



"The Day after Abbas": Strategic Implications for Israel

Udi Dekel and Noa Shusterman

Memorandum
225

December 2022

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המכון למחקרי ביטחון לאומי
THE INSTITUTE FOR NATIONAL SECURITY STUDIES
אוניברסיטת תל אביב
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INSTITUTE FOR NATIONAL SECURITY STUDIES

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MEMORANDUM 225, DECEMBER 2022

היום שאחרי עבאס

משמעויות אסטרטגיות לישראל

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Cover Photo: Marko Djurucs (Reuters)

Graphic design: Michal Semo Kovetz, TAU Graphic Design Studio

Printing: Digiprint Zahav Ltd., Tel Aviv

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December 2022

ISBN: 978-965-92972-3-8

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The question of who will replace or succeed Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) as President of the Palestinian Authority (PA) is one of the most urgent and important issues in the Palestinian arena. It intensifies the rivalry between the main elements of power, namely, Fatah and Hamas, and undermines the PA's control. Once Abbas has left the stage, there will be political turmoil and perhaps even a crisis in the Palestinian camp.

Abbas currently fills three main public positions: President of the PA (he was elected in 2005); Chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO); and Chairman of Fatah. However, he is perceived as a dictatorial ruler since has never stood for reelection or been challenged in an electoral process. How long the 87-year-old Abbas will remain in power is uncertain, although it is known that he is not in the best of health. While in office, he has made sure that no popular political figure who could eclipse him would emerge in the PA, and he has not publicly prepared the way for a successor. If there is no change in the situation and Abbas unexpectedly leaves the stage, the PA is likely to find itself bereft of leadership and without any formal and agreed-upon process to appoint new leadership, while various individuals claim to be successors and seek to inherit one or more of Abbas's positions.

The succession struggles are already underway and impact the balance of power in the Palestinian arena, and even in Fatah there is a growing trend of dissent toward Abbas and action against the PA. One example is the distancing of Tawfiq el-Tirawi (former head of the General Intelligence Service) from Fatah's centers of power due to criticism he voiced against Hussein al-Sheikh. Jibril Rajoub, the secretary general of the Fatah Central Committee, explained that the total commitment to one leader (first Yasir Arafat and subsequently Abbas—like a father who demands loyalty at any price and gets it) served Palestinian interests in the past but merits replacement as part of the process of change necessary in the Palestinian camp. He also made it clear that the

next stage will be completely different from the past and will involve collective decisions with the participation of all the leadership institutions.

This study does not predict who will be Abbas's successor; rather it examines some scenarios for the "day after Abbas" and their implications for Palestinian affairs and for Israel. Each of the scenarios generates a string of consequences and sub-scenarios that will have an impact on the PA and on Israel.

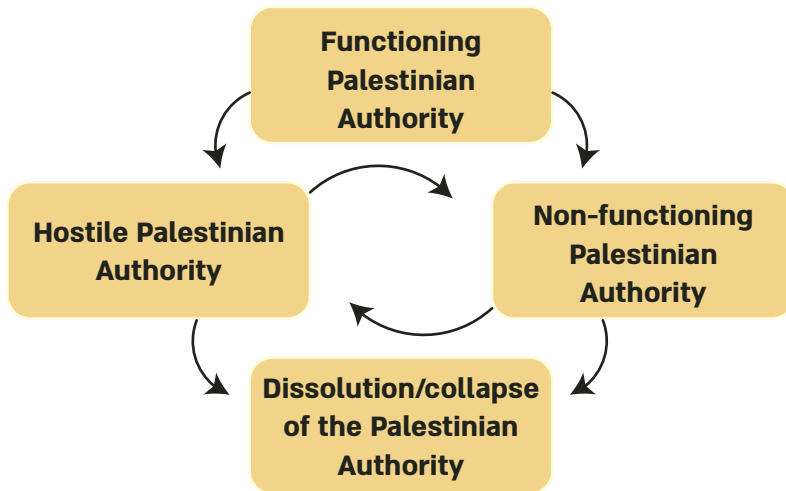
The scenarios:

- a. Abbas grooms and appoints an accepted successor who will assume all three of his positions.
- b. The three roles—President of the PA, Chairman of the PLO, and Chairman of Fatah—will be divided among three different individuals, and a collective leadership will emerge.
- c. Elections will be held for the PA presidency (with optional elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council).
- d. There is no consensus regarding the successor(s) and there will be prolonged struggles for succession.
- e. Hamas will attempt to exploit the opportunity to seize control of the PA and become active in the PLO, with the goal of eventually taking it over.
- f. The Palestinian system descends into chaos, instability, and dysfunction, which leads to the collapse of the PA and the rise of groups hostile to Israel.

In view of the multiplicity of influences and scenarios, it is difficult to predict the future of the Palestinian system. Therefore, Israel must prepare for four possible situations for the PA once Abbas departs the political stage: a functioning PA, with continued security coordination with Israel; a functioning PA that is hostile to Israel; a PA that is no longer functional; and the collapse of the PA. This study focuses on the first three basic states as possible outcomes after Abbas is no longer in office. The fourth outcome, i.e., the dissolution of the PA, is the most disturbing because it leads to a one-state reality or a return to military rule. This outcome is not discussed in depth, although it

brings opportunities to reshape the constellation of power in the Palestinian arena. This can entail Israel's potential annexation of Area C or the recognition of Hamas as the representative of the Palestinians.

Dynamics of PA Basic States

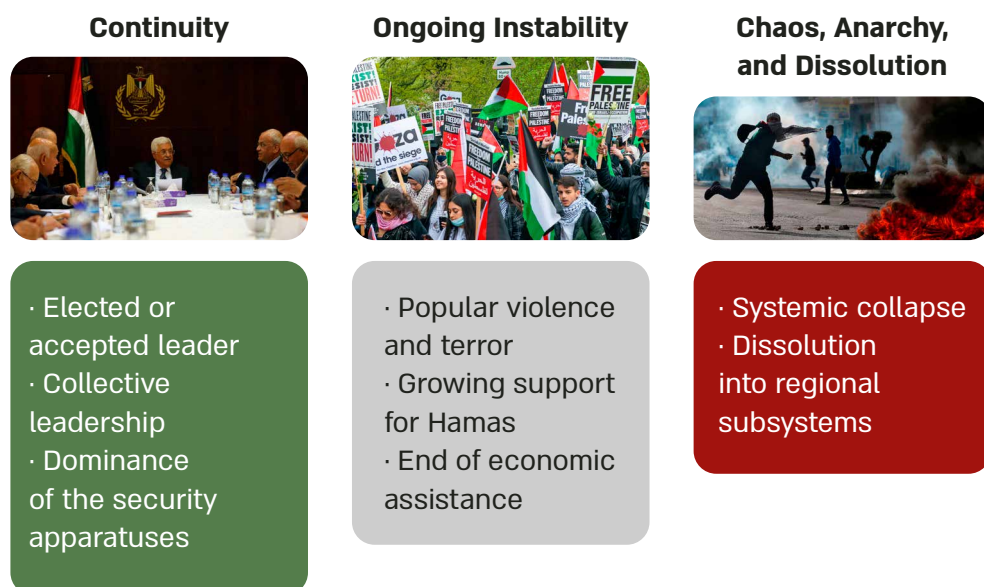


The basic PA states:

- The PA continues to function and to cooperate with Israel, as it does today, primarily in the fight against terror, the maintenance of law and order within PA territory, and civilian issues that affect the Palestinian population in the West Bank.
- The PA continues to function but adopts a hostile attitude to Israel, under the influence of extremist groups that gain control of its agenda.
- The PA is weakened and no longer functions effectively, to the point that it becomes a failed entity, and the processes leading to its collapse gain momentum.

- d. The second and third situations may lead to chaos, in which the PA ceases to be a stabilizing force, is no longer functional, and is unable to govern—in essence, it disintegrates. This can be pushed by a negative dynamic or as a result of a Palestinian decision to “return the keys” to Israel.

Spectrum of Possible Scenarios



Israel's strategic objective in the Palestinian arena is a stable, responsible, and effective PA, which cooperates on security matters, as well as political, social, and economic issues. This study analyzes how Israel's interest, namely, its strategic objective, can be enhanced.

Israel can temper some of the negative trends that are expected to develop or to accelerate when Abbas leaves the political stage, and it can support processes that contribute to the relative stability and continued functioning of the PA. These include non-intervention in the provisional arrangements in the Palestinian system and retention of Israel's future options to shape

the reality of a PA that is separate and distinct from Israel. At the same time, any action by Israel in the context of the Palestinian leadership succession must be measured and well-considered, and steer clear of any attempt to “engineer” the Palestinian system or create an impression that it intends to impose its preferences. In tandem, Israel must try to halt processes that promote chaos and lead to the collapse of the PA, which would force Israel to be directly and deeply involved in the West Bank again or, in other words, restore a military government. This in turn would accelerate the current slide toward a one-state reality.

Israel’s strategic objective in the Palestinian arena is a stable, responsible, and effective PA, which cooperates on security matters, as well as political, social, and economic issues.

Despite the clear Israeli interest in preserving a PA led by Fatah—which officially still adheres to the idea of a negotiated solution in order to achieve the national goal of an independent Palestinian state—Israel is limited in its ability to influence internal Palestinian politics. Nonetheless, Israel can mitigate some of the negative trends already extant in the Palestinian arena. This can be accomplished by means of dialogue with a new leader or leadership; support for the Palestinian economy and an improvement in the quality of life of the Palestinian population, with emphasis on the West Bank but not excluding Gaza if Hamas recognizes the new leadership; reduced civilian friction in the West Bank; support for provisional arrangements in the Palestinian system, with the assistance of the states in the region, the US, and Europe; and a convincing commitment to maintain the option of a two-state solution.

The security establishment must also prepare for the negative scenario of chaos and anarchy, to the point of collapse of the PA and the need to reshape the Palestinian arena. It is essential to consider all possible Israeli responses

to violent incidents, while ensuring that this does not accelerate the collapse of the Palestinian system and thus create a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The policy of differentiation between the West Bank and Gaza should be maintained in order to prevent Hamas from expanding its influence in the West Bank and prevent its gradual takeover of the PA. At the same time, it is important to maintain the security calm in the Gaza perimeter, in view of the ties between Gaza and the West Bank and the inspiration emanating from Gaza for violence in the West Bank. The Arab world should be recruited to assist the day-to-day functioning of the PA and the process of state-building and economic development, and to prevent the provision of assistance to insurgent elements, in particular Hamas.

Assuming that a new or temporary PA leadership is chosen or appointed from the ranks of Fatah, Israel should act according to the following guidelines:

- a. Continue strengthening security coordination with the PA security apparatuses. Thus, military actions that embarrass the PA security apparatuses and undermine the public legitimacy of the new government should be avoided as much as possible, except in the case of extreme events.
- b. Israel should tolerate a confrontational approach by the new Palestinian leadership in the international arena, as long as it does not encourage terror and violence. This is based on the understanding that a confrontational approach will help the new leadership consolidate its legitimacy among the Palestinian public.
- c. Israel, together with its international partners, and in particular the US, Jordan, and Egypt, should periodically assess the stability on the Palestinian side and consider ways to strengthen the new leadership. This includes identifying ways to renew the political process as a stabilizing factor.
- d. It is important to arrive at understandings with the new leadership, with the goal of improving the economic situation and infrastructure services provided to the Palestinian population. This can be done in partnership

with other states inside and outside the region that have an interest in the Palestinian arena. This is also the case if a Palestinian unity government emerges and on condition that Hamas does not assume a key position in it, such as prime minister or minister of the interior responsible for internal security.

Israel must avoid actions that block the way to revive the political process, such as unilateral moves to create territorial facts on the ground in the West Bank, which will accelerate the slide into a one-state reality.

The authors wish to thank all those who took part in the process of conceptualizing, writing, and editing this study, among them the researchers in the INSS Israeli-Palestinian Relations Program: Yohanan Tzoreff; Dr. Kobi Michael; Adv. Pnina Sharvit Baruch; Dr. Haggay Etkes; Dr. Oded Eran; and Dr. Shira Efron. Other researchers who assisted were Dr. Ofir Winter and Dr. Yoel Guzansky. A special thanks goes to Dr. Anat Kurz, Director of Research at INSS, who edited this study.

Main Recommendations

Israel should use its power both to strengthen the new leader and to reduce instability by maintaining and improving the fabric of everyday life.

Reward the PA for a positive non-confrontational approach in order to prevent the erosion of its status.

Constrain Hamas and assist in strengthening the camp that supports a negotiated settlement, by opening the door to a political process.

Maintain coordination with the PA security apparatuses without reducing Israel's operational freedom.

Strengthen the PA security apparatuses by rewarding cooperation and extending assistance to improve their effectiveness.

Recruit the Arab world to assist in improving the performance of the PA under the new leadership and to support economic growth processes and state-building.

Avoid overall responsibility for the Palestinian population or a return to a military regime.

Prevent a slide into a one-state reality.

INTRODUCTION

Mahmoud Abbas, 87 years old at the time of this writing, has filled three senior leadership positions for the last 17 years, serving as Chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO); President of the Palestinian Authority (PA); and Chairman of Fatah.

Abbas succeeded Yasir Arafat, who was Chairman of the PLO's Executive Committee for 35 years, Chairman of Fatah for about four decades, and President of the PA for 10 years. Abbas's succession marked the end of the era of intifadas—the Palestinian popular uprisings led by a uniform-wearing leadership that embraced terrorism as part of its policy.

Abbas's leadership has been characterized by an adherence to the political process and a rejection of violence and terror, although it is also characterized by a confrontational approach toward Israel in the international arena. He has invested efforts toward the establishment of a Palestinian state and its institutions, and the imposition of order in the territory controlled by the PA, in accordance with his vision of “one authority, one law, and one weapon.” On the other hand, he is accountable for the split between the West Bank and Gaza and between the two main Palestinian movements, Fatah and Hamas, and the ongoing stagnation in the political process, which has discouraged the achievement of a two-state solution, i.e., the establishment of a Palestinian state based on the June 4, 1967 lines, with its capital in East Jerusalem.

With Arafat's demise in late 2004, there was widespread consensus among Fatah's leadership institutions that Abbas would be the candidate for PA president. In the presidential elections held in 2005 (and which have not been held since), Abbas won 62 percent of the vote. He emphasized his support for negotiations with Israel, opposition to an armed struggle, and support for an agreement that would create a Palestinian state within the '67 borders with its capital in East Jerusalem, as well as the “right of return” for Palestinian refugees. Many commentators attribute his victory to the fact that he was

not a belligerent figure and advocated the path of negotiations, and as such, did not evoke strong feelings of opposition. Abbas had been part of the PLO leadership since 1968 when Fatah joined the PLO, and during most of that time he was the right-hand man of Arafat, the unchallenged leader. Abbas served for a short time as the head of the PA government alongside Arafat, and therefore upon Arafat's death it was natural that he become the Chairman of the PA and its President. Others who made claims to the leadership believed that at some point they would be able to unseat or succeed him.

Since his early days in Palestinian politics, Abbas clung to the approach that violent opposition to Israel does not help realize the goal of a Palestinian state and that diplomatic efforts in the international arena are preferred. His approach was not accepted for many years and was even marginalized in Palestinian and Arab discourse, since it called for dialogue with Israel and with Israelis even before the historic recognition by the PLO of the State of Israel (within the June 4, 1967 lines) at the conclusion of the 19th Palestinian National Council (PNC) meeting in Algiers in 1988, during the first intifada in the West Bank and Gaza, which began in late 1987. Abbas played a central role in the direct talks with Israeli representatives (though only behind the scenes, in Track II talks), which led to the Oslo Accords. With the signing of the agreements, his approach won recognition and he emerged from the shadows.

The heavy damage sustained by the Palestinians during the second intifada (2000–2005), a campaign of lethal terror against the Jewish population in Israel and the settlements, led to the death of thousands of Palestinians and the widespread destruction of homes and property; the loss of legitimacy for the realization of Palestinian national aspirations from both Israeli and international viewpoints, due to the choice of terror instead of negotiations; the loss of employment; Israel's imposition of heavier restrictions on movement; and damage to the Palestinian economy and quality of life. It subsequently also led to construction of the security barrier, which in Palestinian eyes was

viewed as a wall of separation (B'Tselem, 2017). All these paved the way for the rise of a leader that promised a new approach, and indeed, Abbas was embraced and won international and pan-Arab support.

The beginning of Abbas's rule was characterized by an intensive process led by PA Prime Minister Salam Fayyad to build a base for the future Palestinian state. Abbas, with his declared policy of fighting terror and aspiration to restore the international legitimacy of the Palestinian people, initiated the security coordination with Israel and made sure to maintain it even in periods of political and military tension, although from time to time he threatened to terminate it. When the security coordination with Israel was discontinued in 2020, following Israel's announcement that it would annex territory according to the framework issued by the Trump administration, known as "the deal of the century" (Trump White House, 2020), in practice it continued counterterror efforts. Overall, Abbas's tenure was characterized by a stated approach that seeking a final status agreement is the only way to resolve the conflict.

Since 2014 and following the last attempt to achieve a final status agreement with Israel, which was mediated by US Secretary of State John Kerry, and the round of conflict between Israel and Hamas during Operation Protective Edge in Gaza, the political process has been in a "deep freeze." In parallel, Hamas, a political rival of both Fatah and the PA, has gained strength at their expense. The erosion of Fatah's status began already with the victory of Hamas in the elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) in 2006 and the takeover by force in Gaza a year later, where Hamas has ruled ever since.

The erosion of the status of the PA as the only legitimate sovereign in the Palestinian arena was accelerated by the ongoing stagnation of the political process and the policy of successive Israeli governments, which prevents or at least rejects any arrangement that leads to the creation of a Palestinian state. To the extent that these governments worked to expand the settlements in the West Bank and established new ones—alongside the tacit approval of illegal settlements and the growing threats of annexation following announcement

of the Trump plan—and the subsequent signing of the Abraham Accords (U.S. Department of State, n.d.), which normalized relations between Israel and the UAE, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco, the legitimacy of Abbas's political approach was undermined and his power diminished. His approach, considered to be conciliatory and viewed as serving the interests of the Israeli occupation, has been subject to strong criticism among the Palestinian public.

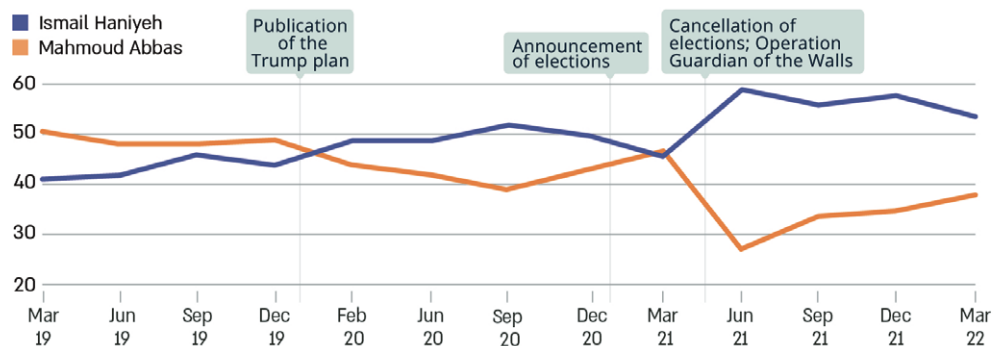
Moreover, during Abbas's rule Fatah and the PLO have lost power to the PA, which currently controls the centers of power in the West Bank, is recognized in the international area as the government representing the future state, and has potential leverage in Gaza. In the eyes of many Palestinians, Hamas, which does not accept Fatah's control of the PLO and the PA, is a legitimate alternative to lead the Palestinian national movement. Fatah is considered a corrupt and anachronistic organization that preserves the traditional centers of power and does not allow the emergence of alternative centers of power, particularly since Abbas took control of the PLO and Fatah and became President of the PA. Hamas takes pride in being a social movement that holds regular elections for its institutions—the external leadership, the leadership in Gaza, and the leadership in the West Bank, as well as the leadership of Hamas prisoners jailed in Israel and the leadership in the refugee camps—and whose institutions are run collectively, notwithstanding the obstacles created by Israel and the PA. Even the PLO, which represents all the Palestinians in the territories and the diaspora and is meant to link all the main Palestinian factions, has over the years become an archaic organization with mainly symbolic power and little influence over decision making.

The PA and its leader therefore face an unprecedented crisis of confidence among the Palestinian public. Abbas, who at the beginning of his rule projected the image of a clear-headed leader who promised to establish democratic state institutions, has in practice undermined those institutions. He did not hold elections; appointed his loyalists to key positions; weakened political opponents and rivals; and suppressed expressions of protest against him.

The public criticism of Abbas intensified after the cancellation of the elections for the PLC, which were scheduled for May 2021. Subsequently, the criticism grew as a result of Hamas's attack on Israel in which it positioned itself as the leader of the Palestinian camp and the defender of Jerusalem. Joining this were the economic crisis resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and the decline in funding to the PA. In contrast, Hamas achieved concessions from Israel: relief in the Gaza closure, work permits for Gazans in Israel, and the launch of reconstruction projects in Gaza.

Opinion polls confirm the lack of legitimacy of Abbas's rule and the PA in general, where the main undermining factor is the political rivalry with Hamas. A survey conducted in June 2021 (about a month after Operation Guardian of the Walls and two months after the cancellation of the elections) by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PCPSR) headed by Dr. Khalil Shikaki, in collaboration with Konrad Adenaur Stiftung (PCPSR, 2021) found that about two-thirds of the Palestinian public are opposed to the cancellation or deferral of the elections and do not believe Abbas that the deferral was due to Israel's refusal to allow the elections to include East Jerusalem. Many believe that the reason for the deferral lay in Abbas's fear of a possible victory for Hamas. Furthermore, the survey findings show that had the presidential elections been held, Abbas would have lost to Hamas head Ismail Haniyeh (59 percent vs. 27 percent), and in the elections for the legislature, Hamas would have won 41 percent of the votes as opposed to only 30 percent for Fatah. These figures confirm the trends charted in prior surveys, which point to a drop in support for a two-state solution and an increase in support for violent opposition to Israel.

Support for Ismail Haniyeh vs. Mahmoud Abbas as President of the PA



Source: Public opinion polls carried out by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PCPSR)

These figures and the trends they reflect paint a worrisome picture for Abbas and his supporters and demonstrate the prestige enjoyed by Hamas as an alternative. Against this background, the PA's security apparatuses are trying to suppress the growing public protest, which accuses Abbas and his underlings of causing the death in June 2021 of incarcerated Nizar Banat, a social activist and vocal critic who had intended to run in the elections for the legislature. The demonstrations in protest of his death were dispersed forcibly and activists were arrested, as well as in demonstrations following the killing of young Palestinians in clashes with IDF forces.

The public criticism was enhanced by the protest against the PA's foreign policy, and in particular, the inability to generate pressure on Israel in various international forums, including the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague. The Trump administration represented a challenge for Abbas and made it difficult for him to "internationalize" the conflict, i.e., make it a focus of international rather than only local attention. This effort, which was led by the PA, experienced a serious blow when President Trump closed the Palestinian Consulate in Jerusalem, moved the US Embassy from Tel Aviv to

Jerusalem, and closed the Palestinian diplomatic office in Washington, while cutting off the financing to UNWRA, the transfer of assistance to Palestinian organizations by way of USAID, and the direct transfer of funds to the PA following the Taylor Force Act.¹ The most serious blow was the so-called deal of the century, a plan to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that ignored most of the Palestinians' historic demands and in theory granted legitimacy to the State of Israel to annex territory in the West Bank (Dekel & Shusterman, 2020). It also laid the groundwork for the Abraham Accords between Israel and several Arab states, thus removing the demand to reach a negotiated solution in the Israel-Palestinian conflict as a precondition for normalization between the Arab states and Israel. These developments deepened the strategic crisis experienced by the PA and highlighted that Abbas's policy was not producing any benefits.

The election of President Joe Biden to the White House breathed new hope into the leadership of the PA regarding its support of a political process with Israel. To those in the leadership, Trump's replacement by Biden took the deal of the century off the table, and the Biden administration resumed the traditional support of a two-state solution. Abbas and senior figures in the PA were encouraged by disagreements between the government of Israel and the Biden administration, and in particular, by the US demand that Israel refrain from steps that preclude the possibility of a two-state solution in the future. Nonetheless, after nearly two years in office in which the Biden administration did not lead to an Israeli change in policy or prompt any significant action, the political stagnation persists and the PA continues weakening. The Palestinian leadership has realized that the Biden administration—in contrast to expectations—does not intend to apply pressure to restart the political

- 1 The Taylor Force Act prohibits the US government from transferring any assistance to the PA until it stops paying salaries to terrorists and condemns terror. The law was approved as part of the Consolidated Appropriations Act in 2018. Taylor Force was an American citizen killed in a terrorist attack on the Tel Aviv-Yafo boardwalk in March 2016.

process. Discouragement also increased among Palestinians from the lack of international and regional support and interest in their predicament.

The platform of Israel's government under Naftali Bennett and Yair Lapid, formed in June 2021, included maintaining the "status quo" in the Palestinian arena, or in other words deferring progress in any political process. At the same time, maintaining the status quo also means deferring steps toward unilateral annexation of the West Bank, though not initiatives for regional economic development. In this context, for the first time in years, Abbas met with Israeli senior officials, chief among them Minister of Defense Benny Gantz, and spoke with Prime Minister Yair Lapid. These talks did not lead to a dramatic change in the PA's status or an improvement in the Palestinian public's attitude toward it, but rather increased criticism on charges of the PA's cooperation with Israel at the expense of the Palestinian public.

As of the time of this writing, the political process remains frozen and the Palestinians are preparing for the "post-Abbas era." Alliances are forming and groups are merging in preparation for a struggle for power. Despite his weakness, Abbas has rejected demands such as the discontinuation of security coordination with Israel and is working to maintain his position—but this is essentially a holding action. The study below reviews and analyzes various scenarios once Abbas departs the political stage, and examines their implications for the Palestinian arena and for Israel. It concludes with policy recommendations for decision makers in Israel that aim to protect and advance Israel's interests.

CHAPTER 1

THE IMPLICATIONS FOR THE "DAY AFTER ABBAS"

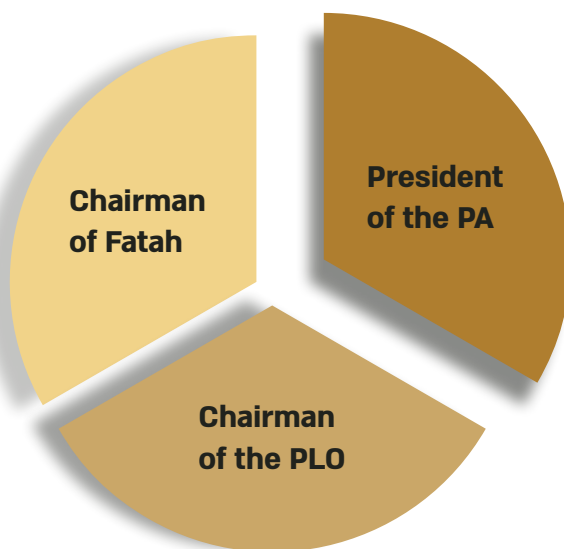
Once Abbas has left the political stage, three key positions will have to be filled:

- a. Fatah Chairmanship: The Chair is chosen by the Fatah Council. After Arafat's death, Farouq Qaddumi was chosen to become Chairman of the organization. In 2009, Abbas was the only candidate and was chosen for the position at Fatah's Sixth Congress. Abbas, who is counted among the old guard of the organization's founders, has filled various organizational positions during his public career.
- b. PLO Chairmanship: In 1969, Yasir Arafat, who was the head of Fatah, was chosen to become the Chairman of the PLO as part of an agreement for the division of internal power in the Palestinian National Council, which granted most of the seats to Fatah. Following the death of Arafat, Mahmoud Abbas was chosen to become the chairman of the PLO's Executive Committee and as such the Chairman of the PLO in practice. The PNC is the legislative body of the PLO and Fatah still holds a majority.
- c. PA Presidency: The president is chosen by direct national elections, which were last held in 2005 following the death of Arafat. Fatah's candidate for the presidency is meant to be chosen by the organization's Central Committee.

Abbas's departure from the political stage is expected to be a shock to the Palestinian political system, since it will create a leadership vacuum, without any fundamental institutional infrastructure for the transfer of power and the appointment of successors. Although the institutions themselves have mechanisms for the transfer of power, which operated when Abbas replaced Arafat, they have eroded over the past decade and have become a tool for maintaining political power. Although the system might overcome its weaknesses and the institutions might function even during a shockwave

such that a successor is chosen according to accepted procedure, a reasonable scenario involves power struggles over the positions to be refilled. Currently, while Abbas is still at the helm, there are efforts by various individuals to strengthen the power of the organizational mechanisms of control. Since Abbas heads the three main bodies in parallel—the PA, the PLO, and Fatah—it is likely there will be a need to define explicitly the division of power and responsibility between them. The decisions regarding the division of power can in principle be made by the movement's institutions, by the national institutions, or by a strong figure with political influence who emerges after Abbas.

Positions Held by Mahmoud Abbas



The President of the PA controls the main center of power. He is the head of the Palestinian governing body and the institutions of the state-in-the-making, and he is in charge of the PA's intelligence and security apparatuses. Abbas's replacement in this position will presumably first focus on establishing the legitimacy of his rule on the domestic front and dealing with the split

between the West Bank and Gaza, including relations with Hamas. These tasks will be a condition for the possibility of continuing to strengthen the foundations of the Palestinian state. Against this background, the political process with Israel will at first assume only secondary priority. The successor will likely take a highly confrontational stance toward Israel in order to score points with the public, at least at the start of his tenure.

The Chairman of the PLO is responsible for relations with the Palestinian diaspora, and has the mandate to deal with Israel on the political and international fronts and to negotiate a settlement. The chairmanship of Fatah can be a springboard to the two other positions, but it might remain separate in order to enable the division of power between the various contenders. The importance of this position lies in the political power it entails, which depends on the support of Fatah's military factions, namely, Tanzim.

Even though the PA came into existence based on treaties signed by the PLO with Israel, it is the PA that controls the money, the resources, and the power, while the PLO has gradually lost its status and power since the PA's establishment. The PA has emerged as the governing infrastructure for the state-in-information, and in practice is the entity that manages the everyday life of millions of Palestinians. Therefore, the struggle between the Fatah leaders to succeed Abbas will likely focus on the position of PA President. In that situation, it will be possible to arrive at understandings that reduce the possibility that those who fill the three positions—the President of the

Abbas's departure from the political stage is expected to be a shock to the Palestinian political system, since it will create a leadership vacuum, without any fundamental institutional infrastructure for the transfer of power and the appointment of successors.

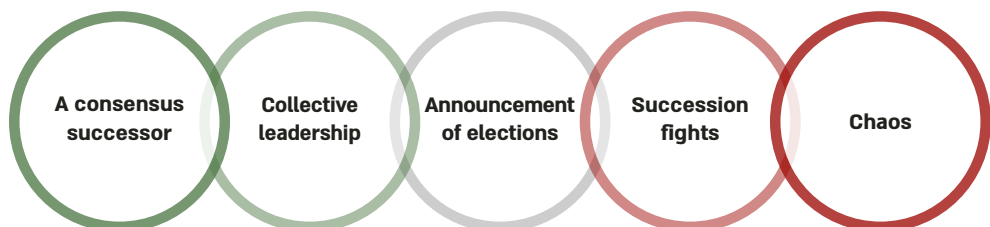
PA, the Chairman of the PLO, and the Chairman of Fatah—will step on each other's toes.

Since Abbas has no natural and accepted heir for any of his positions, and since the elections law has not been invoked for many years, it is unclear how the transfer of power will take place and how the positions will be filled.

There are four leading scenarios:

- a. Prior to leaving the stage, Abbas chooses his preferred candidate to head Fatah and promotes him as the consensus candidate of Fatah and the PLO.
- b. Abbas leaves the stage without any known successor. According to Palestinian law, the head of the PLC, the Palestinian parliament, is appointed for an interim period as the President of the PA, until presidential elections are held. However, the PLC has not functioned since 2006, and according to the results of the election that year, is headed by a Hamas representative.
- c. A more likely possibility is that the Fatah Central Committee will choose the leader, or alternatively, a leadership group that will divide the three main positions between them. The first decision of the chosen leader or leadership group will be whether to hold a presidential election, in view of the clear risk that a senior Hamas figure will win.
- d. The main candidates will compete for power, which will create instability and leadership chaos in the West Bank.

Possible Scenarios after Abbas Departs the Stage



There will be a great deal of pressure—both internal and external—on the new leadership to prove its governing ability and the ability to maintain political stability and security. Presumably various groups from within (Hamas and the various opposition factions) and without (Iran and Hezbollah) will seek to challenge and undermine the

The transfer of power will likely be characterized by fluctuations in the level of violence and by Israel's limited control of escalation and containment of events.

new leadership in order to increase their hold and influence in domestic Palestinian affairs. For Hamas this is a historic opportunity to transform its political status and forcibly achieve one of its main goals, namely, to penetrate and take control of the PLO, to reshape the PLC, to regain the majority for its members, and to integrate into the Palestinian government. This will constitute leverage for Hamas to increase its power in the PA's institutions in the West Bank, on the way to taking over the Palestinian leadership in the future and replacing Fatah as the leading Palestinian political party.

More than anything else, the new leadership will need to prove that it is worthy of the mandate it has received or taken by force, and to this end it will have to demonstrate achievements to the Palestinian public. These achievements will be internal—civil, economic, and political—and external—primarily in the political realm opposite Israel.

Israeli Interests

The overall impression is that the Israeli public is indifferent to internal Palestinian affairs in general, and the succession issue in particular. The government of Israel, for its part, prefers and hopes to preserve the status quo and is not looking for opportunities to change it—be it to promote the political process or to move toward annexation. Most of the actors—the current Palestinian leadership, Israel, the states in the region, and the international

community—have a joint interest in ensuring the survival and performance of the PA in its current format and preventing the takeover of the Palestinian apparatuses of control by Hamas. Nonetheless, the transfer of power will likely be characterized by fluctuations in the level of violence and by Israel's limited control of escalation and containment of events. While most of the Palestinian public in the West Bank, as well as in Gaza, prefer calm and desire an improvement in their daily lives, the shock caused by Abbas's departure is likely to create opportunities for groups in opposition to the PA, and in particular Hamas, to increase their power.

In this context, there are basic Israeli interests in the Palestinian arena that Israel should guard in any of the scenarios:

- a. Stability and calm in the West Bank and Gaza
- b. A responsible, stable, and functioning PA that serves as an address that will engage with Israel based on agreed and common rules
- c. An improvement in the economic situation and quality of life of the Palestinian population, as a means of achieving stability and security
- d. Differentiation between the West Bank and Gaza, to limit the influence of Hamas in the West Bank
- e. Minimization of Hamas's negative influence originating from Gaza and other negative external influences, e.g., Iran and Hezbollah
- f. Strengthening of groups that recognize Israel and are open to the idea of a negotiated settlement, and weakening of resistance groups
- g. Prevention of the imposition of external political efforts that are not desirable for Israel.

Basic PA States

The PA stands to transition to one of three possible states after Abbas departs the political stage:

- a. A functioning and cooperating PA—similar to the situation prevailing in the West Bank for many years already, in which the PA is a relatively

functional governing body that provides public services; it holds (in theory) a monopoly on the use of force in Areas A and B; it constitutes an official address on matters of state; and it cooperates with Israel on security and civilian matters and in most cases also on the economic level, public health, employment, and more.

- b. A functioning but hostile PA: The PA will continue to function as a recognized and responsible Palestinian government, at least in the West Bank, but will be hostile toward Israel and will refuse to cooperate with it. The discontinuation of relations as a result of the Netanyahu government's declared intention to annex territory in 2019 demonstrated this outcome on a small scale. The PA will maintain its confrontational approach to Israel in the international and regional arenas—and with increased intensity, will discontinue security coordination, and at the same time will use force to block the operational activity of the IDF in Areas A and B, and especially in the Palestinian cities.
- c. A failed PA: The PA will lose its hold on the ground entirely and its monopoly on the use of force; its security apparatuses and civilian mechanisms will no longer function; it will also lose its remaining legitimacy in the eyes of the Palestinian population and will cease to function as a central government. This outcome is liable to lead to chaos in the West Bank and heightened terror and violence. Each local area will operate according to the relative power of the clans, factions, and armed groups within it, and presumably this situation will fuel the power and status of Hamas.

Basic PA States and their Implications

Functioning and cooperating Palestinian Authority

- Functioning government that supplies public services and has a monopoly on the use of force
- A responsible official address on the political level
- Cooperation with Israel in security and civil matters

Functioning but hostile Palestinian Authority

- Functioning and responsible government but hostile to Israel, with no contact policy
- Fear of clashes between Palestinian security apparatuses and IDF forces while on missions in the West Bank
- Economic damage to the PA given the extensive dependence on Israel

Failed Palestinian Authority

- The PA loses its hold over the area and its monopoly on the use of force
- The security apparatuses and civilian institutions cease to function and do not supply basic services to the population
- Increased chaos, division into clans and strongholds, and strengthened terror organizations

Main Variables

There are several variables whose characteristics and intensities will to a large extent determine which scenario is realized and how the Palestinian arena will respond after Abbas departs the scene:

- Legitimacy of the leadership:** The successor or successors to the leadership of the PA and the Palestinian institutions will need to earn legitimacy in the domestic arena, in Israel, and in the international Arab arenas.
- Internal Palestinian consensus on the transfer of power:** The transfer of power can be accomplished in a number of ways—internal consensus within Fatah, consensus within the PLO, national consensus (including all of the Palestinian factions, among them Hamas), or a takeover of the

government by force and general elections (either in the West Bank and Gaza or in the West Bank alone). In order to achieve the legitimacy that is essential for leadership, a consensus that is as broad as possible is needed between the security apparatuses, the factions, the institutions, the public, and the regional system. The lack of such a consensus or the achievement of only a partial consensus (without the agreement of the factions or in the case of elections only in the West Bank) is liable to undermine internal stability and may lead to a lack of legitimacy, both internal and external.

- c. Level of governance and governmental stability:** The ability to govern and to provide services to the public, including maintenance of law and order, security, freedom of movement, and more. These should be stabilizing elements after Abbas departs.
- d. The economic situation and the quality of life for the Palestinian population:** a stable budget, employment in the PA systems and in Israel, continued external support, and donations to the PA. These parameters will have implications for the effectiveness of the PA's rule and its legitimacy in the eyes of the Palestinian public.
- e. Integration of the younger generation:** Meeting the needs and expectations of the younger generation, whose integration within the political system—which is perceived as outdated, corrupt, and not representative—will reduce public opposition to the new leadership and help support its stability and increase its room to maneuver.
- f. External involvement:** External legitimacy that is manifested, inter alia, in expressions of confidence and international economic support will strengthen the leadership and stabilize the system. Arab involvement, and in particular that of Jordan and Egypt, as well as Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf states, will likewise have this effect. On the other hand, blocking external and subversive influences from outside actors, such as Iran and Hezbollah, will have a positive effect on the government's stability and image.

Areas Controlled by the Palestinian Authority: Areas A and B



- g. Israeli policy:** As long as the new Palestinian leadership is not hostile to Israel, then Israel can support the new leadership by adopting a policy that primarily involves recognition of the new leadership, support, assistance that allows it to demonstrate achievements (such as an improvement in the economic situation and in the Palestinians' quality of life, which can be accomplished by continuing to allow employment in Israel and easier processing at the border crossings), and avoidance of unilateral territorial moves. In a situation where Hamas becomes the leading power element on the Palestinian side, Israel will have to decide whether to reject it, try to weaken it, or boycott it, or alternatively, to challenge it with a political initiative—or some combination of the approaches.
- h. Reconciliation or internal Palestinian consensus:** The variable with the greatest potential to strengthen the next Palestinian leadership is its ability to initiate an internal Palestinian process of reconciliation. This is especially so if it can bring about the restoration of PA rule in Gaza, even if the arrangements are only partial at the outset and even if the military wing of Hamas is not entirely under the command of the PA.

Weak stabilizing factors or their elimination will lead to negative outcomes, and in the worst case, to chaos, violence, and terror.

Variables that will Influence the Palestinian Arena after Abbas's Departure



CHAPTER 2

THE LEADING SCENARIOS

Scenario I: A Consensus Successor

The optimistic scenario involves an orderly and stable process in which a leader or leadership emerges to succeed Abbas. In this scenario, Abbas will prepare the way ahead of time by choosing a candidate or candidates to replace him in all three positions, based on the understanding that his time as *rais* is limited. He will start to transfer power and strengthen individuals that are loyal to him within the ruling bodies of Fatah, the PLO, and the PA. There are those who believe that Abbas has begun to mark his successors by appointing Hussein al-Sheikh as the secretary general of the Executive Committee of the PLO and by strengthening the regional and international status of Majed Faraj, the head of the Palestinian General Intelligence Service. In this situation, the system would not undergo a shock when Abbas leaves and would continue to function according to the policy guidelines he has established. This increases the likelihood that the PA institutions, including the security apparatuses, will continue to function. The main role is reserved for the National Security Forces, which has the largest force and is perceived as the PA's army. This apparatus has the capability to stabilize the situation on the ground, contribute to the enforcement of law and order, neutralize terrorist threats, and maintain tight security coordination with Israel.

The Palestinian motivation to maintain the PA as a responsible, stable, and functioning government will be based on a number of factors: first and foremost, the desire to prevent Hamas from undermining stability and accumulating power at the expense of Fatah; second, the desire for economic prosperity and assistance from the countries in the region and international sources (the donor countries); third, the personal interest of survival among many of the Palestinian leaders who wish to maintain (and even upgrade) their

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status in the new leadership; fourth, the Jordanian support for the leadership as a stabilizing factor, based on the concern that chaos will spill over from the West Bank into the Kingdom of Jordan; and fifth, a supportive US administration that will view the new leaders as an opportunity to upset the status quo with Israel and demonstrate understanding for Palestinian needs as a means of creating renewed motivation for the political process.

With respect to the new leadership's legitimacy among the public and the processes it will launch, an agreed-upon process for the immediate transfer of power—with a division of power on the basis of internal processes, and above all, elections for the PLC and the presidency of the PA—will presumably receive relatively broad support among the various political factions and among the Palestinian public. On the other hand, avoiding the election process, even after choosing an immediate successor, is liable to contain this positive effect and weaken the support of the Palestinian public for the new leadership, particularly among the younger generation. They are likely to view the new leader as "more of the same," namely a product of the corrupt political system that advances individuals on the basis of authority, money, or nepotism, rather than considerations such as the good of the people and the right to an independent state.

An important and relevant factor in the emergence of a positive scenario is a stable security situation, i.e., a low level of violence on the Palestinian street and friction with Israel and the settlement population, as well as calm on the Gaza border. This will require greater awareness on the part of Israel and a policy to reduce friction and restrain Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

This scenario leaves room for an internal Palestinian process of reconciliation, since Abbas's firm opposition to Hamas was based not only on political considerations but also personal/emotional sensitivities: it was on his watch that Hamas took over Gaza by force. If Hamas views Abbas's successor as a unifying figure, there will be a greater possibility of reconciliation or at least the establishment of a unity or technocratic government, and Gaza's negative influence in the Palestinian arena and in relations with Israel will diminish in the short term. Nonetheless, Hamas will likely exploit the weakness of the new leader or his desire for reconciliation in order to increase its political power and its public legitimacy in the West Bank.

An Optimistic Scenario: Opportunities

In a calm security situation, both in the West Bank and in Gaza, it will be possible to promote processes that are positive from Israel's perspective as well. On the one hand, Abbas's replacement will presumably share his lack of trust of Hamas and the fear of a Hamas takeover, but will not be subject to the personal-emotional constraints that influence Abbas's attitude to the rival organization. Under these circumstances, a more positive relationship might develop between the organizations, together with a new balance of power. A new and more flexible leadership can move toward a Palestinian unity government and perhaps even the restoration of PA control over Gaza. This will increase the legitimacy of the new government and solidify its status as the exclusive address for Israel and the international community. However, the manner of the PA's return to Gaza, its role in the administration of Gaza, and the status of Hamas's military wing relative to the Palestinian security forces will depend on both the strength of Fatah relative to Hamas immediately after Abbas departs the stage and the question of which organizations have an advantage or are prepared to compromise. Furthermore, a new security situation in Gaza is possible in the case of an Israeli military operation that dismantles the military wing of Hamas and Islamic Jihad in Gaza. Egypt will

also have an important role to play in providing guarantees of calm and restraining Hamas in Gaza.

The new Palestinian leadership, if it abandons its opposition to the agreements and joint projects between Israel and the Arab states that emerged from the Abraham Accords, will be able to draw the attention of the regional and international players who wish to increase their influence in Palestinian affairs and their investment in economic/infrastructure projects in PA territory. The revival of projects that are currently shelved will provide positive momentum for the Palestinian economy and build stability. However, the involvement of Hamas in the PA will reduce the willingness of the international community to provide funding to the PA, since Hamas is defined by the EU and the US as a terror organization and the conditions for recognizing its legitimacy are its abandonment of terror and violence and its recognition of agreements between the PLO and the PA on the one hand and Israel on the other. In addition, Hamas is obligated to a third condition, namely, the recognition of the State of Israel and its right to exist within the area of the Land of Israel, but here there may be flexibility in the position of the international community than can prioritize the respective conditions. How Hamas is integrated within the government—whether in key positions; officially as Hamas or through the appointment of individuals who support Hamas but are not members—will also affect the willingness of the international community to assist the new government, and there may be flexibility on this matter as well.

The United States might view the departure of Abbas as an opportunity to renew the political process, since Abbas is perceived as a leader who is unable or unwilling to make fateful strategic decisions. A new and positive leadership based on internal Palestinian forces and led by Fatah, which is less influenced by the politics of the Palestinian diaspora and its demands to prioritize the right of return, may provide an opportunity for jumpstarting the political process. This would likely gain the support and assistance of the international community and the states in the region.

A change in the negotiating paradigm from one that hinders an overall settlement (as part of the condition that “nothing is agreed until everything is agreed”) to a willingness to progress according to interim arrangements will improve the situation. In other words, this calls for a bottom-up process, namely from small to large, whereby something that is agreed upon will be implemented immediately, alongside a commitment to a final outcome of two states for two peoples. In this scenario, it will be possible to obtain regional and international promises and guarantees for the Palestinians, and in the most far-reaching scenario, the establishment of a Palestinian state within temporary borders. The integration of Hamas within the government, such as in a unity or a technocratic government, will affect the PA’s conduct: even if it is stable and functioning, it is likely to adopt a hostile attitude toward Israel.

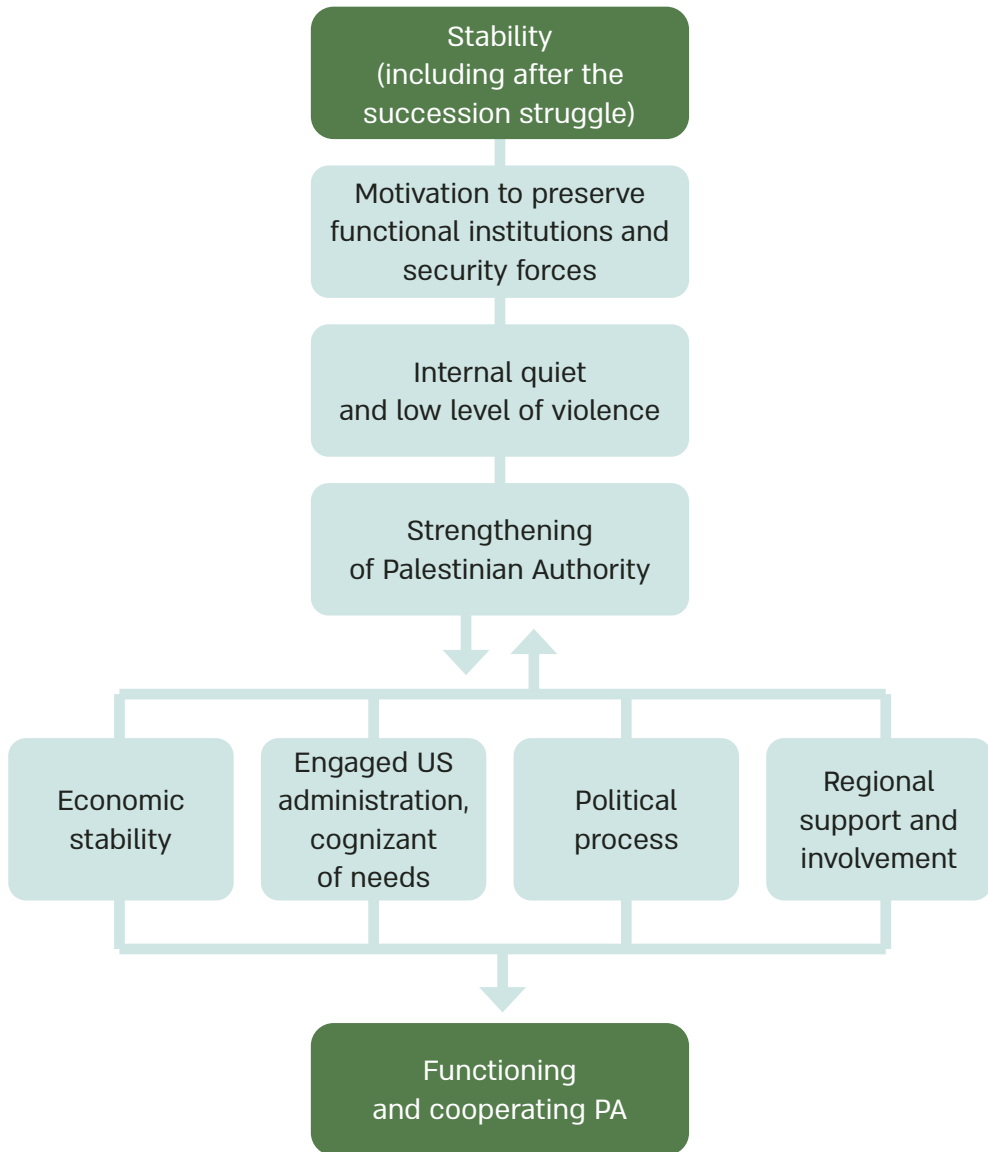
These potential positive processes are not expected to occur immediately, since Abbas’s successor or successors will likely at first be confrontational toward Israel, with the goal of solidifying their position. This does not mean that agreements between Israel and the PA will be breached, but presumably there will be less overt cooperation and greater anti-Israel rhetoric in order to strengthen the government’s public image and demonstrate a departure from the Abbas era.

Scenario II: A Struggle for Succession

In this scenario, there is no dominant figure who will replace Abbas, and the result will be a struggle among those “claiming the throne.” The likelihood of this scenario developing in a positive direction and leading to stability is equal to the likelihood that it will lead to prolonged instability and even chaos, since the outcome depends on the course of events.

In view of the relatively large number of candidates who see themselves as worthy of replacing Abbas and the hostility between the camps of those aspiring to power, there is only a small likelihood that a consensus leadership will emerge and that the confrontations between the candidates will be

Tools to Strengthen the Palestinian Authority



nullified or deferred to a later stage. In this situation, the competing elements will prefer to establish a temporary leadership whose members are perceived as weak. This will make it possible for power-seekers to preserve their status, continue fighting over the leadership, and eventually depose the temporary leadership. The choice will be made by the Central Committee of Fatah, which will meet and decide on a leader or a joint leadership. At a later stage, there will be a need to convene the PLO institutions, or at least the Palestinian Central Council, in order to approve the appointment of the PLO chairman (whether temporary or permanent). Hamas will no doubt oppose this and try to torpedo the appointments. The ability of the would-be successors to cooperate is what will determine the course of events, in particular, whether they internalize the principle of “we must all hang together or surely we will hang separately” and are able to agree on clear rules of the game.

In view of the tension and rivalries, there is a possibility of an appointment of a “weak” candidate as a temporary leader during the interim period, although he may be able to consolidate his position and overcome the recognized centers of power by distancing them or “domesticating” them. In that case, the temporary leadership will become permanent. On the other hand, there is the possibility of an “officers’ revolt” scenario, in which the struggle for succession continues until the emergence of a strong leader who will be supported by the council of the security apparatuses and obeyed by the majority of the people. If this candidate can form a broad coalition within the institutions of Fatah and the PLO, there will be less likelihood of bloodshed and a violent overthrow. If the struggle for power is prolonged and leads to persistent instability but no resolution, then clan loyalty will become dominant and the PA will lose its effectivity, while the government mechanisms will serve as a tool for political gain and the consolidation of status.

Centers of Power

Candidates can attempt to harness support from a number of sources of power: the security apparatuses; the political institutions; the factions and armed militias; and grassroots support.

Centers of Power that Affect the Succession Struggles



**Armed factions
and militias**



**Popular
support**



**Security
apparatuses**



**Political centers
of power**

The Security Apparatuses

In the scenario of prolonged instability, the influence of the security apparatuses will hinge on their determination to maintain a monopoly on the use of force and on their willingness to confront the factions and armed groups, as well as the level of assistance they receive from the IDF, the Israel Security Agency (ISA), the United States Security Coordinator (USSC), and the Jordanian Armed Forces. Stability will partly depend on their loyalty to the temporary leaders and the scope of cooperation between the various apparatuses. The security apparatus with the greatest influence in the PA is the General Intelligence Service, headed by Majed Faraj, whose authority is based on his proximity and loyalty to Abbas. Other entities include the National Security Forces, headed by Nadal Abu Dohan; the Counterintelligence Forces, headed by Abed el-Khadr a-Tamari; the Military Intelligence, headed by Zakaria Musleh; and the Presidential Guard (which succeeded Fatah's Force 17), headed by Munir Zoabi. Currently there is no information indicating that the latter three will

seek to choose a leader from their ranks, and it appears that they will influence the choice by supporting one candidate or another or by creating a stable and calm environment that will enable the new leader to rule.

Political Centers of Power

The main political element is the Fatah movement, where political decisions are made and the various candidates wage their campaigns. Based on the current structure of the Fatah Central Committee, there are three main “factions”:

In the scenario of prolonged instability, the influence of the security apparatuses will hinge on their determination to maintain a monopoly on the use of force and on their willingness to confront the factions and armed groups, as well as the level of assistance they receive from the IDF.

- a. Abbas supporters, with Majed Faraj the most prominent; Hussein al-Sheikh, who in addition to his responsibility for civilian coordination, was appointed by Abbas as Secretary General of the PLO Executive Committee, a senior position filled by Saeb Erekat until his death; Mahmoud al-Aloul, who was appointed by Abbas to be Vice Chairman of Fatah and a member of the Central Committee; and Azam el-Ahmad, who is also a member of the Fatah Central Committee and Abbas’s emissary for special tasks, such as conciliatory contact with Hamas.
- b. Arafat loyalists who came with him from Tunisia: Prominent among them are Nasser el-Kadwe, who is Arafat’s nephew, and Abbas Zachi. El-Kadwe, formerly the PA Minister of Foreign Affairs and ambassador to the UN, was expelled from Fatah in 2021 after declaring his intention to run in a separate list for the May 2021 PLC elections, which were ultimately canceled.
- c. Independents who have their own sources of power. Prominent among them:

- Marwan Barghouti, a former leader of the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade and of Tanzim—the military wing of Fatah in the West Bank. He has been in prison in Israel since 2004 and sentenced to five consecutive life sentences and 40 years of imprisonment for acts of terror.
- Jibril Rajoub, former head of the Counterintelligence Force in the West Bank, who transformed his positions as chairman of the Palestinian Football Association and the secretary of the Central Committee of Fatah into sources of power and influence.
- Tawfiq el-Tirawi is former head of the General Intelligence Service and security advisor to the Chairman of the PA. His case is a recent example of the power struggles within Fatah and the rifts within the movement, as he was expelled from the centers of power following a direct order by Abbas. He was terminated from his position as chairman of the Faculty of Independence, which he established in Jericho and is a guise for a university providing academic security training to those serving in the Palestinian police forces. His membership in the Fatah Central Committee was also terminated. These steps were taken after a long period of vocal criticism against Abbas's cronies, mainly al-Sheikh, and after a recording of el-Tirawi slandering al-Sheikh was released on social media.

Forces outside of Fatah will likely try to undermine the existing political institutions; chief among these external forces is the Hamas movement, which has a grassroots base of support, complete control over Gaza, and a political and terrorist infrastructure in the West Bank. Other outside elements include the Popular Front movement, whose Secretary General, Ahmad Sadat, is jailed in Israel for planning the murder of Rehavam Zeevi; and Mohammed Dahlan, who was Abbas's main opponent in Fatah, until he was ejected from the movement.

Dahlan, who was born in the Khan Yunis refugee camp in Gaza, was responsible for the security forces in Gaza at the time of the Hamas takeover.

Dahlan then moved to the West Bank and remained a senior figure in Fatah's political landscape. However, in 2010 there were rumors that he had sought to depose Abbas as Chairman of the PA, and in response Dahlan was stripped of his positions in Fatah. Since 2011, he has lived in the UAE and is not permitted to enter the PA. In 2014 and again in 2016 he was sentenced in absentia to prison for theft and slandering the regime. His supporters are careful not to link themselves to him overtly given the deep hostility between him and Abbas, and consequently, and in view of his remote location, it is difficult for him to amass open support in the West Bank.

Dahlan enjoys the support of the UAE and Egypt, and he has supporters in the Gaza refugee camps and in the West Bank. Although many consider him capable of acting as a bridge between Fatah and Hamas, it is doubtful whether he will play a significant role in this scenario, unless the Fatah leadership agrees to readmit him to the movement once Abbas is gone. This agreement would depend on his ability to build a coalition with some of the members of the current leadership. If he is not readmitted to the ranks of Fatah, he is expected to establish a new party with the assistance of the UAE and possibly Egypt as well. However, even if he makes such a move, after years of being outside the arena and in view of the campaign against him and the fact that he is persona non grata in PA territory, it is doubtful whether he will succeed against a candidate supported by Fatah.

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Popular Support

In the eyes of the Palestinian public, neither Fatah and its leadership nor Hamas has much popular support, and both movements have lost much of their legitimacy. The picture is more dismal for Fatah, which in recent years has seen a drop in its popular support, after government corruption was rampant and after the failure of its agenda with respect to Israel. At the same time, Hamas has seen its support grow, according to the PCPSR surveys carried out by Khalil Shikaki. However, this trend is not merely ideological identification with Hamas, but also reflects opposition to Fatah. Bereft of other intra-organization options, the camp of those disappointed with Fatah has grown and Hamas has more than once succeeded in exploiting Fatah's poor performance in order to gain support. An example is the events surrounding Operation Guardian of the Walls, when Hamas decided to weaken the PA following its frustration at the cancellation of the PA elections through the encouragement of violence and terror and the positioning of Hamas as the defender of Jerusalem and the promoter of the Palestinian agenda.

Therefore, it is not surprising that from the perspective of public popularity the leader in all the opinion polls is Marwan Barghouti, whose name is not linked to any specific movement, even though he is a member of Fatah's Central Committee. Apparently, this support is a result of the fact that he is not perceived as having any responsibility for the current situation, while he also symbolizes the "warrior hero" in the Palestinian ethos. Had he been released from prison and joined the political game within Fatah he would undoubtedly have enjoyed a high level of support; however, presumably his status and popularity would also have eroded over time. A rise to political power by Barghouti is a highly unlikely scenario, since the government of Israel has been adamant against releasing him. However, in situations of chaos, loss of control, and lack of internal Palestinian consensus on a leader, Israel may have to consider Barghouti's release and coordinate with him, as it did with Arafat in the case of the Oslo Accords.

Armed Factions and Militias

Other important centers of power are the active factions and armed militias, which—with their differing and often contradictory agendas—have the power to cause damage that could undermine stability and create chaos after Abbas’s departure. Their military power allows them to influence the political situation, and they seek to promote their candidates while blocking attempts by other groups to promote rival candidates.

Among the main factions and militias that have the capability to influence the dynamic after Abbas exits the scene:

- a. The military wing of Hamas (Izz a-Din al-Qassam Brigades), led by Mohammed Deif and numbering about 30,000 activists in Gaza. Its main military power includes ground-to-ground missiles and rockets, anti-tank missiles, attack drones, ground-to-air missiles, and light weapons. It is under the leadership of Hamas and executes its decisions, although it sometimes challenges the leadership in view of its hawkish position and influences decision making. In the long term, Hamas is interested in taking control of Palestinian affairs and displacing Fatah. However, at the present time it does not have a sufficient foothold in the West Bank and therefore is working to increase its military strength in Gaza, increase popular endorsement and commitment to armed “resistance,” and gain greater public support as an alternative candidate to rule the PA. In theory, Ismail Haniyeh is the organization’s leading candidate for the presidency; however, he will not achieve any international legitimacy since Hamas is defined as a terrorist organization and his appointment would level a serious blow to the Palestinian economy. Hamas is likely aware of this and therefore when the day comes, Haniyeh will not seek the presidency, but rather the organization will use its political and military power to challenge the presidential candidates, so that they will take Hamas’s demands into

account and adopt a confrontational, and perhaps even hostile, stance toward Israel.

- b. Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) was founded in 1979 and since then has promoted an Islamic-jihadist agenda that opposes any recognition of the Jewish presence in the territory of the waqf, i.e., in any part of the Land of Israel. Thus, it does not recognize the Oslo Accords or the PA as sovereign, and does not support any of the candidates. It is considered a small organization relative to Hamas, with a few thousand fighters and weapon systems similar to those of Hamas. Often referred to as a “spoiler,”² its power lies in its ability to challenge the other actors as an organization that operates on the basis of non-state considerations and is directed by Iran. The organization is led by Ziad Nakhalah who is originally from Khan Yunis and currently lives in Damascus. Islamic Jihad has close ties with Iran and Hezbollah, but because it operates from Gaza and in view of its small size, it usually obeys Hamas and is coordinated from the joint war room of the Palestinian factions in Gaza. Islamic Jihad has sometimes been viewed as a “renegade” organization when it violates a ceasefire or launches rockets in an effort to draw Hamas into a confrontation with Israel. Nonetheless, from time-to-time Hamas uses the organization to pressure Israel or the international community.
- c. Tanzim was founded within Fatah by Yasir Arafat in 1995, but it is currently not under the authority of the Fatah leadership. Tanzim is not a formal organization and operates on the basis of local armed militias in the neighborhoods, refugee camps, and villages. Each has a separate leadership that is not closely tied to any other. Tanzim was active primarily during the second intifada, but in recent months it has again reared its head, primarily in the Jenin and Nablus areas. The cells continue to operate locally—sometimes as gangs and sometimes under the auspices of one

2 A term to describe a non-state actor that sabotages the activity of a government or a legitimate actor and opposes any political process or treaties with Israel.

of the senior Fatah leaders in a specific area. The cells are plentifully equipped with illegal weapons. In the case that the succession is not achieved peacefully and there is a violent struggle for succession, Tanzim cells will operate to promote the candidate who represents their area or their agenda. They will use the weapons they have amassed to this end.

- d. Armed gangs: In addition to Tanzim, there are armed gangs without any organizational affiliation that are focused on criminal activity and resistance to the Israeli occupation, as well as to the PA government. These gangs operate in areas that the PA does not effectively control. They may also link up with candidates they favor, or they may take the law into their own hands.

Implications

If the struggle for succession persists and no consensus leader emerges, the result will be long-term instability without any resolution involving the selection of an accepted leader. This will have implications for the PA's ability to take and implement decisions. It appears that in the initial stage the PA will continue to enjoy the economic support of the donor countries and the Arab world, albeit on a limited scale, driven by the desire for stability. However, these countries may try to promote their preferred candidate, and this would essentially exacerbate the confrontations.

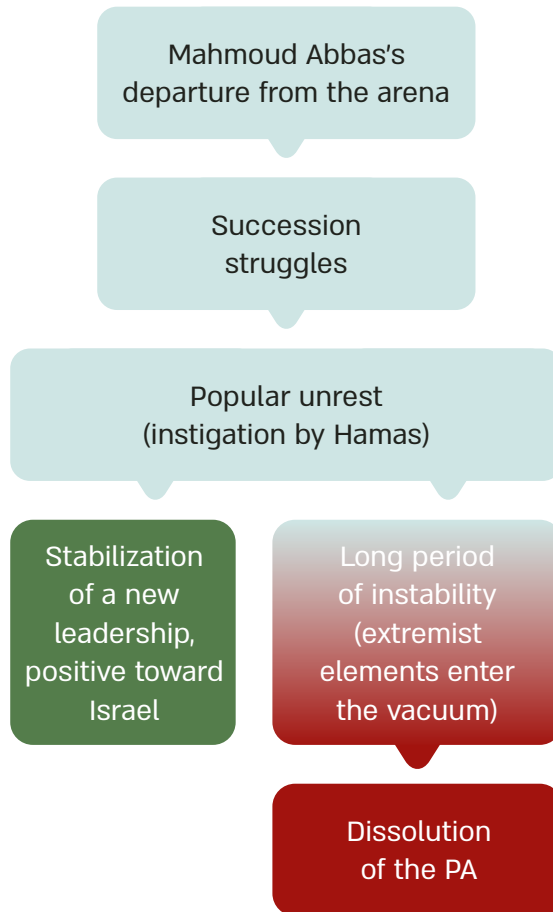
In the situation of a weak temporary leadership and differences of opinion within the collective leadership, it will not be possible to make important decisions with regard to inter-organizational reconciliation and the promotion of unity between the West Bank and Gaza, or with respect to relations with Israel and the political process. Although Abbas's departure will obviate his emotional/personal opposition to Hamas, many others in Fatah share his views. A candidate that initiates a process of reconciliation will have to rely on support from the fragmented Fatah, an organization in which the young—known as the *shabiba*—do not obey the leaders. Furthermore, the

organization will have to be politically flexible to allow for the formation of coalitions.

At least in the initial phase, any new Palestinian regime will have to prove its loyalty to Palestinian nationalism by demonstrating hardline positions against Israel, as long as the confrontational approach does not harm the interests of the PA and its institutions. Therefore, there is little likelihood of a serious threat to the security coordination with Israel, despite continued confrontational rhetoric. Implicit Israeli support (not rhetoric or public support but rather actions that are meant to contribute to PA stability and performance) can prevent harm to the Palestinian economy and the provision of services to the Palestinian population.

A challenge that the new leadership will incur is acceptance of its authority, particularly in areas where armed groups or clans are in control. Thus, it will have to contend with the subversive activities of the factions, particularly in some of the refugee camps. The main subversive elements will be Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and supporters of Dahlan, if he himself is not able to integrate within Fatah. If Dahlan finds a place in the ranks of the organization, he is expected to compete for the leadership.

Positive and Negative Scenarios in the Succession Struggles



Scenario III: Elections

According to the Palestinian constitution, presidential elections are held within sixty days after an incumbent leaves office. However, the last elections in the PA took place in 2006 (for the PLC) and there have not been any elections since, already in violation of the constitution, which stipulates elections are held every four years. Therefore, it is difficult to predict whether a temporary leadership will operate according to the constitution and announce elections, or the choice of president will be decided outside the democratic process.

The question of elections will be determined by how open the temporary leadership is to reconciliation or at least understandings that are acceptable to Hamas.

The new leadership might hold elections in order to achieve public and international legitimacy and unite the ranks of the Palestinian camp, but that will occur only if there is a decision regarding a presidential candidate within Fatah, and if the candidate is believed to have a high chance of winning an election, particularly against a Hamas candidate. If the various elements agree to an election, it can be based on an agreement in principle reached between Fatah and Hamas in early 2021 regarding the format of the elections for the PLC in the West Bank, Gaza, East Jerusalem, and the Jerusalem district on the basis of national lists. However, these understandings do not necessarily mean that Hamas will participate in the PLC elections or that it will field a candidate for president. The appointment of a Hamas candidate as president will have major implications for his ability to function independently, in view of the restrictions that Israel is likely to impose on the PA. There will also be ramifications for the international recognition of the PA and its ability to continue raising money from the donor countries.

The question of elections will be determined by how open the temporary leadership is to reconciliation or at least reaching understandings that are

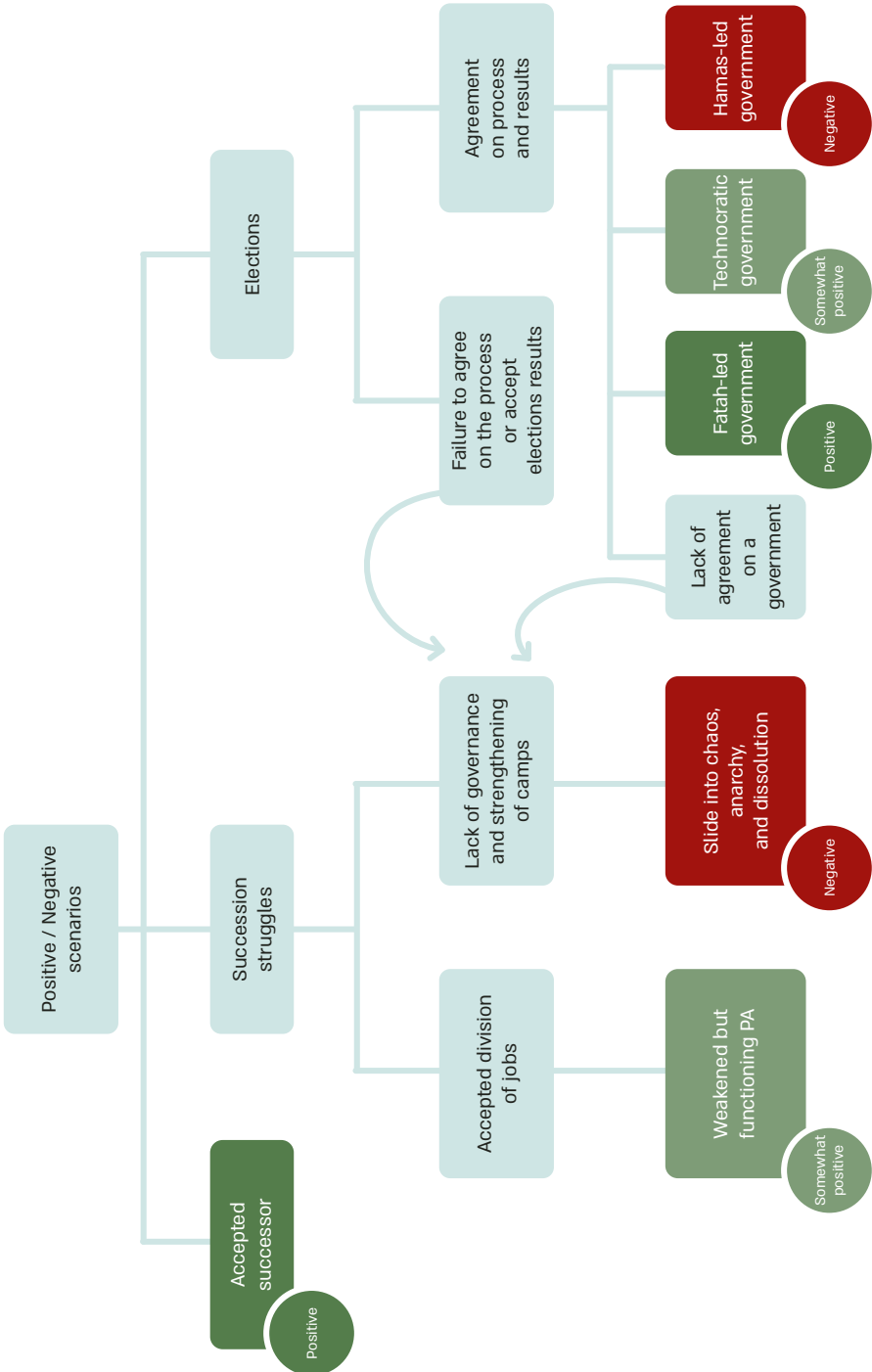
acceptable to Hamas. If this is not achieved because Hamas's conditions are not met or due to the concern among the Fatah leadership about Hamas gaining political power—which is necessarily at its expense—the sides may agree to establish a technocratic government with fair representation for both. If it is decided to hold elections, one of two scenarios will ensue: either there will be a campaign that will rouse the Palestinian street and the winner will enjoy broad public support, or the rivalry between the camps will lead to friction and violence that will destabilize the political arena and the Palestinian street, and lead to a rejection of the election results by one or both of the large movements.

If the Fatah leadership decides to hold elections only in the territory under PA control but not in Gaza, due to the opposition of Hamas or the fear that it will win the elections, then Gaza—including all the factions operating within it, with Hamas taking a leading role—will serve as a spoiler. As such, the excluded organizations will work to undermine stability and will try to sabotage the elections. After the elections, they will try to challenge the legitimacy of the results.

Opportunities and Risks for Israel

The election scenario can on the one hand lead to a positive outcome, i.e., the election of a candidate with broad public support and the ability to initiate positive processes. On the other hand, it may also lead to a more dangerous outcome in which a Hamas candidate or a candidate endorsed by Hamas is victorious. This second possibility would symbolize the takeover of the PA and the PLO by Hamas. However, initiating an election process and then terminating it could be risky and might turn the Palestinian street against the side that is perceived as responsible. A lack of agreement during the elections or unwillingness to accept its results could fuel the struggle for succession and ignite the anger of the public against the leaders that are perceived as responsible.

Flow Chart: Principal Scenarios



Possible Successors

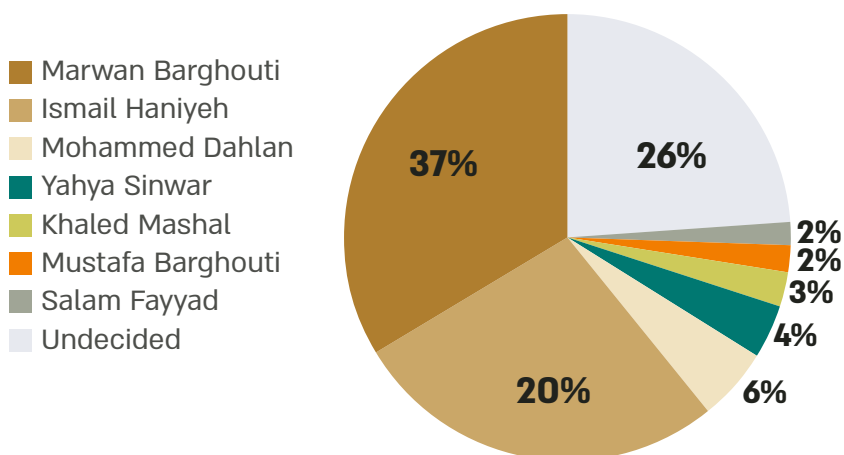
In early 2022, Abbas decided to strengthen the status of his trusted allies Majed Faraj and Hussein al-Sheikh. The latter, the Minister for Civilian Affairs, was appointed by Abbas in May 2022 to become the secretary of the Executive Committee of the PLO (number 2 in the internal hierarchy of the PLO) and to replace the late Saeb Erekat as chief negotiator with Israel. The appointment of al-Sheikh was by means of a personal letter from Abbas and later by a vote of the Executive Committee, which is defined as the main executive body of the PLO and itself was chosen in a controversial process by the PLO Central Council in March 2022.

In theory, the choice of a coalition of Hussein al-Sheikh and Majed Faraj should have been assured. They are the closest officials to Abbas, they both have close ties with Israel and with international organizations, and they are acceptable to the United States and maintain ongoing contact with the US Secretary of State and the CIA. From the perspective of Israel's security establishment, the possibility that they will someday succeed Abbas is the preferred option. At the same time, their popularity on the Palestinian street is the inverse of what it is in the corridors of power in Israel. Many view them as collaborators with the Israeli occupation and both have often been accused of corruption, which allegedly infects the entire PA leadership (al-Sheikh has been accused of sexual abuse as well).

Faraj is 60 years old and was born in the Dheisheh refugee camp. He is very close to Abbas and to Abbas's son Yasir (who is in Qatar) and has been at his side for more than a decade. He has carried out many missions for Abbas, some of which are public knowledge and others not; he is vehemently opposed to Hamas and maintains the security coordination with Israel. During the first intifada, Faraj was a Fatah leader, was arrested many times, and was jailed in Israel for six years, and during the second intifada he was active against Israel. Nonetheless, with his appointment as head of the intelligence apparatus in the West Bank, he moved closer toward Israel, and maintains

political and security contacts with Israel. Al-Sheikh is also a fierce opponent of Hamas, and was appointed by Abbas to be responsible for contact with Israel on civilian affairs. He speaks fluent Hebrew and is familiar with senior Israeli officers and politicians.

Support for Presidential Candidates if Elections were Held without Abbas



Source: PCPSR survey, March 2022

However, all the Fatah candidates to succeed Abbas lack legitimacy on the Palestinian street and their grip is limited in certain areas and among the clans in the West Bank and Gaza. The exception is Marwan Barghouti. Born in 1959 in Kafr Kobar, northwest of Ramallah, Barghouti became an activist in Fatah at the age of 15. He was one of the leaders of the first intifada in 1987, and was arrested by Israel and exiled to Jordan. He spent seven years there until he was allowed to return as part of the Oslo Accords. In 1996, he was elected to the PLC. With the beginning of the second intifada in 2000, he became popular as the leader of Tanzim and the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, which were essentially the armed wing of Fatah. As such, he was responsible

for several terrorist attacks on Israelis. He was captured by the IDF in April 2002 during Operation Defensive Shield. He later stood trial and was sentenced to five life sentences and is currently imprisoned in Israel.

According to Palestinian opinion polls, Barghouti is the only candidate identified with Fatah who enjoys public support. Moreover, the popularity of all the other candidates is lower than that of Hamas leader Haniyeh. To be sure, one quarter of the respondents were undecided, such that the emergence of another candidate or a rise in the popularity of one of the known candidates is possible. In any case, only about one half of potential voters intend to cast their ballot, yet this rate increases when Abbas is excluded from the list of candidates.

The struggle for influence until Abbas departs the stage continues to drive the creation of alliances and axes, and in particular the Faraj-al-Sheikh axis. From time to time, competing axes appear, such as Dahlan and the Barghouti clan; or Jibril Rajoub (who was born in Dura near Hebron and was formerly the head of the counterintelligence apparatus and a senior member of Fatah) and Tawfiq el-Tirawi (who was formerly the head of the General Intelligence Service), each of whom separately maintains ties with Hamas. These axes converge or are untangled based on dynamic changes on the ground, the positioning of potential successors, their public support, and connections with armed factions. It is difficult to assess which axis will be more dominant upon Abbas's departure, but it is clear that their ability to cooperate, or their level of rivalry, already dictates the reality in the West Bank.

Identity Cards: Possible Candidates to Succeed Abbas

Majed Faraj

Strongest candidate in view of his control over the security apparatuses. Abbas's right hand man and close to Hussein al-Sheikh, but does not enjoy public support.



Hussein al-Sheikh

Does not have his own power base or even a loyal clan, and has been accused of sexual abuse and corruption. His public status is improving and he has not remained behind the scenes.



Jibril Rajoub

Former head of the Preventive Security Force and senior Fatah figure. Has become weaker in his area, in part due to his involvement in the 2021 elections attempt and failure to form a unity government with Hamas.



Photo: REUTERS/Mohamad Torokman

Mohammed Dahlan

Bitter rival of Abbas and formerly one of the leaders of Fatah and head of the Preventive Security Force in Gaza. Lost power in Gaza despite the financial support he provides from his residence in the UAE.



Photo: REUTERS/Stringer

Mahmoud al-Aloul

Abbas's Vice Chairman in Fatah; strong among Tanzim. Recently failed in his attempt to link up with Faraj and al-Sheikh.



Photo: (Kudus TV (CC BY 3.0))

Marwan Barghouti

Has the most popular support among the candidates. Serving life sentences in prison with little likelihood of release in the near future.



Photo: REUTERS/Nir Elias/Files (ISRAEL POLITICS CONFLICT ELECTIONS)

Tawfiq el-Tirawi

Member of the Fatah Central Committee; formerly head of the General Intelligence Service and a security advisor to the Chairman of the PA. His membership in Fatah is questioned due to criticism he voiced against al-Sheikh.



Photo: Palestinian Official News Agency

Ismail Haniyeh

Head of the Hamas political bureau since May 2017. Served as PA Prime Minister following the 2006 elections until the coup in Gaza, and later was Prime Minister in the Hamas government.



Photo: REUTERS/Mohamed Azakir

Scenario IV: Chaos, Instability, and Collapse of the PA

Israel and its neighbors are particularly concerned about the stability of the Palestinian system after Abbas's departure, based on the understanding that the emergence of chaos would endanger regional stability. Collapse will lead to a security threat and less restraint on terrorist elements; a slide

back to an Israeli military regime, with an economic and demographic burden on Israel; negative consequences and risks of destabilization to the Jordanian monarchy; and adverse effects on the security reality surrounding Gaza, including the Sinai Peninsula.

The weaknesses of the Palestinian system may, in certain circumstances, accelerate existing chaotic processes, which may even lead to the dissolution or collapse of the PA. The PA does not operate within a vacuum, and alongside its weaknesses and the potential for collapse it is influenced by external forces, with Israel playing a particularly important role in this context. At the same time, there are also stabilizing forces within it, which are concerned about their survival and may act to mitigate negative trends and support provisional arrangements and reorganization.

A number of sub-scenarios may lead to chaos and instability.

The weaknesses of the Palestinian system may, in certain circumstances, accelerate existing chaotic processes, which may even lead to the dissolution or collapse of the PA.

Scenario IVa: Collective Leadership

With few viable prospects of stabilizing the system by means of free elections, there may be an effort to establish a collective leadership comprising a number of prominent individuals, such as Jibril Rajoub, Majed Faraj, Mahmoud al-Aloul, and Rami el-Hamdallah (former Prime Minister), and perhaps Salam Fayyad (currently a lecturer at Princeton University; he is also a former Prime

Minister) who would be called on to return to the West Bank. These individuals might divide up Abbas's powers, titles, and positions for a defined period of time, until the system is stabilized and elections are held.

Although this scenario has the potential to stabilize the Palestinian system, its success depends on the egos of the partners in the leadership and their ability to cooperate, as well as their ability to blunt public opposition to their taking over the centers of power. The Palestinian system is not used to this type of leadership, given that since the takeover of the PLO by the Fatah movement, it has had only a single autocratic ruler.

The critical interests of the potential partners in a collective leadership, and even their very survival, will call for the preservation of the PA and may help the partners—at least for a limited period—bridge gaps, narrow rivalries, and overcome hatred. If the collective leadership does not manage to cooperate among themselves, consolidate their control of the PA, and give the public a sense of positive change, the Palestinian system will descend into chronic instability with a growing potential for violence and even loss of control: it will face unending opposition from the “old guard” and the renegade factions. Ongoing violent confrontations will lead to anarchy and even collapse in the absence of a central government with a monopoly on the use of force.

Scenario IVb: Takeover by the Commanders of the Security Apparatuses (Coup d'Etat)

The lack of agreement between the dominant leaders will eliminate any possibility of establishing a collective leadership and will lead the Palestinian system into chaos. Under these conditions, one of the commanders of the Palestinian security apparatuses may exploit the rifts and rivalries to take control of the Palestinian system in a coup d'état. However, it is difficult to imagine rule by a single commander (since Arafat created a complex system of multiple security apparatuses precisely to prevent the concentration of power) and thus in such a case two commanders would likely join forces to

take control of the system. The National Security Forces is the largest armed force from a military perspective. The General Intelligence Service is smaller but wields more control and has a significant presence on the Palestinian street. Despite the advantage in size and military capability of the National Security Forces, it is difficult to imagine a situation in which its commander manages to stabilize the rule of a single military dictator without the cooperation of the General Intelligence Service or the Counterintelligence Security Force. The blue police and military intelligence do not have sufficient military power or control on the ground and among the population.

This scenario is a recipe for chronic instability, unrest, and violence, and places the PA's security apparatuses in direct confrontation with other security apparatuses and power groups that have not joined them, such as armed Tanzim groups, some of whom have allegiance to competing actors such as Mahmoud al-Aloul and Mohammed Dahlan. This is even before the armed groups of Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and other armed groups join the fighting. The result will be confrontations on the Palestinian street that may lead to anarchy and the collapse of the PA.

Scenario IVc: Collapse of the PA into Local Subsystems (Cantonization)

As a result of the instability and inability to control the West Bank, there may be a collapse of the PA into autonomous regional systems, as occurred in Gaza. These systems will be led by local leaders who draw their power from the clan structure of Palestinian society and over the years have consolidated their power and their socioeconomic and political influence. Ramallah is essentially the only district that is under full PA control, and it is where most of the national institutions of the future Palestinian state are situated. But even in the Ramallah area the PA's authority is challenged by NGOs and uncontrolled forces in the Amari refugee camp. The more remote districts, such as Hebron, Jenin, and Nablus, have ruled themselves fairly autonomously for years. The local "aristocratic" families in Hebron, such as the al-Jabri, Natsheh, and other

families, and the al-Masri family in the Nablus district enjoy a special status and the public legitimacy to rule their district. The situation is different in Jenin, where the armed organizations and factions that do not recognize the authority of the PA are in control. A trend that surged and became dominant in 2022 is the participation of the younger generation of Palestinians in armed groups. They are undergoing a process of radicalization and joining terrorist cells associated with Fatah's al-Aqsa Brigades. The implication of this trend is widening the circles of "resistance" beyond Hamas and PIJ, as well as targeting the PA in addition to Israel. The scope of this phenomenon is evidenced by the participation of sons of officers in the Palestinian security apparatuses in shootings and terrorist attacks.

Scenario V: Hamas Dominates in the West Bank

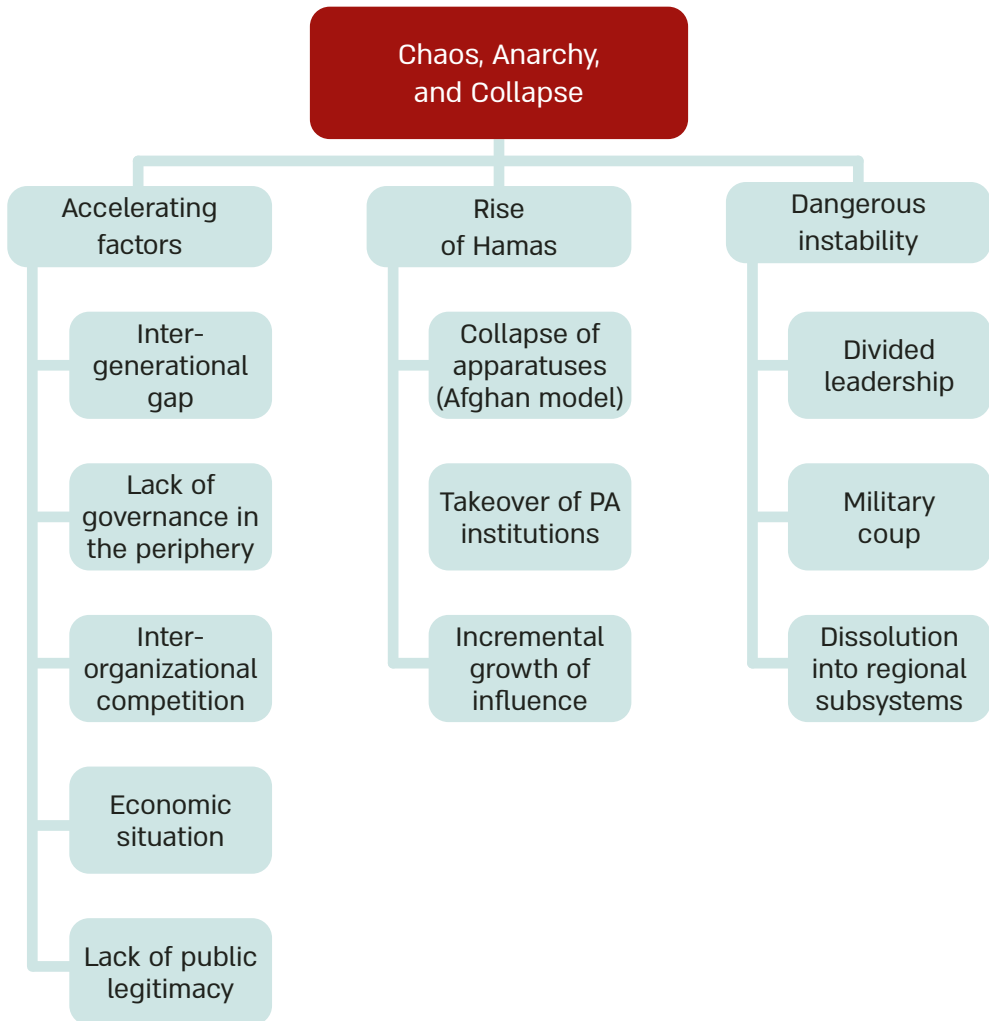
In any scenario, the new leadership will have to deal with Hamas, which competes with it over the commitment to Palestinian national goals and the leadership of the struggle against Israel, challenging it for sovereignty over Jerusalem and al-Aqsa. Hamas fans the flames of resistance and does not recognize Israel's right to exist, thus giving it the status of spoiler.

Hamas's takeover of the Palestinian system is likely to occur in one of three ways: a military coup; a victory in the elections for the PA's institutions; or a slow, incremental expansion of influence.

Scenario Va: Forcible Takeover of the West Bank by Hamas

Under current circumstances, a forcible takeover of the West Bank by Hamas is not a realistic scenario, given Israel's control over security in the West Bank and its ongoing efforts to dismantle the terror infrastructure there. The military wing of Hamas has no access to the territory of the West Bank due to Israel's policy of differentiation and its freedom to operate throughout the area. The PA's security apparatuses have an advantage as long as the security coordination and cooperation with the IDF and ISA continues. Moreover, the

Possible Radical Scenarios



territorial separation between Gaza and the West Bank prevents a direct military confrontation between the camps and the movement of forces from Gaza to the West Bank. Therefore, maintaining the differentiation between the West Bank and Gaza and the security coordination between Israel and the PA apparatuses will continue to prevent Hamas from increasing its military power in the West Bank, at least until there is a change in the bitter inter-organizational rift in the Palestinian arena or a change in Israel's policy.

Scenario Vb: Hamas Electoral Victory

A Hamas electoral victory is possible if the efforts by Egypt and Jordan to promote a compromise between Hamas and Fatah are successful and if the two camps agree to hold elections, as was decided in early 2021. However, even in this scenario, Hamas will need Fatah to create a coalition, as it did following the 2006 elections. It is unlikely that the efforts in this direction will bear fruit, for the same reason that prevented agreement then, namely Fatah's refusal to put its security apparatuses, which are currently under the authority of the Ministry of the Interior, under the control of Hamas; and in parallel the refusal of Hamas to accept the PA's demand to disarm its military wing or at least put it under the authority of the PA. Although there have been voices within Hamas expressing willingness to integrate Hamas's military wing within the PA's security apparatuses in exchange for its acceptance into the PLO, and other voices that have agreed to put Hamas's military wing under the authority of the cabinet (without disarming it), it is difficult to imagine the camps coming together sufficiently to allow for such a dramatic move. Moreover, it does not appear that Hamas will settle for mere membership in the PLO without making political demands that Fatah will have trouble accepting.

If Hamas and Fatah reach an agreement that includes holding elections, and even if Hamas is victorious, Hamas will likely prefer to create a unity government with Fatah. Hamas is aware of its problematic international

position and the legal prohibition in many countries to be in contact with it, as well as the negative consequences of Hamas joining the Palestinian leadership for the flow of money to the PA. Therefore, it is expected to occupy a back seat status in the political arena and concentrate on internal issues, rather than seeking a place on center stage.

Scenario Vc: Hamas's Expansion of Influence Slowly and Incrementally, and the PA's Decline in Status

Hamas is currently seeking to strengthen its hold on Gaza and continuing its efforts to undermine the stability of the PA in the West Bank, in preparation for the struggle for succession to the presidency. It understands that the tactic of seeking elections or taking over the PLO from within by means of internal Palestinian reconciliation is not practical as long as Abbas is President. The organization believes that it will have difficulty taking control of the West Bank even if the PA collapses due to the restrictions that will be imposed by Israel. Therefore, it has adopted a strategy of taking over the Palestinian national movement in phases and from the outside inward. Its first objective is Lebanon and the refugee camps, and to that end, Hamas has joined the Iran-Hezbollah axis. Haniyeh's first visits to Lebanon demonstrated how—under Iranian auspices and with directive assistance from Hezbollah—the symbols of the Lebanese regime, such as meetings with the Lebanese president, can be exploited to attain regional legitimacy for Hamas. At the same time, the organization is trying to transform all the Palestinian organizations in Lebanon and Syria, apart from Fatah, into its satellites, and thus frameworks for coordination have been created between the various organizations.

Hamas's potential to take over the system varies according to three basic situations:

- a. Ongoing instability is likely to strengthen Hamas's image as an alternative to the PA and perhaps encourage openness (opportunistic openness rather than ideological) among senior officials in Fatah to cooperate with

Hamas. At the same time, if Hamas operates in a subversive and divisive manner, this will presumably increase the motivation of rival factions in Fatah and the PA to close ranks.

- b. Even in the event of a total systemic-institutional collapse in the Palestinian arena, Hamas will not enjoy the legitimacy to assume a leading role in the stabilization. Therefore, the question remains what Hamas can offer the Palestinian public. The organization will attempt to squeeze out as much political and economic benefit as it can and may exploit a direct military confrontation with Israel in order to do so.
- c. Inertia and a continuing increase in Hamas's strength in the West Bank are likely to create a situation similar to that described as ongoing instability. This will occur unless there is a dramatic turning point leading to a change in Israel's policy, such as a willingness to return to the political process or participate in an international peace conference.

Ingredients for Chaos: Worsening Trends in Palestinian Society and a Loss of Public Legitimacy

In all public opinion polls conducted in Palestinian society over the past two years and even before, there has been a clear indication of profound disappointment with the Palestinian leadership and the PA, with respect to its level of performance and the extent of its corruption on the one hand and its degree of success—or more precisely, its failure—to achieve national or socioeconomic goals, on the other hand. The findings point to a lack of satisfaction, a lack of confidence, and a sense of insecurity, which intensified following the cancellation of the elections in late April 2021 and Operation Guardian of the Walls shortly thereafter. According to the PCPSR survey of September 2021, about 80 percent of the Palestinian public favor Abbas's resignation, while only 24 percent are satisfied with his performance. In parallel, and following the confrontation with Israel, Ismail Haniyeh's popularity rose, and when the survey pitted him against Abbas, 56 percent said that they

would vote for Haniyeh while only 34 percent said they would vote for Abbas.

The dissatisfaction is also reflected in the reluctance to participate in the political game, and thus only 40 percent of the Palestinian population said they would vote if Haniyeh runs against Abbas. In contrast, if Barghouti is pitted against Haniyeh, he would be victorious over the Hamas leader (55 percent vs. 39 percent) and voter turnout would rise to 66 percent.

Given the lack of public support for Abbas, presumably a candidate groomed by him but who would not be elected in a democratic process, such as Hussein al-Sheikh, would not gain public support but rather would be viewed as following in Abbas's footsteps.

Given the lack of public support for Abbas, presumably a candidate groomed by him but who would not be elected in a democratic process, such as Hussein al-Sheikh, would not gain public support but rather would be viewed as following in Abbas's footsteps. Even if elections are held, based on the popularity of other candidates such as Jibril Rajoub, Mohammed Dahlan, Salam Fayyad, and Rami Hamdallah, there is no indication that any can win a clear majority. This growing lack of public legitimacy for any one candidate and the general disenchantment with the PA and its institutions may deepen the rifts among the public to the point of a violent struggle for power.

The Generation Gap

Palestinian society is characterized by a wide generation gap. The younger generation feels alienated from the circles of influence and is not represented in the Palestinian leadership or in PA institutions. As a result of the corruption and the promotion of cronies, many of the PA ministries, and in particular the security apparatuses, are built like an inverse pyramid—a growing layer

of senior officials and little opportunity for the young to enter the system, let alone to advance within it.

The younger generation is not monolithic, and there are various groups and sectors. The younger Fatah generation would like to see an alternative to the current leadership. In contrast, members of Fatah's armed militias, which are active primarily in the refugee camps, are antagonistic toward the security apparatuses and do not allow them to operate freely and effectively in all regions. Others, and in particular university graduates who are not active in Fatah, are focused primarily on the effort to find suitable employment, use their skills, and build normal lives. They are less involved in national issues, although they are usually vehemently opposed to cooperation with Israel; rather, their problems are the result of high unemployment levels and the lack of suitable employment, as well as a feeling that they are without rights. They are frustrated and angry with the old and failed leadership, which is not working to improve their chances of personal and economic advancement.

The Center and the Periphery

The PA finds it difficult to function and maintain a presence in districts that are remote from Ramallah, such as Hebron, the southern Hebron hills, and Jenin. These areas have over the years developed a kind of functional autonomy that is managed by the heads of the leading clans, which are themselves developing the local economy. In the northern West Bank, the economy relies primarily on commercial ties with Israel's Arab citizens and on commercial cooperation with Israelis.

Palestinian society in the West Bank is to a large extent still organized on a tribal and regional basis, with the population of the refugee camps—which in most cases have become the main centers of unrest in the West Bank—having a unique status. Various figures, both inside and outside Fatah, are trying to build local or organizational centers of power for themselves. Thus, for example, Mahmoud al-Aloul, who is identified with the Fatah-aligned

Tanzim, may use this base of power and armed groups under its influence to gain power in the event of a war of succession.

Inter-Organizational Competition

Despite the efforts of the PA to restrain Hamas as it strives to organize in the West Bank, Hamas has foci of power and cadres of supporters who will oppose any Palestinian leadership that it is not a part of. Hamas enjoys the support of nationalist groups who believe in “resistance” while at the same time advocating unity to carry out the struggle against Israel effectively. Alongside them, although on a limited scale, there is a base of support for Mohammed Dahlan. The economic support that he enjoys from the UAE and the Egyptian belief that he can restore the PA’s control over Gaza enables him to ignite disruption and foment opposition to other centers of power. However, this core of support does not have the potential to grow to any significant extent, given in part that Dahlan originates from Gaza and in view of his physical distance from the arena.

Jerusalem, and primarily the al-Aqsa Mosque and the Temple Mount, have in the last decade become the focus of confrontation between Israel and the Palestinians, and it is there that one can see the day-to-day competition between the organizations. Jerusalem is distinct from areas in the West Bank as a result of its isolation due to the security barrier, as well as the efforts of the Israeli government to distance it from the PA and its various institutions. This can also be attributed to the involvement of the Israeli Islamic Movement (the Northern Branch) in developments on the Temple Mount. As a result of the combination of religious, national, and historical elements, and the struggle between Israel and Israelis on the one hand and the Palestinians on the other for sovereignty in Jerusalem, each organization views Jerusalem as an opportunity to increase its power and presence. This is compounded by the following external elements:

- a. The Jordanian wakf, based on understandings with the government of Israel, whereby it manages the Temple Mount and is meant to maintain order and calm there. However, the wakf is in effect handled by Palestinians.
- b. Hamas, which seeks to strengthen its image as "the defender of al-Aqsa," on the assumption that incitement related to the Temple Mount will reinforce the spirit of "resistance" among Palestinians. Islamic groups that have linked up with the movement and responded to its calls contribute to Hamas's image as the element in charge of events.
- c. The Israeli Islamic Movement—the Northern Branch—is highly active in fanning the flames and in organizing unrest centered on al-Aqsa.
- d. Hizb ut Tahrir (Islamic Liberation Party) is active against the wakf establishment and the PA, in coordination with Hamas's youth and student organization, which is active in the universities in the West Bank.
- e. Groups of youth in East Jerusalem, which seek to protect al-Aqsa from Jewish worshippers and the settlement population; their agenda does not necessarily align with that of the PA leadership.
- f. Murabitun, led by Sheikh Ekrima Sabri, the preacher at the al-Aqsa Mosque.
- g. Turkey is involved in events related to the Temple Mount as part of its efforts to expand its regional influence.

None of these actors have any allegiance to the PA or its leader and presumably this situation will continue after Abbas. Another example of a city that is not under the authority of the PA and is run by the organizations is Jenin, where the competing organizations have been able to cooperate with each other based on their shared opposition to the PA and to Israel. Hamas has managed to unite the forces of Islamic Jihad, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and even elements of Fatah's Tanzim against the PA security apparatuses. This trend is liable to expand to other areas of the PA, since the refugee camps are overflowing with unemployed and frustrated young men who become members of dormant cells and criminal gangs.

They are joined by clans that are also organizing to protect their interests in the event that instability develops after Abbas; alternatively, they may try to take control over the area in which they operate and turn against those organizations with which they currently cooperate.

The Economic Situation

The economic situation in the West Bank is vastly superior to that in Gaza, although it is still a problematic economic reality, particularly in comparison to the standard of living and quality of life in Israel. The Palestinian economy is totally dependent on Israel. About 150,000 Palestinians work in Israel (with or without a permit) and the industrial areas in the settlements, primarily in unskilled employment. Their total wages constitute about 21 percent of the GDP and they support over 120,000 households, which translates into about 800,000-900,000 individuals. Agriculture in the West Bank accounts for about 6 percent of GDP. The business sector is almost completely concentrated in services and retail with little production or exports, due in part to the difficulty in competing with the salaries offered to workers in Israel. The tourism sector could potentially contribute to output and employment, but the pandemic suspended it following the lockdowns and the prohibition on foreigners entering Israel. Currently the sector needs rejuvenation to jumpstart its growth momentum. The public sector is the largest sector in the economy and there are tens of thousands of Palestinians who earn their livelihood from the PA and its institutions. The greatest distress is among the young educated Palestinians who suffer from high levels of unemployment. They have difficulty finding jobs that are suited to their skills and pay a reasonable wage, particularly in comparison to unskilled workers who earn relatively high salaries in Israel.

In view of the large proportion of breadwinners who are dependent on working in Israel, the settlements, and the PA institutions, chaos in the Palestinian system and security instability that leads to a significant reduction in the number workers employed will clearly lead to a large-scale economic

crisis in the Palestinian system. While during the pandemic Palestinians could not officially work in Israel due to lockdowns, in practice this simply led to more workers entering Israel illegally and working without a permit. The IDF did not prevent their entry and did not bother to repair breaches in the security fence since the option of working in Israel was perceived as a stabilizing factor in the Palestinian arena. Thus, a serious crisis is liable to act as a catalyst for escalation and at some point even the collapse of the Palestinian system and confrontation with the security apparatuses, to the point of civil war.

Implications for Israel

Palestinian society in the West Bank is highly fragmented and organized along tribal and regional lines. It is distrustful of the leadership and its ability to achieve national goals. Against this background, there is diminishing support for the two-state solution, a lack of unity even among the political and social mechanisms, and no consensus on how to manage political differences of opinion. Under these conditions—namely, the difficulty in achieving a smooth succession after Abbas and the potential struggle for power, as well as the declining state of security and the economy—there is strong potential for chaos, anarchy, and collapse of the Palestinian system.

The scenario of chaos and anarchy represents a threat to the cooperation between the PA's security apparatuses and Israel's security forces. There is a significant likelihood that it may even be terminated following the collapse of the security apparatuses and the dispersal of their members among the various rival camps. Thus, there may be an inflow of new members into the terrorist organizations, which will view the anarchy as an opportunity for a violent uprising against Israel within the West Bank.

The working hypothesis is that the collapse of the security apparatuses and the resulting flow of their members to the local militias, according to their geographic or clan allegiance, will force the IDF to occupy territory

with the goal of destroying terrorist infrastructures and disarming armed individuals and groups. If this occurs, it will be difficult to restore the PA and its mechanisms and there will be a need to reestablish Israel's military regime in the West Bank. Even then, the IDF will have to deal with a growing level of friction with the Palestinian population and with a rising level of violence and terror.

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CHAPTER 3

THE REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Jordan, Egypt, and the Gulf states have an interest in a quick and peaceful succession within the Palestinian leadership. Each has a particular interest in the makeup of the Palestinian leadership, and each has a different—though limited—degree of influence on the identity of Abbas’s successor or successors.

Jordan

Jordan shares a long border with the West Bank and there is a large Palestinian component within its population. It is the Arab country most affected by what happens in the Palestinian arena and in the PA. Unrest in the West Bank is liable to spill over into its territory and to undermine the stability there, as well as the standing of the Hashemite kingdom. Therefore, from Jordan’s point of view, the ideological identity and political behavior of the Palestinian leadership is of the utmost strategic importance.

Jordan has several levers to influence the replacement of the Palestinian leadership. First, Jordan controls the eastern border of the PA, which gives it control over the flow of Palestinians in and out of the West Bank, other than by way of Israel, as well as the commercial route to the Arab world. Second, Jordan has a status recognized by Israel and the PA on the issue of Jerusalem and in particular the Temple Mount, and its involvement has an impact on what happens on the ground. Moreover, Jordan maintains security relations with the PA, as well as with Israel and the US. Thus, the relations with Jordan are a strategic asset for Israel in the war on terror and the prevention of weapons smuggling.

Nonetheless, Jordan’s influence in the Palestinian arena is limited and diminishing over time. Since 1988, when King Hussein announced he was cutting ties with the West Bank and abandoning his demands for sovereignty over the area, Jordan’s interest in the PA and even more so in Gaza has

declined. The Palestinians themselves are aware that Jordan must consider the interests of the US and Israel, which limits Amman's room to maneuver. In addition, from the viewpoint of its domestic interests—and unlike the situation of Egypt with respect to Gaza—Jordan is limited in its ability to interact with the PA and is unable to impose a lockdown on the Palestinians by means of its control of the transit points, which would allow it to have some influence and impose a Jordanian agenda. Finding a peaceful solution to the conflict in the form of a two-state solution—Israel beside a Palestinian state—is essential to Jordan for it to maintain its identity and prevent it from becoming the Palestinian homeland.

The involvement of the King in the transfer of power in the Palestinian arena can be expected only if the leading candidate is clearly viewed as a threat to the King and to the monarchy itself. An example would be if a senior official in Hamas is elected who is perceived as inciting Islamist elements on the ground that can spill over to Jordan. Even in this case, Jordan can be expected to act in coordination with Egypt and the Gulf states to whatever extent possible. Israel will likely not go beyond “consultation” with Jordan on this issue, as long as the candidates for leadership in the PA are not a threat from its viewpoint.

Egypt

Egypt is concerned about the day after Mahmoud Abbas and is hoping that a leader will emerge who is aligned with its interests in the Palestinian arena. No less important is that he be able to achieve internal Palestinian unity, to restore the PA's control in Gaza, and be acceptable to Israel and Egypt's allies in the region.

Egyptian interests in the Palestinian arena, which will determine its position following Abbas's departure, include:

- a. Maintaining Cairo's status as the dominant source of influence in Gaza with respect to security, policy, and economics, including the effort to limit the infiltration of competing regional players—primarily Iran and Turkey.
- b. Fighting terror in the Sinai Peninsula, with an emphasis on preventing connections between elements in Gaza and Salafi jihadist groups in northern Sinai.
- c. Cooperating on Egypt's vision of economic development in northern Sinai, the Eastern Mediterranean, and perhaps also Gaza sometime in the future, such as in the area of natural gas and energy.
- d. Achieving internal Palestinian reconciliation in a format that will lead to the gradual return of the PA to Gaza and the weakening of Hamas's position within the Palestinian system.
- e. Renewing the Israeli-Palestinian political process, in which Egypt will play a leading role, in order to reinforce regional stability. This is a means to improve Egypt's regional status and its status in Washington.
- f. Cooperating with Israel on matters of security, energy, and trade, including projects for the reconstruction of Gaza.

In the near term, Egypt recognizes Hamas as the ruler of Gaza, and serves as the mediator between the organization and Israel. Since 2017, understandings have been reached between Hamas and Egypt with respect to the war against terror in Sinai, and Hamas accepts Cairo as the main mediator with Israel. For the long term, however, Egypt views Hamas with suspicion (as a branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, which is an outlawed organization in Egypt) and would like to see the rise of an alternative Palestinian movement that is more effective and more relevant and will promote its strategic interests in the Palestinian arena.

In the intermediate term, which may be quite prolonged, it will be convenient for both Egypt and Hamas to adopt a realistic approach to their respective tactical interests without committing to a strategic compromise,

such as on the issue of weapons in Gaza. This pragmatic strategy also has the support of regional and international actors such as Israel and the US, and particularly against the background of the ongoing stagnation in the political process. The implication is therefore that in the near and intermediate term Cairo views Hamas as part of the effort to stabilize Gaza, even if Hamas is not perceived as a partner in the long-term regional stability equation that Egypt favors.

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Egypt's willingness to take a leading role in the reconstruction of Gaza following Operation Guardian of the Walls and its efforts to restrain Hamas since May 2021 reflect this approach, since the reconstruction project increases Hamas's dependence on Egypt and thus gives Egypt additional leverage over the organization and promotes Egypt's security and economic interests. Although Egypt seeks to promote internal Palestinian reconciliation, which would restore the PA's control of Gaza, in the absence of any willingness on the part of Hamas and Fatah to reach a compromise, Egypt has chosen to make Hamas increasingly dependent on it. In this way, it attempts to balance between an optimal but unfeasible scenario, namely the restoration of Fatah's control of Gaza and the removal of Hamas, and a more realistic but problematic scenario, namely the growing entrenchment of Hamas in Gaza and the perpetuation of the rift between Gaza and the West Bank.

The day after Abbas is viewed by Egypt as both a risk and an opportunity. On the one hand, there is a risk that the struggle for succession will sow the seeds of chaos in Gaza, hinder Egypt's efforts to stabilize the security situation in Sinai, and lead to the takeover by Hamas and/or Islamist elements in

the West Bank. On the other hand, it is possible that a Palestinian leader will emerge who has the power to unite the Palestinian camp and promote Egypt's interests more effectively, in both the Palestinian arena and the regional context.

Accordingly, Egypt's preparations for the day after Abbas involve two efforts:

- a. Helping the Palestinians create conditions for a smooth transition of power, which will include internal Palestinian reconciliation and make it easier—when the time comes—to create a mechanism for choosing a successor who will enjoy broad Palestinian support. Cairo feels that such a transfer of power is not just an Egyptian interest but also a regional interest that is shared by other countries—Jordan, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Israel—which are also interested in a smooth transfer of power and the emergence of a popular and effective Palestinian leader.
- b. Nurturing relations with a variety of figures in the Palestinian leadership, without evincing a preference for one or the other. Egypt has good relations with most of the candidates to succeed Abbas, such as Majed Faraj, Hussein al-Sheikh, Jibril Rajoub, and Mohammed Dahlan. On several occasions Egypt has pushed for the release of Marwan Barghouti from prison, even though his release and candidacy for succession is not acceptable to Israel.

Gulf States

Qatar is the only country that currently plays a direct and active role in the Palestinian arena. Its activity is focused on Gaza but includes other areas as well. Doha is likely indifferent to who succeeds Abbas, on the assumption that in any case it will be able to continue promoting its regional status and backing elements identified with the Muslim Brotherhood, based on its ability to offer financial assistance through its connections with Hamas.

In contrast to Qatar, the UAE belongs to the regional axis led by Saudi Arabia and Egypt. It supports the candidacy of Dahlan who lives in Abu Dhabi and

has personal ties with the regime. This is reflected primarily on the economic level and in projects that do not include the active promotion of his candidacy, based on the reality that he is persona non grata in the eyes of the PA.

Since the signing of the Abraham Accords and the normalization between Israel and the UAE, the foreign relations between Abu Dhabi and Ramallah have deteriorated and there is almost no communication between the two leaderships. In response to the agreements, the PA recalled its ambassador from Abu Dhabi and senior PA officials have condemned the UAE leadership, while the UAE has reduced its support for UNWRA significantly. Although there is an expectation that the UAE will play a role in the Gaza's reconstruction and stabilization of Gaza, in view of the UAE's ties with Egypt and Dahlan's influence, so far UAE leaders have focused on specific humanitarian aid to Gaza and have not tried to influence the political dynamic there. In any case, the UAE, or any other Gulf state belonging to the same axis, is not likely to try to influence the choice of Abbas's successor or the elections in the PA, unless they are asked to do so by Egypt or the US.

Significance

The events of the Arab Spring accelerated the split in the Arab world and reduced the influence of "senior" states on what is happening in domestic arenas. The Palestinian issue's priority on the Arab agenda has declined significantly and with it the interest in who will be the next Palestinian leader. In any case, there is no possibility of a meaningful Arab discourse on the issue as long as Abbas is in power. The influence of the Arab states, and in particular Jordan and Egypt, will be brought to bear only if the leading candidate is totally unacceptable to them. In this matter, Israel is liable to find itself in a conflict of interest with Jordan, Egypt, and other states (particularly if from their point of view Barghouti's candidacy has a realistic chance).

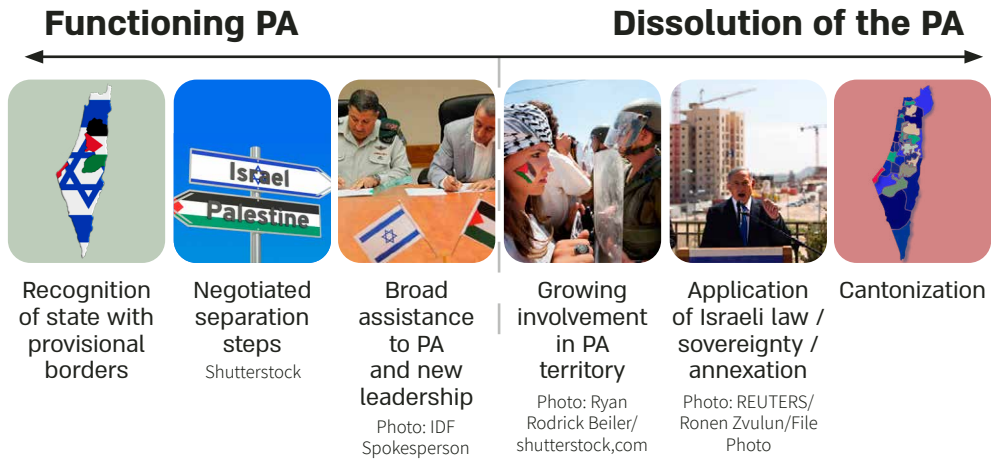
CONCLUSION: ISRAEL AND THE SHAPING OF A STABLE PALESTINIAN SYSTEM

In view of the multiplicity of players and scenarios, the future of the Palestinian system cannot be predicted. Therefore, Israel needs to prepare for four basic situations after Abbas departs the stage: a functioning PA that will maintain coordination with Israel; a functioning but hostile PA; a non-functioning or even failed PA; and the collapse of the PA.

Israel has the ability to temper some of the adverse trends that are expected to develop or accelerate once Mahmoud Abbas leaves the political stage; and it can enhance options that are likely to contribute to relative stability and the continued functioning of the PA, such as not intervening in the provisional arrangements in the Palestinian system and maintaining future political alternatives to create the reality of a Palestinian entity that is separate and distinct from Israel. Yet in any event, any action taken by Israel in the context of the Palestinian leadership succession must be measured and cautious and avoid any attempt—or semblance thereof—to politically “engineer” the Palestinian system or create an impression that it intends to impose its preferred candidate. At the same time, it must try to halt processes heading toward chaos, which will bring about the collapse of the PA and draw Israel back into direct involvement in the West Bank, i.e., a return to military government, and will accelerate the current slide toward a one-state reality.

Israel should invest in achieving understandings with its regional strategic partners (the so-called Arab Quartet, namely Egypt, Jordan, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia, which has not yet agreed to full normalization with Israel) with US backing. These understandings should focus on ways to stabilize the Palestinian system and prevent its takeover by Hamas and should include a commitment to assist the future leadership, if it accepts the agreements and understandings reached between Israel and the PA. Critical components of these understandings are continued security coordination between Israel

and the PA's security apparatuses and the acceleration of economic and infrastructure development in PA territory.



To stabilize the Palestinian system, it is necessary to restrain elements that look to escalate the situation and seek a direct confrontation with Israel, while at the same time bolster elements that support the building of a Palestinian state and at some future stage an arrangement that will achieve the vision of two states for two peoples. Building a Palestinian state will also require a strong regional partnership based on understandings and coordination between Israel and the Arab Quartet as well as international elements that support a two-state solution, alongside US backing for a political process.

In addition to a coordinated effort to improve PA governance and strengthen its economy and infrastructure, Israel should demonstrate flexibility on the issue of territory and allow the Palestinian leadership to control the vast majority of the Palestinian population, in terms of law and order and civilian governance. To this end, it should “approve” retroactively the spillover of Palestinian settlements into Area C and transfer civilian responsibility for these areas to the PA, as well as facilitate geographic and transportation

contiguity. This should be made conditional on the new leadership avowing its commitment to existing understandings with Israel and its focus on the improvement of PA performance rather than on power struggles with Israel.

Israel will need to strengthen regional and international cooperation in blocking attempts by undesirable elements to gain influence in the Palestinian arena, such as those in the Iranian and Shiite axis. It will also have to assist the new Palestinian leadership in preventing Hamas from exploiting the opportunity to weaken the PA to the point of collapse, or alternatively, a Hamas takeover of the PA and the PLO. At the same time and in view of the greater likelihood of scenarios of chronic instability and developing chaos, Israel must prepare for the greater challenge, namely, the collapse of the Palestinian system, and develop policy guidelines and capabilities to deal with dispersed Palestinian subsystems.

In scenarios of chaos and a situation in which the PA no longer functions effectively—to the point that it is prepared to return the keys of power to Israel—Israel must consider a transition from a reactive and stabilizing policy to a proactive policy of establishing facts on the ground. In this case, Israel has two options: imposing Israeli law on Area C, where Israel has settlements and security interests; or a reorganization of the West Bank into regions similar to cantons, which will be ruled by the clans and the dominant families.

In contrast, in the scenarios where the PA continues to function and the new leadership has the confidence of the public, Israel may consider steps toward national, geographic, and demographic separation from the Palestinians—preferably in coordination with the PA and by means of interim agreements on issues ranging from minor to major (bottom-up). What is agreed upon will be implemented, and to the extent that cooperation with the new leadership of the PA grows, the greater will be Israel's willingness to recognize a Palestinian state within temporary borders, prior to agreement on all the complex issues of a final status agreement.

Possible Steps

Reactive policy	Proactive policy
Maintain a policy of adaptation and accommodation to reality	Single out the preferred candidate and work toward his succession of Abbas
Support the stability of the PA and its leadership	Leverage instability to annex portions of Area C
Avoid blocking internal Palestinian unity/reconciliation	Encourage elections and unity / reconciliation processes
Support Palestinian elections, or at least refrain from intervention	Free Barghouti from prison: a strong leader who is acceptable to all factions
Assist the security apparatuses to achieve control and stability	Encourage cantonization and the nurturing of local leadership
Improve the economy and fabric of everyday life	Promote the Jordanian option
	Recognize Hamas and initiate contact with it

Policy Recommendations for Israel

In order to prepare for Abbas's exit from the stage, whether planned or unplanned, the following guidelines to stabilize the situation should already be implemented:

- It is not advisable to intervene openly in internal Palestinian politics in an effort to steer the succession toward a candidate that is preferred by Israel.

It appears that Israel is in favor of al-Sheikh and Faraj, but its support is liable to undermine their public legitimacy and encourage the formation of a coalition against them. Dahlan also has supporters in Israel, some of whom have business ties with him. Any expression of Israeli support for a Palestinian leader will label him as a "servant of the occupation" and will constitute a kiss of death. It is likely that any effort to conceal Israeli support will be quickly exposed.

- b. The PA should be strengthened by improving its economic position, via construction of essential infrastructure and industrial areas and freedom of movement within PA territory. This should be joined by assistance to the PA and its security apparatuses to tighten their control on the ground and help them impose law and order.
- c. It is essential both to halt the growing influence of Hamas and to strengthen the camp that supports a political arrangement. Cooperation should continue with the PA and its security apparatuses in the struggle against Hamas and Islamic Jihad in the West Bank, and should even be intensified, since Hamas may view Abbas's political exit as an opportunity to expand its activity in the West Bank and strengthen its base of political, economic, and terrorist power. Efforts to preserve the current situation in the West Bank should continue, since Hamas will not be able to overthrow the government in Ramallah as long as Israel maintains the differentiation between Gaza and the West Bank and retains its operational maneuverability throughout the area west of the Jordan River.
- d. There is a high correlation between the loss of control by the PA and the decline in Israel's ability to maintain security calm. This is driven by the poor performance of the Palestinian security apparatuses, the growth in the number of violent incidents, the growing friction between the Palestinians and the settlement population, and the exploitation of opportunities by the extreme factions to incite the population. Therefore, Israel must prepare itself at an early stage for a loss of control; it must strengthen the



protection of the settlements and the access roads; and in particular, it must complete the security barrier, ensuring contiguity and renovation, where necessary.

- e. Israel's operational maneuverability in the West Bank must be maintained in order to prevent attacks, dismantle terrorist infrastructures, and prevent a deterioration in the security situation. At the same time, assistance should be provided to strengthen the Palestinian security apparatuses in exchange for cooperation and an improvement in their effectivity. Israel must avoid strengthening local elements at the expense of the PA apparatuses, even if in the short term this appears to achieve calm in the security situation. The long-term implication will be a loss of control by the PA and the lack of a single and responsible address for establishing rules of the game and at a later stage advancing political arrangements. Israel should refrain from taking advantage of the situation to apply Israeli law to Area C (which accounts for about 60 percent of the West Bank) or parts of it. Such a move would stymie progress and prevent the consolidation of a moderate Palestinian leadership that cooperates with Israel. Essentially, it will accelerate the dissolution of the PA.
- f. At the same time, the security forces must prepare for a negative scenario involving chaos and anarchy, even to the point of a collapse of the PA and the need to reshape the Palestinian arena. It is essential to carefully consider any Israeli response to a violent incident, to ensure that it does not incite elements that seek to achieve the collapse of the Palestinian system, lest it become a self-fulfilling prophecy.
- g. The policy of differentiation between the West Bank and Gaza should be maintained to block Hamas from expanding its influence in the West Bank and prevent its gradual takeover of the PA. It is important to maintain calm in the Gaza envelope, in view of the ties between Gaza and the West Bank and the violence inspired by Gaza. In this context, any relief measures

granted to Gaza must be managed wisely, so as not to strengthen Hamas and weaken the PA, as part of the internal Palestinian balance of power.

- h. The Arab world should be engaged to support the day-to-day functioning of the PA and the process of state-building and economic development, and the effort to prevent assistance reaching subversive elements, and in particular, Hamas.

Israeli Policy to Support Stability



In a scenario in which a new government or temporary leadership emerges that is led by Fatah:

- a. Israel has a clear interest in maintaining full security coordination with the PA's security apparatuses. Therefore, it should refrain, except in exceptional cases, from operations that will embarrass the PA security apparatuses or harm the public legitimacy of the new government.
- b. Israel should tolerate a continued Palestinian confrontational approach, which will be adopted by the new Palestinian leadership in the international arena, as long as it does not encourage terrorism and violence. This is based on the understanding that a confrontational stance can help bolster the new leadership's legitimacy among the Palestinian public.
- c. Israel has the ability to strengthen the new Palestinian leadership and reduce the causes of instability. This can be done by recognizing the new leadership and contributing to an improved quality of life for the Palestinian population.
- d. In the scenarios involving struggles over succession, up to the point of chaos, the question arises as to the release of Marwan Barghouti as a way of stabilizing the political situation in the PA, in view of his broad public support. The government in Israel will no doubt encounter strong opposition to such a move and will find it hard to gather domestic support. Such a move will be possible politically only if Barghouti's release is part of a broader process that provides Israel with some significant gain, such as the regional and international recognition of the security barrier as a (temporary) demarcation line between Israel and the PA.
- e. The stability on the Palestinian side can be examined periodically by Israel, together with its international partners, and in particular the US, Jordan, and Egypt. Together they can devise ways to support the new leadership, including the consideration of possibilities to restart the political process as a stabilizing element.

- f. Specific understandings and agreements should be reached with the new leadership, with the goal of improving the economy, civilian services, and infrastructure. This can be done jointly with countries in the region and elsewhere that have an interest in stabilizing the Palestinian arena. This is also the case if a Palestinian unity government emerges and on condition that Hamas does not assume a key role in the Palestinian government, such as the position of Prime Minister or Minister of the Interior responsible for internal security.

Israel must refrain from actions that block any way back to a political process for the new leadership, such as unilateral moves and the establishment of facts on the ground in the West Bank, which will accelerate the slide into a one-state reality.

Israel's Toolbox

Military Tools

Operational freedom
in the West Bank

Security coordination
with the PA apparatuses

Intervention in internal
Palestinian conflicts

Completion
of the security barrier

Improved defense
components

Dismantlement and arrest
of problematic elements

Disconnect between Gaza
and the West Bank

Soft Power

Jordanian mediation

Regional and international
involvement

Improvement of the economy,
commerce, and daily life

Promotion of infrastructure
projects

Identification and connection
with influential groups

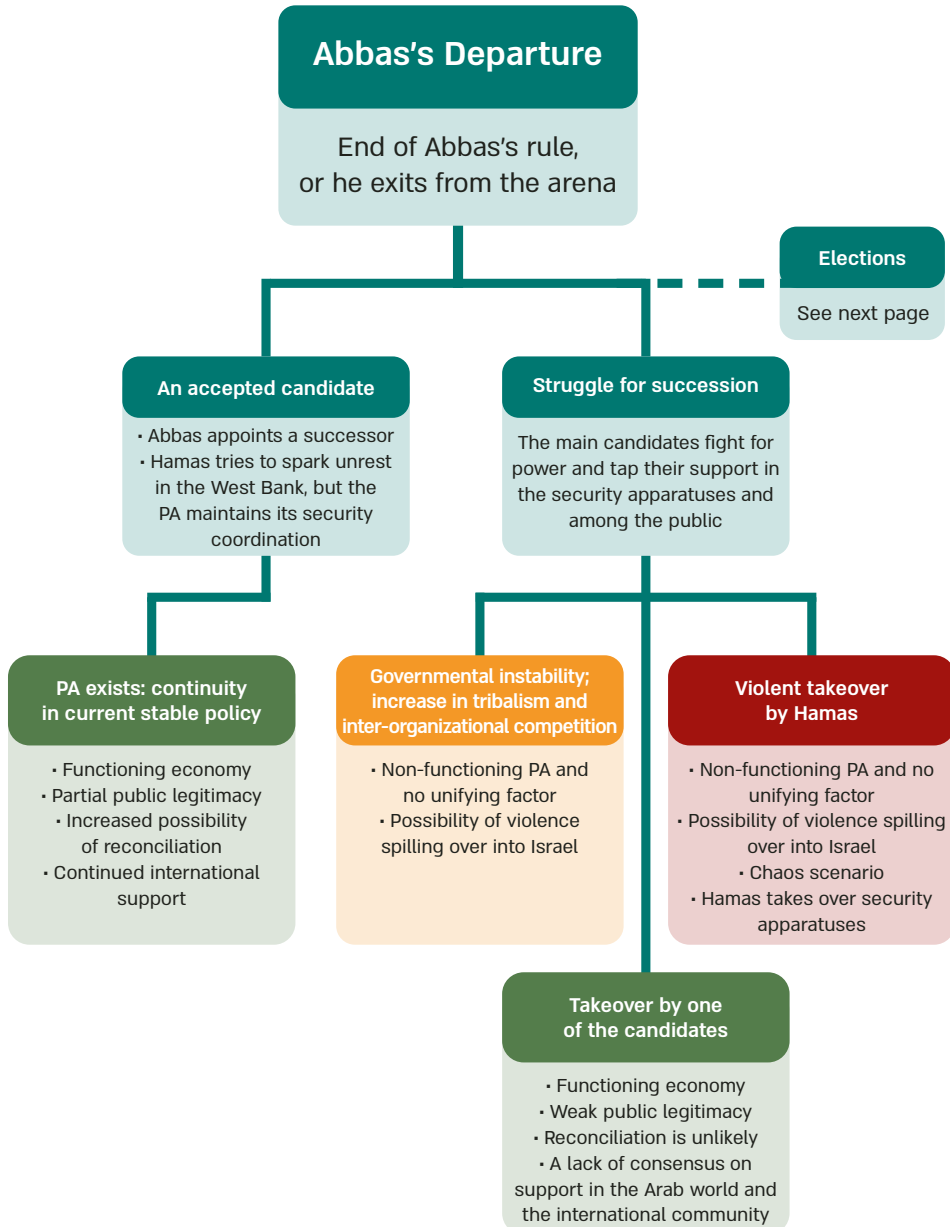
Encouragement of
elections or the creation
of a technocratic or unity
government

Approval of entry
of workers into Israel

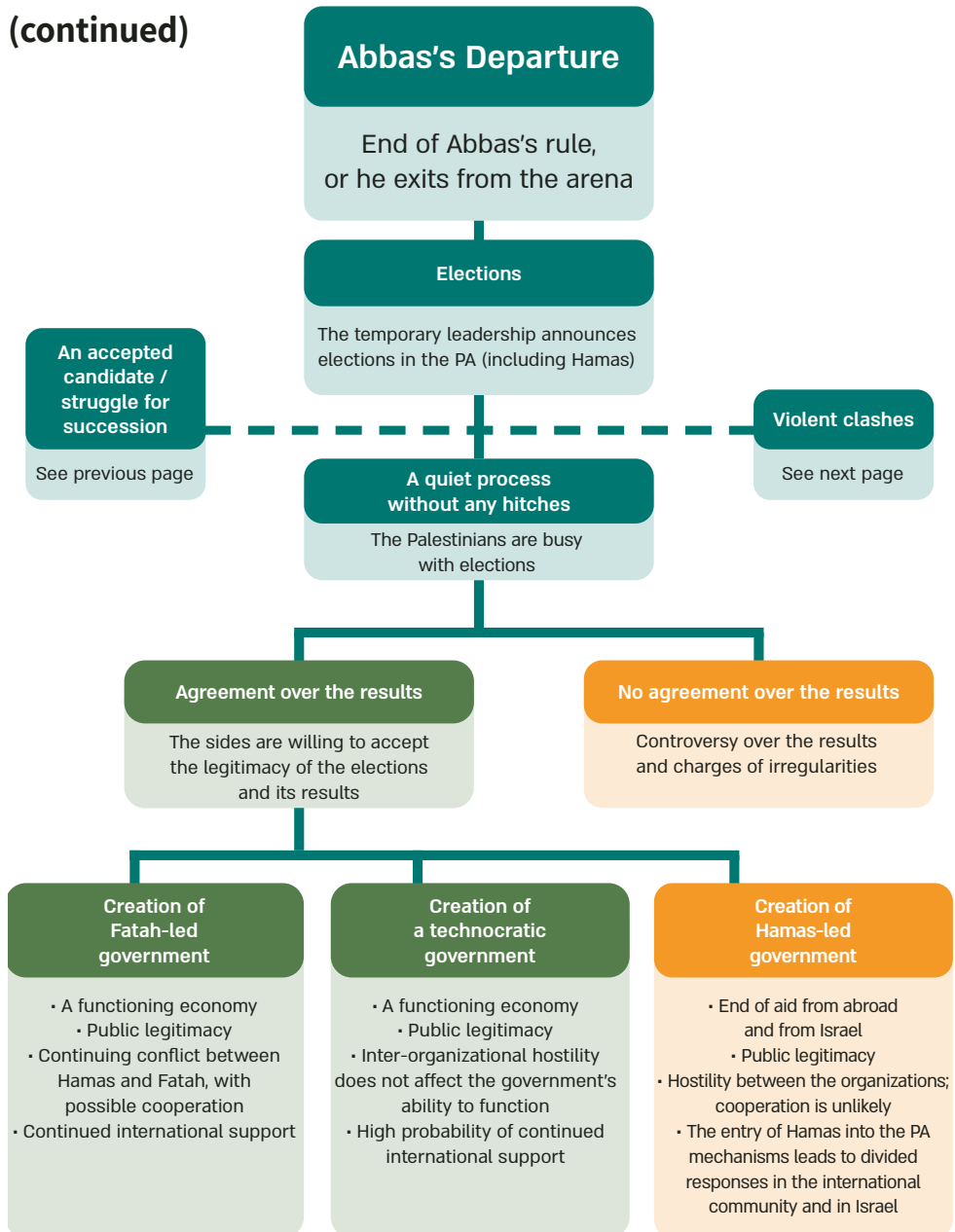
Differentiation between
the West Bank and Gaza

Expansion of PA authority
in Area C

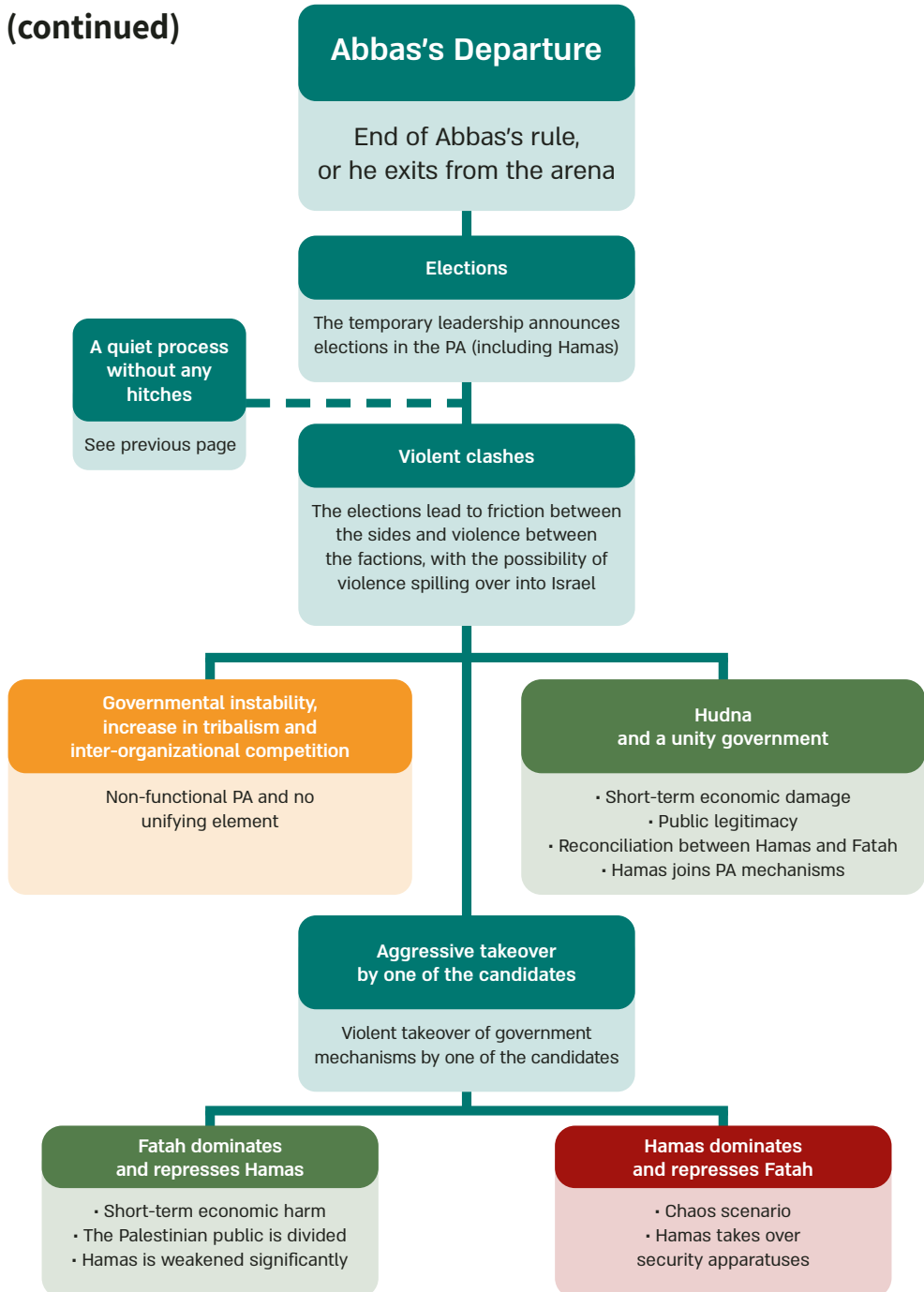
Scenarios and Dynamics of Events



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Potential Situations and their Implications

	Successor chosen in a democratic process	Groomed successor and/or appointed non-democratically	Continuous succession struggles and ongoing instability	Fragmentation of the PA institutions into local subsystems
Ability to make substantial decisions and initiate processes	The successor is backed by the government and the public, and is able to take decisions and make changes in the system.	The successor is backed by the government mechanisms but does not have broad public support. He is liable to have difficulty taking controversial steps until he consolidates his power.	The temporary leadership is unable to take major decisions and initiate processes. Any move promoted by a particular candidate is opposed by the others and does not achieve a broad consensus.	The local leaders of the subsystem can affect only the area in which they are dominant. There is no dominant body or individual able to reach a national consensus and initiate processes on a collective level.
Public legitimacy and involvement of the younger generation	The successor gains widespread support and legitimacy and is perceived as the accepted representative of the Palestinian people.	The successor has only narrow public support, primarily from the segment that he represents. Opposition from factions not represented and from the younger generation that advocates the adoption of democratic processes.	The public is divided into camps and none of the candidates enjoy broad support or legitimacy as leaders accepted by the majority.	The public tires of struggles for power and the parties' leaderships—possibility of increasingly powerful regional or clan leadership or the rise of hostile elements that will fill the regime vacuum.
Internal Palestinian dynamic and possibility of Fatah-Hamas reconciliation	Possibility of reconciliation between Hamas and Fatah depending on the approach of the successor and his willingness to be flexible, primarily toward Hamas, and to include Hamas representatives in the government.	Possibility of reconciliation between Hamas and Fatah depending on the approach of the successor, despite growing demands by Hamas and increased pressure from the factions that do not recognize the leadership.	Hamas will likely exploit the struggle for succession to strengthen its status on the ground and demonstrate its capabilities in the face of a non-functioning government.	No possibility of reconciliation, with mutual exploitation of the opportunity to create friction and to gain political capital at the expense of rival organizations. Hamas will strengthen its foothold in Gaza.
Continuation of security coordination	Security coordination is expected to continue, depending on the successor's attitude toward Israel.	It is unlikely that the successor will take the risk of terminating coordination, since he needs to consolidate his position and does not want to give the renegade factions a chance of undermining him; nonetheless, he will be confrontational to Israel in international forums in order to increase his internal and external legitimacy.	Security coordination is expected to continue but its effectivity will be reduced as a result of the instability and struggle for power between the candidates, and the fragmentation of support for the leadership among the security apparatuses and Palestinian factions.	The collapse of the central government will lead to a weakening of the security apparatuses and will harm their ability to maintain control on the ground. The security apparatuses will dissolve themselves and their members will join local militias. As a result, security coordination will end.

CONCLUSION: ISRAEL AND THE SHAPING OF A STABLE PALESTINIAN SYSTEM

	Successor chosen in a democratic process	Groomed successor and/or appointed non-democratically	Continuous succession struggles and ongoing instability	Fragmentation of the PA institutions into local subsystems
Economic situation	No major volatility expected in the economy.	No major volatility expected in the economy.	Instability adversely affects donations, foreign investment, tourism, and the public sector; growing unemployment.	Instability adversely affects donations, foreign investment, tourism, and the public sector; growing unemployment; emigration among educated.
Support from regional countries	If the successor is not identified with Hamas, the countries of the region will support the new leader and will view him as the legitimate representative who can initiate positive change and advance toward internal Palestinian reconciliation and a political agreement with Israel.	The countries of the region will back the new leader even if he is not their preferred choice and will try to apply pressure to ensure that he promotes their agenda.	The countries of the region will likely try to distance themselves from the internal rivalries and will not express support for any one leader. Jordan and Egypt may become actively involved in view of the immediate implications for them.	The countries of the region will try to assist in the consolidation of the new leadership yet at the same time will be careful not to become too involved in the Palestinian imbroglio.
Effect on Israel	The PA continues to function and has control over security; is able to prevent the spillover of violence; relations are based on the new leader's approach. If a Hamas representative is elected, Israel will have to re-examine its no-contact policy with Hamas.	The PA continues to function and is able to prevent a spillover of violence. Relations are maintained in their current format while Israel will try to strengthen the PA's security apparatuses and the civil and security coordination.	The PA functions at only a minimal level and is unable to achieve stability. The violence will likely spill over into Israel and there will not be any possibility of advancing a political process.	The PA is not functional; there is a deterioration in the economy and in security and a spillover of violence into Israel. Israel is increasingly providing for the civilian needs of the Palestinian population.

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Since 2005, Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) has worn three hats, serving as President of the Palestinian Authority (PA), General Secretary of the PLO, and Chairman of Fatah. Along with scoring several achievements for the Palestinians during his tenure, Abbas is also accountable for a number of failures, foremost among them the split between the PA in the West Bank and Hamas, which took over the Gaza Strip in 2007. The difficulty caused by this internal rift compounds the lack of progress toward the long-sought goal of an independent Palestinian state. Despite the criticism, Abbas's position has not been challenged, and during his term stability has prevailed in the West Bank most of the time. In recent years, there have been growing rumors of his expected exit from the stage, whether willingly or unwillingly, and there is much anticipation in the Palestinian arena.

A team of experts in the Palestinian Research Program at the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) examined the possible scenarios after Abbas's departure and the implications for Israeli-Palestinian relations.

The goal of this memorandum is not to predict who will replace Abbas, but rather to outline various potential scenarios, with the goal of understanding the challenges and implications for Israel that stem from each of them. The focus is on three main scenarios: the orderly transfer of power to a leader or leadership group from within Fatah, which would thereby maintain the PA as a functional entity; a prolonged struggle for succession that will weaken the PA and strengthen Hamas; and chaos and a loss of control by the PA to the point of collapse and a return of the keys to Israel.

In this policy-oriented research study, the authors formulate policy recommendations for the Israeli government for the "day after Abbas." Some of the recommendations are already relevant, while Abbas is still in power. The ability of the Palestinian system to deal with the sudden exit of Abbas will be largely determined by the ability of the Palestinian Authority to execute an orderly and stable transfer of power, without a struggle for succession. Israel has tools to support this process, such as support for the Palestinian Authority and its governance.

The ideas in the memorandum are the result of work by researchers at INSS with considerable experience in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: Dr. Anat Kurz, Yohanan Tzoreff, Dr. Kobi Michael, Adv. Pnina Sharvit Baruch, Dr. Haggay Etkes, Amb. Dr. Oded Eran, Dr. Ofir Winter, Dr. Yoel Guzansky, Noa Shusterman, and Brig. Gen. (res.) Udi Dekel.