

CHAPTER 1

THE IMPLICATIONS FOR THE "DAY AFTER ABBAS"

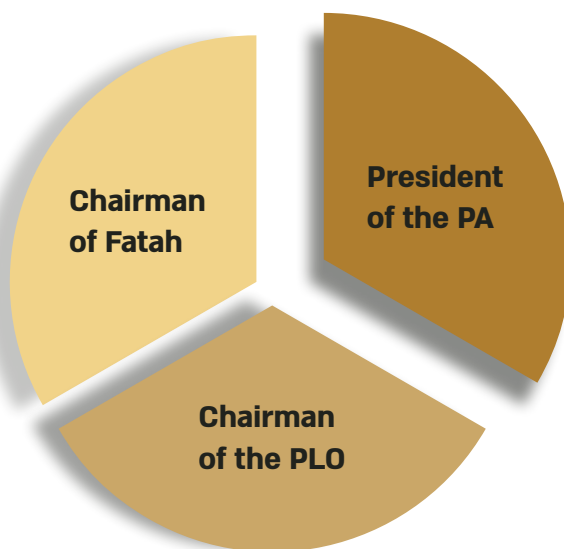
Once Abbas has left the political stage, three key positions will have to be filled:

- 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

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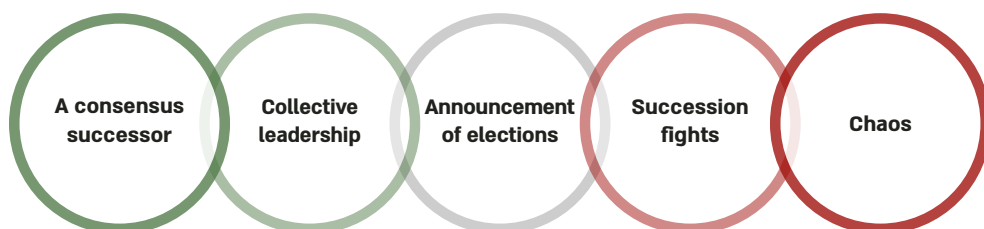
PA, the Chairman of the PLO, and the Chairman of Fatah—will step on each other's toes.

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

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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

