

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.

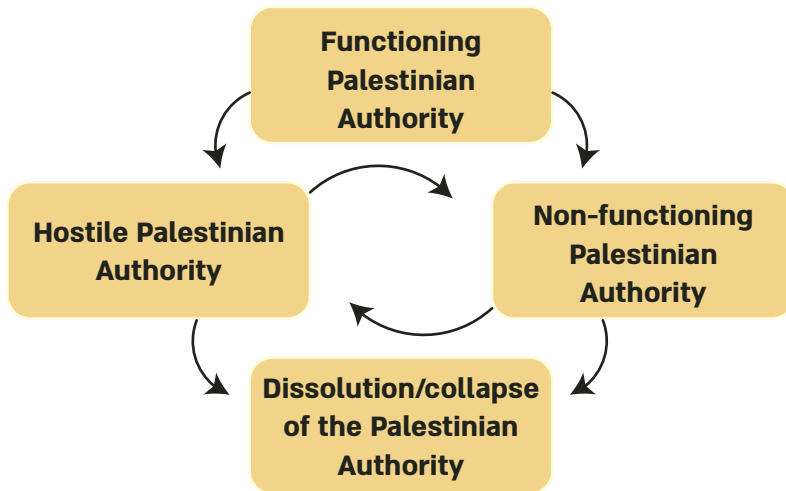
The scenarios:

- 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

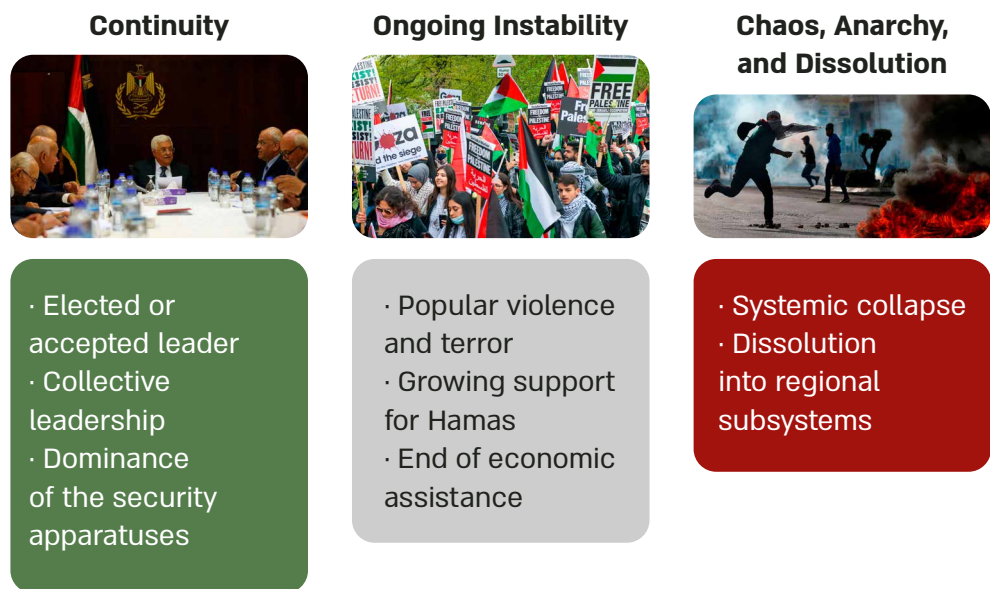


The basic PA states:

- 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.

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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.

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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.
