption and crime rates are that much higher in the PA. In fact, activities related to the preservation of public order in the Palestinian cities and in the 25 police-stationed villages commonly known as "Area B+" (see Appendix III) involve only 25 percent of the actual PSS personnel. Although Oslo II instructed that all the Palestinians recruited to the police forces had to be duly trained to perform police functions (see Appendix III), the agreement never really determined the nature and the quality of the training required for the practice of law enforcement. The issue remained open for Palestinian interpretation and the result was that, apart from the Civil Police, the main branches of the PSS have never been properly trained in police work. Moreover, most PSS employees lack the necessary equipment—such as shields, clubs, and tear gas—needed for riot control and other equipment needed to perform police duties. The reason for this is simple: Almost 75 percent of the total force is not assigned to any law enforcement duties. Therefore, although the PSS is commonly referred to as "Palestinian Police," three-fourths of its officers are not technically police officers. Rather, they are assigned duties relating to the important missions of regime preservation and preventive action against the PA's Islamist opposition, as well as the protection of "Area A" borders and cooperative work with the IDF under the definitions of the Oslo Accords. With the PSS's status as "more than a police force" thus clearly defined, it is time to consider whether the PSS is developing into a Palestinian army-to-be, and whether the Palestinians want it to do so.

Palestinian Attitudes Toward Militarization

The topic of national security has rarely been debated within the Palestinian community, and therefore there is no agreed-upon definition of Palestinian security needs.⁹ The few Palestinian scholars who have written about the issue are at odds with each other concerning the preferred means of achieving security. Yazid Sayigh, for example, believes that only after the Palestinians achieve sovereignty will they be able to achieve security. He rejects the idea of establishing a massive Palestinian army, saying that “for the Palestinians to seek a peace agreement permitting them to maintain sizable armed forces would be self-defeating, since their resultant defenses would in any case be inadequate to defeat an all-out attack.”¹⁰ He therefore advocates creating a single formation, such as a National Guard, responsible for both border security and public law and order.¹¹ Faisal al-Husayni, the PA’s minister for Jerusalem affairs, has conveyed a similar idea, saying the PA should invest its money in schools and high technology enterprises rather than in arms, because the PA’s army could never be as strong as the IDF.¹² Contrary to Sayigh’s and al-Husayni’s views, another school believes that the capacity for self-defense is an essential component of the Palestinian national security doctrine and therefore advocates the creation of a Palestinian army once a state is established.¹³

It seems that the Palestinians have, for the time being, reluctantly chosen the first model of a multipurpose security force—“reluctantly,” because given the limitations of Oslo II and the PA’s existing economic constraints, a multipurpose security force is the maximum they could achieve. The PA is under permanent scrutiny, lacks the capacity to procure and manufacture arms openly, and is economically dependent on international donors. Despite these severe constraints, however, if the PA were interested in developing the PSS into a rudimentary army-in-waiting, it could take some preliminary steps during the interim period to prepare for a time when the security forces could be transformed into a proper military.

Is the PSS Building a Military Infrastructure?

Militarism is one of the means to create a supportive atmosphere for future conscription, legislation, and public participation in national security efforts. The PA tends to emphasize values such as aggressive patriotism, the use of force by *jihad* (holy war) and struggle, and the dependency of the political system on the security apparatus. PA chairman Yasir Arafat himself is always seen wearing military uniforms and surrounded by his military aides—even in private moments, such as while praying in a mosque. Full military ceremonies take place on his arrival in and departure from Gaza, even if his trip is no more than a one-day deliberation in Cairo. Daily street parades, military commemoration days, and the extreme proliferation of different types and colors of uniforms are some of the elements of a “uniform culture” that has been forged in the territories.¹⁴ The most ominous sign of the domination of this culture is the infiltration of military values into Palestinian youth movements such as scout groups and *Shabiba*, the youth wing of Arafat’s *Fatah* organization. During the summer of 1998, Fatah inaugurated in Gaza a series of military camps that trained young Palestinians in martial arts, handling light weapons, and other military drills. The training staff of these

camps belonged to the *Istkhabbarat al-Askariyya*, the military intelligence branch of the PSS, thus making it likely that these camps had the PA's approval.¹⁵ Intensive militaristic activity among youth movements and student bodies could create the base for a future ultramilitant Palestinian society.

Additionally, a PSS intent on militarization would have to lay a proper infrastructure to ease the transformation from the existing paramilitary structure into a fully mobilized army. Components of this infrastructure would include an embryonic training-and-recruitment system; a well-defined echelon of command; and rudimentary military-related industries for the local manufacture of uniforms, ammunition, and small firearms. All of these components can in fact be found to some extent in the PA. Yet, the PSS seems to have severe problems with at least one crucial part of this infrastructure—it lacks a cadre of commander-quality recruits currently serving as regular officers, who could assume command over newly recruited platoons and companies once the transformation to a standing army occurs. The German Army of the 1920s successfully implemented this “accordion-like” mechanism when the Versailles Treaty limited it to only 100,000 soldiers. The Germans introduced a highly competitive selection process so not only the commanders but even each of the privates would be qualified, once the monitoring regime was over, to become a field commander.¹⁶ The PA, on the other hand, has failed to adopt this method, and the current selection of PSS recruits is undefined and based largely on political affiliation and loyalty to the regime rather than on intellectual and leadership qualities. The low wage the PA pays officers—compensation has decreased by 50 percent over the last three years, such that the current monthly salary is about \$200¹⁷—discourages young Palestinian elites from joining the PSS and helping to develop a command-quality cadre. One PSS colonel, Abu Salah, who runs the training programs for new recruits, describes the profile of the generation that grew up during the intifada and is now joining the PSS:

They did not go to school, they are illiterate, they smoke, many of them forget about helping their parents, they spend money on immoral things and they have no sense of responsibility. That is the raw material that Israel left us with here.¹⁸

The previously mentioned summer military camps marked a change of the above trend. The students who were admitted to the camps were selected according to their leadership qualities and their potential to become future commanders.¹⁹ Although too early to determine, this could be the first indicator that the PSS has adopted an “accordion-like” mechanism.

If the PSS were intent on militarizing, it could also make overtures to the 350,000 refugees living in Lebanon who could serve as a potential reservoir of military power for a future Palestinian army. Once statehood is attained, a Palestinian port or airfield in Gaza or the West Bank could be a route for smuggling heavy weapons and additional troops from Lebanon's refugee camps. These camps, which have turned into lawless havens for terrorists, criminals and arms-dealers, could also provide the PA with a crucial component required for a military buildup: training grounds. Indeed, Lebanon is the only place where Palestinian soldiers can develop skills in special weapons, such as the launching of anti-tank and anti-aircraft missiles. Such skills would be necessary in a future confrontation with Israel. If it is intent on militarizing the PSS, the PA would therefore have some strong incentives to culti-

vate its relations with the Lebanese factions with the intention of mobilizing them in the future. In fact, great efforts are being made to settle the internal disputes between the PA and Fatah's faction in Lebanon, so that if the peace process breaks down and is replaced by total conflict, the PLO fighters in Lebanon will be ready to join in. Arafat has pledged to support the Palestinian dissident groups financially, and—according to different sources—millions of dollars designated for humanitarian projects in the West Bank and Gaza have been diverted to Lebanon to fulfill the pledge.²⁰

A Hybrid

To summarize, the PSS is at this point more than a police force yet less than a rudimentary army. In its present framework, it hardly resembles a typical police force: Apart from the Civil Police, the main units of the PSS have never been trained in police work, and they lack the necessary equipment for riot control. On the other hand, some fundamental components that ought to exist in any military establishment are also missing in the PSS. Among them are a well-defined and organized officers' corps; a general staff apparatus; training of military formations comprising the intermediate and high levels of command (battalions and regiments); and the infrastructure of a professional corps such as armor, artillery, signal, and surgeon corps. Despite some minor steps described above taken by the PA to promote the formation of such an infrastructure, there is no evidence of the existence of a plan to build a full-fledged army. The PSS can thus best be described as a hybrid, too complex and over-staffed to be the police force required for the size of the Palestinian population and yet too underdeveloped both organizationally and militarily to be considered a rudimentary army.

Notes

- 1 See *Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: Gramercy Books, 1989), s.v. "police," p. 1113.
- 2 A military force, unlike a police force, employs a large variety of weapons systems for the destruction and deterrence of foreign military forces. It usually has an air force and a navy to defend the skies and the shores of the country. Some of the weapons employed by the military have highly destructive capabilities—much more so than police forces, which employ only light weapons for law enforcement and riot control. Although it is true that the PSS is advancing its weaponization, as will be seen in future chapters, this chapter focuses primarily on the organizational structure of the PSS.
- 3 David Hirst, "The New Oppressor of the Palestinians," *Guardian* (London), July 6, 1996, reprinted in *World Press Review*, October 1996, p. 11. Hirst suggests that there are 40,000–50,000 security officers. For Israeli press reports about there being 40,000 officers, see Steve Rodan, "Gov't: PA Has 16,000 More Policemen than Permitted by Oslo," *Jerusalem Post* (international edition), May 2, 1998, p. 3. According to the *Jerusalem Post*, Israeli defense sources said in September 1996 that the number of armed men in the PA had risen to 80,000. See Steve Rodan, "Palestinians Have 80,000 Armed Fighters," *Jerusalem Post*, September 27, 1996, p. 5.
- 4 Nadav Shragai, "Illegal Weapons Are Rampant in PA," *Ha'aretz* (internet edition), July 7, 1998.
- 5 Joseph Conteras, "Locked in a Box," *Newsweek*, October 14, 1996, p. 46.

- 6 Alex Fishman, "Interview with Maj. Gen. Shlomo Yanai," *Yediot Ahronot* weekend supplement (in Hebrew), May 9, 1997, pp 6, 8. See also report about the manufacturing of ammunition and hand grenades, in *Yediot Ahronot* (in Hebrew), April 15, 1997. IDF Deputy Chief of Staff Maj. Gen. Uzi Dayan also confirmed that such a manufacturing workshop existed in Gaza; see Alex Fishman, "The Palestinians Are Preparing for War," *Yediot Ahronot* weekend supplement (in Hebrew), June 26, 1998, pp. 14–15.
- 7 Speaker of the Palestinian Legislative Council, Ahmed Qurie (Abu Ala), speaking at The Washington Institute for Near East Policy's Soref Symposium, in Washington, D.C., May 7, 1998.
- 8 The PA tries to justify its exceeding the Oslo II quotas by stating that service in the PSS is a way to ease high unemployment in the territories. Indeed, by absorbing thousands of people into its ranks, the PSS has become the largest employer in the PA. *Ibid.*
- 9 Naomi Weinberger, "The Palestinian National Security Debate," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 24, no. 3 (Spring 1995), p. 16.
- 10 Yazid Sayigh, "Reading the Basics: Sovereignty and Security of the Palestinian State," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 24, no. 4 (Summer 1995), p. 10.
- 11 *Ibid.*
- 12 Isabel Kershner, "Palestine Rising," *Jerusalem Report*, July 6, 1998, pp. 22–27.
- 13 One of the advocates of army establishment is Ahmad Khalidi; see Weinberger, "The Palestinian National Security Debate," pp. 17–18.
- 14 Beverly Milton-Edwards, "Palestinian State-Building: Police and Citizens as Test of Democracy," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 25, no. 1 (May 1998). More reflections on the militarization of the Palestinian society were delivered in a speech by the director of the Palestinian Center for Human Rights, Raji Sourani, at The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, June 10, 1998. In his remarks he asserted that the PA is militarizing Palestinian society by employing huge numbers of security personnel.
- 15 Isabel Kershner, "Summer in Gaza: Guns & Games," *Jerusalem Report*, August 3, 1998, pp. 22–24.
- 16 The most detailed account of the nature of the 100,000-man army would probably be in Barton Whaley, *Covert German Rearmament 1919–1939: Deception and Misperception*, (Frederick, Md.: University Publications, 1984).
- 17 Hirst, "The New Oppressor of the Palestinians."
- 18 Niel MacFarquhar, "How Palestinian Policemen Were Drawn into the Conflict." *New York Times*, September 29, 1996, p. 1.
- 19 Kershner, "Summer in Gaza: Guns & Games," p. 22.
- 20 *Jerusalem Post*, March 25, 1995; also, "Palestinians Unite in Lebanon," *Foreign Report*, August 21, 1997.

The Hasmonean Tunnel Riots: A Turning Point

Three days of fighting, sixty-nine Palestinians and fourteen Israeli soldiers dead, and more than 1,200 people wounded: This was the toll of rioting and clashes that followed Israeli prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu's controversial decision to open the Hasmonean Tunnel in Jerusalem on September 24, 1996. Former prime minister Yitzhak Rabin had believed that the Palestinians would perceive such an act as a deliberate provocation, and he therefore postponed the opening of the tunnel several times. He was posthumously proven right. The immediate result of the tunnel opening was an outburst of violent riots in eastern Jerusalem and in Hebron, which soon spread throughout the rest of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Unlike in previous riots, when the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) used tear gas and rubber bullets to disperse civilian crowds, this time IDF soldiers suddenly found themselves opposed by officers of the Palestinian Security Services (PSS) using live ammunition. Over the next two days several armed confrontations between IDF soldiers and the PSS took place. The most serious clashes occurred at Joseph's Tomb in Nablus; the Ginat outpost near Jenin; the outskirts of Tulkarem; the Arak checkpoint in Ramallah; and in the Gaza towns of Netzarim, Kfar Darom, and Rafah.

To this day, no one knows who ordered the PSS to fire at the IDF troops. According to one version, the shooting was a result of the spontaneous outrage of officers who saw their friends and relatives being shot by the IDF.¹ Others believe that the Palestinian forces were activated "at a press of a button in Gaza."² Regardless of what triggered the riots, the result was a rapid disintegration of the local command-and-control apparatus and the rise of arbitrary initiative-taking by PSS officers who could not withstand the pressure of the raging masses. Some officers were seen removing their uniforms and joining the demonstrators; in other cases insurgents grabbed the rifles from helpless officers and used them to open fire on the IDF.³

These violent events took the IDF commanders by surprise.⁴ The switch from rubber bullets to live ammunition was a new situation and reality sank in; it was no longer a riot—it was armed warfare. Furthermore, the events became a watershed in IDF–PSS relations, and the cooperative approach that prevailed up to September 1996 was replaced with mutual suspicion and animosity. Israeli *Magav* (border police) officers, who for months had developed friendly relations with their Palestinian partners on joint patrols, were reluctant to resume their mission

after observing their counterparts turning their guns against IDF troops. Even the Israeli terminology underwent a change: The previous terms used in referring to PSS officers—“parallels” and “partners”—were replaced with “the enemy” and “the adversary.”

The September rioting—or the “September War,” as some Palestinians called it—was a seminal event not only in terms of how Palestinian and Israeli officers thought of each other, but also in terms of how they reacted. It was the first time since Oslo that the IDF introduced heavy armored vehicles and tanks in the West Bank. Israeli tanks were deployed around the main cities to deter the Palestinian Authority (PA) from escalating the crisis. Several times, these tanks opened fire toward uninhabited areas as a demonstration of power. The Israeli Air Force also took part in the battles, sending attack helicopters that fired automatic weapons at selected targets inside the urban areas.

Following the September rioting, the IDF developed a new view of warfare in the territories based on the lessons derived. It prepared and modified three action plans to deal with future contingencies. The first plan, called “Indian Summer,” would deal with violent confrontation in all the territories without having the IDF reenter the cities. The second plan, “Fiery Steel,” would deal with severe local incidents such as the overpowering of a Jewish settlement. The third plan, “Field of Thorns,” is a contingency plan for reinforcing Jewish settlements and protecting Israelis in the territories.⁵ In the first two stages of Field of Thorns, total closure would be imposed on the territories and tanks deployed around the cities; subsequent to that, a third stage might be implemented involving the reentry of IDF forces into the self-ruled areas and the quelling of any PSS opposition.⁶ If implemented, however, such a plan would be extremely costly. A war game conducted by the IDF in June and July 1997 led to the conclusion that reentering “Area A” territories would result in hundreds of Israeli casualties in each of the cities.⁷ Given the Israeli public’s strong sensitivity to casualties, this last plan is likely to be too costly even to implement.

The September riots also led the IDF to rethink its tactics when fighting in urban areas. Many changes were introduced to improve the units’ performances in future confrontations. Major emphasis was placed on defensive measures, among them improving the fortification of military strong-points, procuring bullet-proof vests and helmets, and replacing all the operational patrol vehicles with bullet-proof light-armored ones. The IDF also improved its infantry, tank, and helicopter coordination and its sniping abilities. It concluded that future engagement with the PSS would necessarily require more accurate, focused, and vigorous fire. This new concept was described by Maj. Gen. Shlomo Yanai, then-commander of the Southern Command:

If such a confrontation does take place it will be militarily forceful and worse [than the September riots]. In such a confrontation, if it takes place, I intend to exact a much dearer price [from the Palestinians by] accurate on-target shooting: snipers. Massive fire looks bad on camera and this is a main consideration. A helicopter photographed by CNN gives the picture of the “underdog with the slingshot” opposite the power of a strong country. I’m ready to inflict a much heavier price and to create a situation where thirty Palestinian policemen lie dead, not wounded, at Netzarim junction, for instance. If an explosion occurs, this is what *I* want to happen.⁸

Whereas Israelis were shocked by the extent and results of the rioting, for the Palestinians it was a great victory, both strategically and tactically.⁹ On the strategic dimension, the violent reaction broke the deadlock in the peace negotiations that had existed ever since the Likud party came to power in May 1996. This in turn led to the Washington summit that October and, subsequently, to the negotiation of the Hebron Accord. The message for the PA was clear: violence paid off.¹⁰ On the tactical level, the performance of the PSS was also viewed as a success. Of the sixty-nine Palestinians killed, only twelve were PSS officers.¹¹ On the other hand, the PSS officers who participated in the battles killed fourteen IDF soldiers, seven of whom were officers and even some senior IDF commanders.¹² The deputy commander of IDF forces in Gaza was killed; a colonel and a brigadier general—the commander of the IDF Artillery Corps—were wounded. This in itself boosted the Palestinians' morale. The ability to inflict such a high casualty rate on the Israelis further reassured the Palestinians that, in the event of a future conflict, the PSS would not become easy prey for the IDF.

Notes

- 1 One PSS officer who opened fire said, "How am I supposed to follow orders when I see my cousin, my brother and my neighbor being wounded? My emotional reaction to take my gun and respond overcame my military reaction." See Niel MacFarquhar, "How Palestinian Policemen Were Drawn into the Conflict," *New York Times*, September 29, 1996, p. 1.
- 2 Ehud Ya'ari, "A Dangerous Cocktail," *Jerusalem Report*, October 31, 1996, p. 38.
- 3 Dan Peri, "Palestinian Police Force Emerges as Unwieldy Army," Associated Press (online), September 26, 1996.
- 4 Interview with IDF Col. Moshe Elad describing how Israelis were surprised by the PSS-IDF shootout. See Connie Bruck, "The Wounds of Peace," *New Yorker*, October 14, 1996, p. 90.
- 5 Alex Fishman, "Mines, Rockets and Tunnels—That's How the Palestinians Are Deploying for the Israeli Invasion," *Yediot Ahronot* (in Hebrew), January 16, 1998, p. 3.
- 6 Operation Field of Thorns is a modular operation. It can be implemented in one, several, or all seven cities depending on the order of battle allocated for it. *Ibid.*
- 7 Julian Borger, "Human Cost Rules Out Israeli Invasion," *Guardian* (London), July 21, 1997, p. 12. Also see Peter Hirschberg, "War Games," *Jerusalem Report*, September 4, 1997, pp. 26–27.
- 8 Alex Fishman, "Interview with Maj. Gen. Shlomo Yanai," *Yediot Ahronot* weekend supplement (in Hebrew), May 9, 1998, pp. 6, 8.
- 9 Palestinian Justice Minister Freih Abu Medein said, "The Palestinians are now proud of their army, proud of their image"; see MacFarquhar, "How Palestinian Policemen Were Drawn into the Conflict."
- 10 The lead editorial in the Fatah newspaper stated:

Only the uprising of the masses and the *intifada* in the Palestinian homeland in September 1996 enabled the Palestinians to hope for international and Arab support. It is this *intifada* which compelled the Israeli side to implement the Oslo Accords. What distinguished this *intifada* was its official nature. Palestinian Security Forces took part side by side with the masses. Only once the flow of blood began and Israelis died at the hands of the security

forces' gunfire did Netanyahu understand that his assumption that the Palestinians and Arabs did not have other options was baseless. Only then did he understand that he must get used to new realities. Revolutionary violence, which enjoys international legitimacy as a struggle against occupation, is the option that must be put on the discussion table. This is the option that will bring about a breakthrough in the current impasse and breathe new life in to the agreements.

Cited in *al-Hayat al-Jadida*, June 4, 1997, and reprinted by the Israel Government Press Office (online at www.pmo.gov.il/english/policy/pp-21-1997.html).

- 11 MacFarquhar, "How Palestinian Policemen Were Drawn into the Conflict."
- 12 The IDF officers killed included one colonel, one major, two captains, one lieutenant and two border police officers.

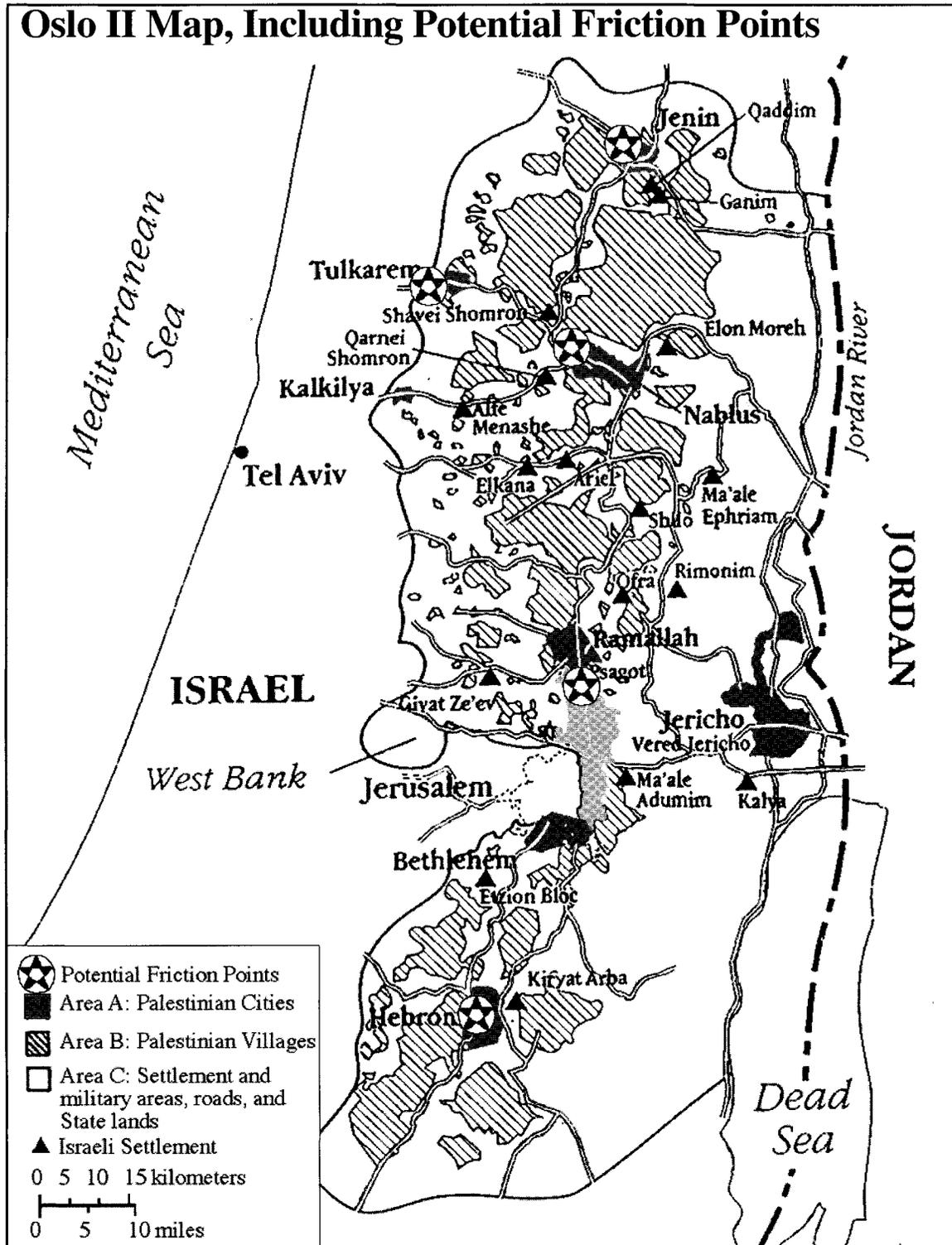
The Next Round

The array of tensions during the last couple of years caused by the impasse in the peace process has occasionally led analysts to speculate that Palestinians may carry out what they call the “military option.”¹ Many statements made by Palestinian officials in the context of political crises, such as the building of Jewish housing in the areas of Har Homa and Ras el-Amud in eastern Jerusalem, were provocative and belligerent.² References to the military option received new meaning after the September 1996 Hasmonean Tunnel riots. It was no longer necessarily the resumption of the massive, civil uprising of the Palestinian *intifada* (uprising) but rather a large-scale use of armed forces supported by the unarmed Palestinian masses. The Palestinians’ “victory” in the clashes made them believe that armed confrontation, even if not very desirable, is a viable option for which they should be prepared.

The prevailing view in the Israeli security establishment is that if the peace process reaches a standstill, violence and the use of force will be certain.³ When “war-gaming” the next confrontation, some major trends are visible, all of them recent developments stemming from the lessons of September 1996.

First, one can assume that a future confrontation between the Palestinian Security Services (PSS) and the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) will originate in the same areas of friction where the riots erupted in September 1996: the outskirts of the Palestinian cities (“Area A”), especially where IDF and PSS checkpoints are in close proximity. The several hundred feet separating the two sides would become a convenient ground for an exchange of fire. Such was the case in the northern outskirts of Jenin, the northern outskirts of Ramallah and the Arak checkpoint in its southern outskirts, and the western entrance to the city of Tulkarem in the West Bank. In the Gaza Strip, the problematic points are the main junctions that lead to the isolated Jewish settlements: Netzarim junction, Kfar Darom junction and Morag junction. Other potential friction would probably arise around the Jewish enclaves, such as Joseph’s Tomb in Nablus and Rachel’s Tomb in Bethlehem. The most problematic point would most likely be the Jewish settlement in Hebron; this city was under complete Israeli control in September 1996. The new situation resulting from the deployment of the PSS in most of the city’s territory, because of the Hebron Accord, will make defense of the Jewish enclaves in the city one of the IDF’s most challenging undertakings.

The second trend is related to the Israeli introduction of heavy weapons during the crisis. Tanks, armored personnel carriers, and attack helicopters, all put into action during the last clash, will have to deal next time with a new array of Palestinian threats. The general assessment is that the Palestinians are amassing stocks of light anti-armor weapons, rocket-propelled grenades, anti-tank missiles, and SAM-7 anti-aircraft missiles, all of which are forbidden under the Oslo Accords.⁴ Reports about such stockpiling differ with respect to the



Source: *Yediot Ahronot*, October 6, 1995, and author's predictions

types and quantities of the weapons, but the Palestinian ability to launch anti-tank weapons is almost certain.⁵ The PSS has succeeded in accumulating weapons mainly by smuggling them into the Palestinian Authority (PA) across the Dead Sea and into the West Bank, or across the Mediterranean Sea into Gaza.⁶ Another channel of smuggling is from Egypt by means of

secret underground tunnels that connect Egypt to Rafah in the Gaza Strip; despite the IDF's extensive efforts to locate and destroy these tunnels, all of them dug underneath the Israeli-controlled borderline, the underground channels remain very active.⁷ The Palestinians have also acquired weapons through continuous efforts to steal them by breaking into Israeli military installations. Some of these efforts have been very fruitful, and dozens of anti-tank missiles, as well as rifles and ammunition, were thus transferred into PA territory. Efforts to acquire anti-aircraft shoulder-fired missiles were made public in February 1997, when a former IDF scout was arrested for stealing a military patrol vehicle loaded with weapons and ammunition. In the investigation he admitted that the weapons were ordered by the PSS through a Palestinian who served as a contact with the suspect.⁸

Another precaution the Palestinians have taken against future IDF use of tanks is by digging anti-tank tunnels and trap-holes under central roads in the West Bank and Gaza. These holes can be filled with explosives to block the advancing armored vehicles. News about explosives stolen from quarries in Israel emphasizes the existence of such a technique.⁹ PSS efforts to upgrade its military performance by achieving anti-tank and anti-aircraft abilities are not mere defensive measures against a future contingency in which the IDF carries out Operation Field of Thorns (see chapter 5) and reenters the Palestinian cities. Behind these new abilities hides also a psychological statement emphasizing that the PA is not as feeble an opponent as it may seem. Attacking and destroying a state-of-the-art weapon system such as a Cobra helicopter or a Merkava III tank would give an enormous boost to the Palestinians' esprit de corps. In a future confrontation, the picture of a burning Israeli tank on the outskirts of Nablus, for example, would become a much-sought commodity in the world media, symbolizing the brave Palestinian "David" taking a stand against the Zionist "Goliath," similar to the image of the Chinese student standing in front of a tank in Tiananmen Square.

The PSS's performance during the September riots, as discussed previously, certainly raised the Palestinian officers' self-esteem, especially because of their ability to kill and wound a relatively high number of senior Israeli commanders. The PSS would probably adopt a similar sniper-style mode of operation to inflict even more casualties in a future confrontation. Indeed, sniper units have become among the most prestigious postings in the PSS. To recruit a large group of snipers, the PSS acquired considerable numbers of telescopic sights for their M-16s and AK-47s.¹⁰

Militarily, the PSS's preparations for confrontation are reflected in a distinct change in the mode of operation and methods of training. The security bodies are adopting a more professional approach, through training in the use of formations of teams and squads for defined missions like gaining control of an area of land, holding down a post, and attacking an IDF post or settlement.¹¹ But the preparations for the next round are not restricted to the military level. The participation of the unarmed civilian population in a future conflict is a key factor in Palestinian preparation. The PA, for example, holds self-defense courses for civilians. The training includes lessons in shooting, hand-to-hand combat, and ceremonial drills.¹² The civil defense apparatus is constantly improving by conducting a massive program of first aid courses for PA residents and preparing water reservoirs and an alternative electricity supply. The health system undertook a face lift of its own by renovating emergency rooms in major hospitals to be able to handle large numbers of wounded people.¹³

To achieve a strong result—that is, winning the international community’s support in a future conflict with Israel—PA chairman Yasir Arafat will probably try to create an image of a popular uprising supported by a marginal, armed backup of the PSS. To coordinate the masses’ participation, the PA will have to use its electronic media, namely Palestinian TV and the Voice of Palestine radio station, in the same way they were utilized during the 1996 Tunnel riots. The frequent televised images of Palestinian casualties and PSS officers exchanging fire with the IDF were used to incite the masses, thus encouraging them to take active part in the insurgency.¹⁴ This is likely to recur in a future clash.

Notes

- 1 PA Minister for Jerusalem Affairs Faisal al-Husayni in an interview with the Egyptian weekly *al-Watan al-Arabi*: “If Israel continues to undermine the path to peace there will be no other alternative but that called for by the Islamist Palestinian opposition—the military option.” Cited by Agence France Presse, May 1, 1995, and reprinted by the Israel Government Press Office (online at www.pmo.gov.il/english/policy/pp-21-1995.html).
- 2 Minister Husayni said, “If Prime Minister Netanyahu decides to build in Har Homa, this will be a declaration of war on the Palestinians.” Quoted in *Yediot Ahronot* (in Hebrew), February 18, 1997, and reprinted by the Israel Government Press Office (online at www.pmo.gov.il/english/policy/pp-21-1997.html).
- 3 Israeli defense minister Yitzhak Mordechai in Amos Harel, “PA Forces Said Training Hard to Take On IDF,” *Ha’aretz* (internet edition), June 1, 1998. The IDF’s former chief of military intelligence, Yehoshua Sagi, described the next confrontation as an enhanced intifada by means of weapons, hand grenades, and Molotov cocktails; see Abraham Rabinovitch, “An Intifada with Guns,” *Jerusalem Post* (international edition), September 27, 1997, p. 8.
- 4 The Palestinian security officials vehemently deny having these weapons and also deny the accusations about smuggling weapons across the borders to the PA territories. See interview with Muhammad Dahlan, “Security Chief on Security Coordination,” *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, September 21, 1997, in FBIS-NES-267 (Foreign Broadcast Information Service—Near East and South Asia, daily report online), September 26, 1997.
- 5 See Nadav Shragai, “Illegal Weapons Are Rampant in PA,” *Ha’aretz* (internet edition), July 7, 1998. See further reports about anti-tank and anti-aircraft weapons in Harel, “PA Forces Said Training Hard to Take On IDF”; Lisa Beyer and Aharon Klein, “Deadlier Next Time?” *Time* (internet edition), December 16, 1996; Laurie Copans, “Palestinians Deny Try for Anti-Tank Missiles,” *Washington Times*, December 10, 1996, p. A15.
- 6 The IDF foiled a Palestinian attempt to smuggle dozens of weapons via the Dead Sea; see Yoav Limor, Hanan Shlein, and Uri Binder, “Weapons Were Smuggled for the Palestinian Authority,” *Ma’ariv* (in Hebrew), March 1, 1998.
- 7 It is estimated that there are six underground tunnels connecting the Sinai to the PA-controlled Gaza Strip. Steve Rodan and Arieh O’Sullivan, “PA Smuggles Arms Via Sinai Tunnels,” *Jerusalem Post* (international edition), June 6, 1998, p. 32.
- 8 Lior El-Hai, “Palestinian Intelligence Sent an Israeli to Steal Shoulder-Fired Missiles,” *Yediot Ahronot* (in Hebrew), March 25, 1998.
- 9 Alex Fishman, “Mines, Rockets and Tunnels—That’s How the Palestinians Are Deploying for the Israeli Invasion,” *Yediot Ahronot* (in Hebrew), January 16, 1998, p. 3.
- 10 Harel, “PA Forces Said Training Hard to Take On IDF.”
- 11 High ranking IDF officer. Ibid. See also Ron Ben Yishai, “The Probability for War Next Year Has Increased,” *Yediot Ahronot* weekend supplement (in Hebrew), July 10, 1998, p. 6.
- 12 Harel, “PA Forces Said Training Hard to Take On IDF.”
- 13 Roni Shaked, “Arm with All Weapons, for the Worst Possible Eventuality,” *Yediot Ahronot* (in Hebrew), December 20, 1996, p. 11.
- 14 Steve Rodan, “Palestinians Have 80,000 Armed Fighters,” *Jerusalem Post*, September 27, 1996, p. 5.

Conclusion

Rarely in modern history has a nation, struggling for its independence, been granted permission by its own military occupier to establish a quasimilitary armed force and to handle its own security matters independently. The Arab–Israeli conflict, known for creating some unique events in the past, provided such a precedent in Oslo on September 13, 1993, when the government of Israel—by signing a declaration of principles for negotiating peace with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)—thus agreed to the formation of an armed Palestinian police force in the West Bank and Gaza (see Appendix I). The decision aroused the fierce opposition of Israeli right-wing groups, which chanted the slogan, “Don’t hand them guns!” Many less-conservative individuals similarly doubted the Palestinians’ ability to ensure the maintenance of law and order during the interim negotiation period.

Nearly five years after the deployment of the Palestinian Security Services (PSS), its performance shows a lop-sided balance-sheet. On the positive side, it seems that the efforts of the PSS to ensure and preserve Arafat’s regime and to restrain the opposition movements have been successful. Arafat’s regime is sound, much to the credit of the Preventive Security Force, the *Mukhabbarat* (General Intelligence), and the Special Security Force. These PSS units have suppressed some of the most radical factors in the opposition and succeeded in minimizing the domestic threats to the present regime, enabling it to proceed on the peace track. But this achievement has been eclipsed by some negative developments that can be detected in the PSS and its relations with the civilian population. The force that was established with the aim of “protecting the public and its property and acting to provide the feeling of security and safety” (see Appendix II) is gradually becoming a public menace. The low salaries of PSS officers and their high tolerance for human rights violations have created a situation in which the involvement of officers in illegal activities, corruption, and the abuse of power are quite common. One should also include on the negative side of the balance sheet the two major armed clashes in which the PSS were involved during the turbulent interim period: Black Friday and the Tunnel Riots. Both were seminal events that changed the identity and the strategic status of the Palestinian Authority (PA). On Black Friday, the PSS broke the taboo of firing live ammunition at civilians, thus adding the PA to the club of human rights–violating regimes. In September 1996 the action of Palestinian troops against the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) placed the PSS high on Israel’s list of potential threats and adversaries, causing the IDF to revise its military doctrine of low intensity conflict.

The PSS has therefore become a key player in the Israeli–Palestinian arena with a large role in a possible future Israeli–Palestinian confrontation. Promises from PA officials

that Palestinians “are not stupid enough to think of war with Israel, and [that] a military confrontation is not even a consideration for us,”¹ are overshadowed by internal instructions circulated within the PSS urging commanders to “be ready and well-armed with all weapons and means in anticipation of the worst possibilities.”² These instructions show that, although the PA would prefer not to engage itself in a military confrontation with Israel, the PSS has widely discussed and prepared for such a development. The PSS’s basic assumption is that if a major breakdown occurs, “the Israeli army will not come back” to the cities; as one senior PSS officer said, “They [Israelis] know the Palestinians will fight with their lives and many [Israelis] would die.”³ This assessment is probably correct, especially owing to the IDF’s sensitivity to urban warfare, with its high casualty rate.⁴ In a future confrontation, then, the most likely lines of engagement between the IDF and PSS would be in rural areas and on the outskirts of the main Palestinian cities, especially around the checkpoints at city entrances. Such combat would hardly be decisive and would probably lead to the development of a long war of attrition in the territories in which tactics used by the IDF and Hizballah in southern Lebanon would likely be adopted. The IDF might find itself facing threats like roadside bombs, anti-tank missiles, and ambushes along the main transit routes of the West Bank and Gaza. The PSS has studied the techniques used by Hizballah in Lebanon and may want to apply some of the more useful ones against the IDF, as the terrain in the West Bank is similar to that in Lebanon. The “Lebanonization” of the West Bank would be intolerable to the Israeli government mainly because so many Israeli civilians are trapped in the middle of this potential warzone. Regardless of the political implications of a future confrontation with the PSS, on the military side alone the PSS has the ability both to inflict upon the IDF a considerable number of casualties and to deflate Israel’s national morale.

The imminence of a confrontation between the IDF and the PSS will not necessarily be determined by the proximity to May 4, 1999. The sensitivity of the political situation supplies almost daily a new excuse for lighting the powder keg. If, however, the five-year deadline for the final status negotiations involves the unilateral declaration of a Palestinian state and, thus, the breakdown of the Oslo framework of negotiations, then Israel might end up facing a different opponent than the one described in this paper. Dissolving the Oslo Accords would mean that the various limitations on the size, structure, and armaments of the PSS would cease to exist. As a sovereign nation, the Palestinians would be able to legislate mandatory conscription as one of the first steps in the buildup of a standing army. The Palestinian population is one of the youngest in the world; 73 percent of Palestinians in the territories are younger than 35 years old. Legislation mandating conscription could thus immediately yield more than 100,000 new recruits.⁵

Indeed, the Palestinian Legislative Council has already proposed a National Service Law, which would have drafted all high school graduates for one year of work in Palestinian public projects, including the police. The initiative was eventually withdrawn because of Israeli objections.⁶ Mandatory service legislation would likely also be economically lucrative. Currently, the PSS employs only paid, professional officers, at an annual cost of more than \$500 million. Introducing mandatory service would enable the new Palestinian state to draft a much less expensive—if not entirely unpaid—pool of conscripts into the ranks of the

PSS. The millions of dollars once spent on police salaries could then be diverted toward procurement and training to promote the strengthening of the forces.

Whether the PA establishes such an army following a declaration of independence depends on both intentions and means. Strong motivations for building up a military force more competent than the current one do in fact exist. This can be surmised from the militaristic nature of Palestinian society, which tends to embrace the “uniform culture.” Another sign of a strong desire or intention to create a Palestinian army is the fact that the PA has thus far seized every opportunity to adopt the indicators of nationhood, including postage stamps, a flag, legislative bodies, courts, a stock market, and even an Olympic committee. The most important national indicator would be a formidable military force, and it is hard to believe that the Palestinians would waive their right to such a force once a state is declared.

Nevertheless, desires and intentions are not always sufficient. In terms of the PA’s means to create an army, the situation is much more complex. The PA currently lacks the funds required to finance the buildup of large military formations. The annual budget for the PA’s present 30,000-strong police force—including salaries, training, supplies and living expenses—is approximately \$500 million, according to various financial estimates. Given that its gross domestic product in 1996 was a mere \$3.3 billion, the PA will not be able to maintain such a large force for very long unless it receives generous financial assistance from the donor community. Yet, most of the countries that have already pledged to assist the Palestinians have tied their pledges to civilian development projects and are reluctant to donate money for police purposes. The Johan Jorgan Holst Trust Fund, which the World Bank established in 1994 to help finance the PA’s budget, has exhausted almost all of its funds after transferring more than \$260 million to the PA in 1994–1996. As a result, the PA has been forced to carry most of the economic burden of its security forces on its own. It is therefore unlikely to make much progress in the area of increasing its forces until it reaches economic independence. All of this will leave the Palestinians in the near future with a quasimilitary force that is much smaller and more feeble than they would like it to be, yet at the same time too big and much more costly than they themselves can afford to finance. Moreover, if the Palestinians unilaterally declare a state, some donor countries may rescind the aid they currently have earmarked for the PSS, thus forcing the Palestinians to fund their own military. Constrained by economic limitations, the PA—or the newly declared Palestinian state—might try to look to sign mutual defense treaties with other Arab countries. Even if the Palestinians fail to achieve such pacts, however, the PSS will still pose a fundamentally new type of military challenge to Israel in the coming years.

Notes

- 1 Palestinian Legislative Council member Ziyad Abu Ziyad in an interview to Israeli radio, cited by Laurie Copans, “Palestinians Deny Try for Anti-Tank Missiles,” *Washington Times*, December 10, 1996, p. A15.
- 2 Order of the Day, circulated by Arafat’s political guidance aide, Othman Abu Garbiya, to all PSS officers. See Roni Shaked, “Arm with All Weapons, for the Worst Possible Eventuality,” *Yediot Ahronot* (in Hebrew), December 20, 1996, p. 11.

- 3 Chief of the Civil Police in Hebron, Col. Tariq Zaid, in Julian Borger, "Human Cost Rules Out Israeli Invasion," *Guardian* (London), July 21, 1997, p. 12.
- 4 The IDF was seriously engaged in urban area warfare during the Lebanese War in 1982. The high casualty rate anticipated by the IDF's commanders led to insubordination by one of the brigade commanders, Col. Eli Geva, who was ordered to enter West Beirut with his brigade. His refusal to perform the mission raised a public debate in Israel and emphasized again the problem of urban warfare.
- 5 Palestinian conscription potential: men in the West Bank and Gaza Strip

<u>Age</u>	<u>Gaza</u>	<u>West Bank</u>	<u>Total</u>
13-17	48,000	69,000	117,000
18-22	40,000	62,000	102,000
23-32	62,000	106,000	168,000

Source: The International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 1997/1998*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 137–138.

- 6 Jon Immanuel, "PA National Service Plan Camouflage for Draft," *Jerusalem Post* (international edition), August 16, 1997, p. 3.

Declaration of Principles

Excerpt from the Israel–PLO Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements, September 13, 1993

Article VIII: Public Order and Security

In order to guarantee public order and internal security for the Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the Council will establish a strong police force, while Israel will continue to carry the responsibility for defending against external threats, as well as responsibility for overall security of Israelis for the purpose of safeguarding their internal security and public order.

'The Cairo Agreement'

Excerpts from the Agreement on the Gaza Strip and the Jericho Area, May 4, 1994

Article IX: The Palestinian Directorate of Police Force

1. The Palestinian Authority shall establish a strong police force, the Palestinian Directorate of Police Force (hereinafter "the Palestinian Police"). The duties, functions, structure, deployment and composition of the Palestinian Police, together with provisions regarding its equipment and operation, are set out in Annex I, Article III. Rules of conduct governing the activities of the Palestinian Police are set out in Annex I, Article VIII.
2. Except for the Palestinian Police referred to in this Article and the Israeli military forces, no other armed forces shall be established or operate in the Gaza Strip or the Jericho Area.
3. Except for the arms, ammunition and equipment of the Palestinian Police described in Annex I, Article III, and those of the Israeli military forces, no organization or individual in the Gaza Strip and the Jericho Area shall manufacture, sell, acquire, possess, import or otherwise introduce into the Gaza Strip or the Jericho Area any firearms, ammunition, weapons, explosives, gunpowder or any related equipment, unless otherwise provided for in Annex I.

Annex I: Protocol Concerning Withdrawal of Israeli Military Forces and Security Arrangements

Article III: The Palestinian Directorate of Police Force

1. General

The Palestinian Directorate of Police Force (hereinafter "the Palestinian Police") shall function in accordance with the following principles:

- a. It will be responsible for public order and internal security within the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority in accordance with Article V of the Agreement.
 - b. Movement of Palestinian policemen between the Gaza Strip and the Jericho Area will be conducted in accordance with Article IX of this Annex.
2. Duties and Functions
 - a. Subject to the provisions of this Agreement, in the areas under Palestinian jurisdiction the duties of the Palestinian Police shall be as follows:
 1. Performing normal police functions, including maintaining internal security and public order.
 2. Protecting the public and its property and acting to provide a feeling of security and safety.
 3. Adopting all measures necessary for preventing crime in accordance with the law; and
 4. Protecting public installations and places of special importance.
 3. Structure and Composition
 - a. The Palestinian Police shall consist of one integral unit under the control of the Palestinian Authority. It shall be composed of four branches:
 1. Civil Police (al-Shurta);
 2. Public Security;
 3. Intelligence; and
 4. Emergency Services and Rescue (al-Difa'a al-Madani).

In each district, all members of the four Police branches shall be subordinate to one central command.

- b. The Palestinian Police will establish a Palestinian Coastal Police unit (hereinafter the "Palestinian Coastal Police") in accordance with Article XI of this Annex.
 - c. The Palestinian Police will be comprised of up to 9,000 policemen in all its branches.
4. Recruitment
- a. The Palestinian Police shall consist of policemen recruited locally, and from abroad (from among individuals holding Jordanian passports or Palestinian documents issued by Egypt). The number of Palestinian recruits from abroad shall not exceed 7,000, of whom 1,000 will arrive three months after the signing of the Agreement.
 - b. Palestinians recruited from abroad should be trained as policemen. The employment of policemen who have been convicted of serious crimes or have been found to be actively involved in terrorist activities subsequent to their employment will be immediately terminated. The list of Palestinians recruited, whether locally or from abroad, shall be agreed on by both sides.
 - c. Palestinian policemen coming from abroad may be accompanied by spouse and children.
5. Arms, Ammunition and Equipment
- a. Uniformed policemen, as well as other policemen on duty who hold special accreditation, may carry arms.
 - b. The Palestinian Police will possess the following arms and equipment:
 - 1. 7,000 light personal weapons.
 - 2. Up to 120 machine guns of 0.3" or 0.5" caliber.
 - 3. Up to 45 wheeled armored vehicles of a type to be agreed between the two sides,
- and of which 22 will be deployed in protecting Palestinian Authority installations. The use of wheeled armored vehicles in the Security Perimeter, on the Lateral Roads and on their adjacent sides, or in the vicinity of the Settlements shall be approved through the relevant DCO. Movement of such vehicles along the central North-South road (Road No. 4) in the Gaza Strip may take place only after providing notification to the relevant DCO.
- 4. Communication systems, subject to Article II of Annex II of this Agreement.
 - 5. Distinctive uniforms, identification badges and vehicle markings.
 - c. Relevant police equipment and infrastructure funded from the budget of the Civil Administration shall be transferred to the Palestinian Police.
6. Introduction of Arms and Equipment and Foreign Assistance
- a. All foreign contributions and other forms of assistance to the Palestinian Police must comply with the provisions of this Agreement.
 - b. The introduction into the Gaza Strip or the Jericho Area of arms, ammunition or equipment for the Palestinian Police, from all sources, shall be coordinated through the JSC.
7. Deployment
- The Palestinian Police shall be initially deployed in the Gaza Strip and the Jericho Area as shown on attached maps Nos. 4 and 5. Any changes to this deployment will be agreed on in the JSC.

‘Oslo II’: The Interim Agreement

Excerpts from The Palestinian–Israeli Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, September 28, 1995

Annex I: Protocol Concerning Redeployment and Security Arrangements

Article IV: The Palestinian Police

1. Duties and Functions

As detailed in the Palestinian law, the Palestinian Police shall carry out its duties and functions in accordance with this Agreement as follows:

- a. Maintaining internal security and public order;
- b. Protecting the public and all other persons present in the areas, as well as protecting their property, and acting to provide a feeling of security, safety and stability;
- c. Adopting all measures necessary for preventing crime in accordance with the law;
- d. Protecting public installations, infrastructure and places of special importance;
- e. Preventing acts of harassment and retribution;
- f. Combating terrorism and violence, and preventing incitement to violence;
- g. Performing any other normal police functions.

2. Structure and Composition

- a. The Palestinian Police shall consist of one integral unit under the control of the Council. It shall be composed of six branches:
 1. Civil Police (al-Shurta);
 2. Public Security;
 3. Preventive Security;
 4. Amn al-Ri'asah;
 5. Intelligence; and
 6. Emergency Services and Rescue (al-Difa' al-Madani).

In each district, all members of the six Police branches shall be subordinate to one central command.

- b. The Palestinian Police shall have a Palestinian Coastal Police unit in accordance with Article XIV of this Annex.

3. Deployment

- a. During the interim period, the total number of policemen of the Palestinian Police in all its branches in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip will be no more than 30,000 out of which up to 12,000 policemen may be deployed in the West Bank and up to 18,000 policemen in the Gaza Strip. These numbers may be changed by agreement, if necessary. The Palestinian side will notify Israel of the names of the policemen recruited to the Palestinian Police in the Gaza Strip.
- b. In accordance with the stages of the first phase of redeployment of Israeli forces in the West Bank, up to 6,000 of the above-mentioned 12,000 Palestinian policemen may be deployed in the West Bank in Area A and, as set out in paragraph 3 of Article V, in Area B, as detailed in Appendix 2.
- c. The remaining 6,000 Palestinian policemen will be deployed in the West Bank according to the phases of the further redeployments or as needed, as agreed upon by the two Parties.
- d. The Palestinian Police shall be deployed as shown on attached map Nos. 3 and 5.

4. Recruitment

- a. The Palestinian Police shall consist of policemen recruited locally, and from abroad (from among individuals holding Jordanian

passports or Palestinian documents issued by Egypt). The number of Palestinian recruits from abroad shall not exceed 5,000 in the West Bank and 7,000 in the Gaza Strip.

- b. Palestinian policemen coming from abroad may be accompanied by their spouse and sons and daughters.
 - c. The Palestinian policemen to be recruited pursuant to this Agreement shall be West Bank or Gaza Strip residents who will be duly trained to perform police functions.
 - d. The Palestinian side will notify Israel of any candidate for recruitment to the Palestinian Police. Should Israel object to the recruitment of any such candidate, that person shall not be recruited.
 - e. In accordance with Palestinian law, the employment of policemen who have been convicted of serious crimes, or have been found to be actively involved in terrorist activities subsequent to their recruitment, will be immediately terminated, and their weapons and police identification documentation will be confiscated.
5. Arms, Ammunition and Equipment
- a. In the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, uniformed policemen may carry arms, and plainclothes policemen on duty who hold special accreditation may carry personal light arms concealed in their clothing, in accordance with this Agreement.
 - b. In the West Bank, the Palestinian Police will possess the following arms and equipment:
 1. Up to 4,000 rifles;
 2. Up to 4,000 pistols;
 3. Up to 120 machine guns of 0.3" or 0.5" caliber; and
 4. Up to 15 light, unarmed riot vehicles of a type to be agreed on between the two sides in the JSC.
 - c. In the Gaza Strip, the Palestinian Police will possess the following arms and equipment:
 1. 7,000 light personal weapons;
 2. Up to 120 machine guns of 0.3" or 0.5" caliber; and
 3. Up to 45 wheeled armored vehicles of a type to be agreed on between the two sides, and of which 22 will be deployed in protecting Council installations. The use of wheeled armored vehicles in the

Security Perimeter, on the Lateral Roads and on their adjacent sides, or in the vicinity of the Settlements shall be approved through the relevant DCO. Movement of such vehicles along the central North-South road (Road No. 4) in the Gaza Strip may take place only after providing notification to the relevant DCO.

- d. The number of arms or items of equipment specified in subparagraphs b. and c. above may be increased subject to the agreement of both sides.
 - e. The Palestinian Police will maintain an updated register of all weapons held by its personnel.
 - f. The Palestinian Police may possess communication systems, subject to Article 36 of Annex III, and distinctive uniforms, identification badges and vehicle markings.
 - g. In this Annex, the term "weapons" includes firearms, ammunition and explosives of all kinds.
6. Introduction of Arms, Equipment and Foreign Assistance
- All foreign contributions and other forms of assistance to the Palestinian Police must comply with the provisions of this Agreement.
- a. The introduction of arms, ammunition or equipment intended for the Palestinian Police shall be coordinated through the JSC, in accordance with its established practices.
7. Movement
- Movement of Palestinian policemen between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip will be conducted in accordance with Article X of this Annex.

Appendix 2: Deployment of Palestinian Policemen

1. Pursuant to paragraph 3.b of Article IV of this Annex, the details of the deployment of the 6,000 Palestinian policemen in Areas A and B will be as follows:
 1. In the Jenin District: 1,000 policemen;
 2. In the Tulkarm District: 400 policemen;
 3. In the Qalqilia District: 400 policemen;
 4. In the Nablus District: 1,200 policemen;
 5. In the Ramallah District: 1,200 policemen;
 6. In the Bethlehem District: 850 policemen;

7. In the Hebron District: 950 policemen including 400 policemen in the City of Hebron; and
 8. In the Jericho District: 600 policemen that will be considered part of the number of policemen allocated to the Gaza Strip in accordance with Article IV of this Annex
2. Changes in the numbers of policemen in each district during the further redeployment phases, when the number of policemen in the West Bank will increase to 12,000, will be agreed upon in the West Bank RSC.

Appendix 3: Police Stations and Posts in Area B

1. The Palestinian Police shall establish 25 Civil Police (Al Shurta) police stations and posts in the towns, villages and other places listed below and shown on map No. 3, with personnel and equipment as follows:
 - a. Jenin District
 1. El-Yamun: 50 policemen, 2 vehicles, 9 rifles, 17 pistols;
 2. Meithalun: 50 policemen, 2 vehicles, 9 rifles, 17 pistols;
 3. Kafr Rai: 45 policemen, 2 vehicles, 8 rifles, 15 pistols;
 4. Jalqamus: 45 policemen, 2 vehicles, 8 rifles, 15 pistols; and
 5. Burqin: 45 policemen, 2 vehicles, 8 rifles, 15 pistols.
 - b. Nablus District
 1. Asiraat A-Shumaliyya: 50 policemen, 2 vehicles, 9 rifles, 17 pistols;
 2. Talouza: 45 policemen, 2 vehicles, 8 rifles, 15 pistols;
 3. Tell: 30 policemen, 2 vehicles, 5 rifles, 10 pistols;
 4. Talfit: 60 policemen, 2 vehicles, 12 rifles, 20 pistols;
 - c. Tulkarm and Qalqilya District
 1. Shuweika: 45 policemen, 2 vehicles, 8 rifles, 15 pistols;
 2. Kafr Zibad: 50 policemen, 2 vehicles, 9 rifles, 17 pistols;
 3. Anabta: 50 policemen, 2 vehicles, 9 rifles, 17 pistols; and
 4. Illar: 45 policemen, 2 vehicles, 8 rifles, 15 pistols.
 - d. Ramallah District
 1. Arura: 50 policemen, 2 vehicles, 9 rifles, 17 pistols;
 2. Deir Ghassana: 45 policemen, 2 vehicles, 8 rifles, 15 pistols;
 3. Khirbat Abu Falah: 45 policemen, 2 vehicles, 8 rifles, 15 pistols; and
 4. Bir Zeit: 70 policemen, 3 vehicles, 14 rifles, 23 pistols.
 - e. Bethlehem District
 - Tuqua: 50 policemen, 3 vehicles, 9 rifles, 17 pistols.
 - f. Hebron District
 1. Yata: 80 policemen, 3 vehicles, 15 rifles, 27 pistols;
 2. Dhahiriya: 70 policemen, 3 vehicles, 14 rifles, 23 pistols;
 3. Nuba: 45 policemen, 2 vehicles, 8 rifles, 15 pistols;
 4. Dura: 70 policemen, 3 vehicles, 14 rifles, 23 pistols; and
 5. Bani-Naiem: 45 policemen, 3 vehicles, 8 rifles, 17 pistols.
2. The rifles in each of these police stations will be used only for the purpose of guarding the police station. In special cases, where the use of rifles outside the police station is required for the exercise of public order responsibility, prior notification shall be given to the DCO.

Palestinian Militia Groups in the Diaspora

Group name	Leader	Location	Est. Troops
Palestinian Liberation Front (PLF)	Abu al-Abbas	Iraq/Syria	400-550
Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP)	George Habash	Syria	800
Popular Struggle Front (PSF)	Samir Ghawsha	Syria	600-700
Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP)	Naif Hawatmah	Syria/Lebanon	600
Arab Liberation Front (ALF)	Abd al-Rahim Ahmad	Lebanon/Iraq	500
Palestinian National Liberation Army (PNLA)	(not stated)	Lebanon/Jordan/Iraq/(et al.)	8,000
Fatah Dissidents	Abu-Musa	Syria/Lebanon	1,000
PFLP General Command (PFLP-GC)	Ahmed Jibril	Syria/Lebanon/Iraq	700
Al - Sa'iqqa	Issam al-Qadi	Syria	1,000
Fatah Revolutionary Council	Abu-Nidal	Syria/Lebanon/Iraq	400
Black September 13	Munir al-Makdah	Lebanon	100
Palestinian Liberation Army (PLA)	(not stated)	Syria	4,500

Sources: International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 1997/1998* (London: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 137–138; and Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, *The Middle East Military Balance 1994–1995* (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Post, 1996), pp. 314–326.

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