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The Palestinian Authority: On a Journey to Nowhere

by Kobi Michael, Ori Wertman June 2022

Nearly three decades after its establishment, the Palestinian Authority (PA) has failed to fulfill its historic national goal as a platform for the full implementation of Palestinian independence and the establishment of a viable state "with Jerusalem as its capital." Despite the flickers of hope for reform, especially during Salam Fayyad's tenure as prime minister, the PA is advancing nowhere; it offers no prospect of real change in the political, economic, or social situation. Israel, meanwhile, for lack of a better alternative and owing to political imperatives of its own, is locked into a conflict management mode with no fresh political thinking to help break the stasis in relations. Thus, the PA in its present form is grounded in its failed function, increasingly loses the remnants of the legitimacy in the eyes of the Palestinian public and fails the test of controlling its destiny.

"It can be asserted that the basic drivers for the PA's failure to fulfill its mission can be found in the PA's own conduct."

There are indications—not least in opinion polls and in the latest elections in the Birzeit University student body, as detailed below—that Hamas is effectively positioned as a political alternative. True, Hamas is not part of the PLO: although the official definitions and powers of the PLO as the sole representative of the Palestinian people have not yet changed since its inception and over the years, the PA has pushed the PLO, in effect, out of the center of national activity and has become the most prominent political factor in the Palestinian system. Thus, as senior PLO officials have joined the PA leadership—in fact, the PLO chairman is also the PA president—the center of gravity of the Palestinian people has clearly shifted to the PA territories, making the Fatah–Hamas rivalry (or alternatively, disintegration along sub-regional lines) potentially central to the Palestinian future.

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