



Criminalizing Resistance: The Cases of Balata and Jenin Refugee Camps

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The Palestinian Authority (PA) adopted donor-driven security sector reform (SSR) as the linchpin to its post-2007 state-building project. As SSR proceeded, the occupied West Bank became a securitized space and the theater for PA security campaigns whose ostensible purpose was to establish law and order. This article tackles the consequences of the PA's security campaigns in Balata and Jenin refugee camps from the people's perspective through a bottom-up ethnographic methodological approach. These voices from below problematize and examine the security campaigns, illustrating how and why resistance against Israel has been criminalized. The article concludes by arguing that conducting security reform to ensure stability within the context of colonial occupation and without addressing the imbalances of power can only ever have two outcomes: "better" collaboration with the occupying power and a violation of Palestinians' security and national rights by their own security forces.

SECURITY SECTOR REFORM (SSR) HAS BECOME a crucial element of any state-building endeavor.¹ Under the leadership of Prime Minister Salam Fayyad from 2007 to 2013, the Palestinian Authority (PA) adopted SSR as a linchpin to its state-building project.² Besides enhancing the capabilities of security forces through equipment and training, the PA sought to overhaul structures, hierarchies, and chains of command with the stated goal of building up democratic governance and control, in accordance with the demands of its major financial backers in the international donor community.³ As SSR proceeded,⁴ the occupied West Bank became a securitized space and the theater of security campaigns whose ostensible purpose was to establish "law and order."

The reform and effectiveness enhancement of PA security forces (PASF) in particular, and of the security sector in general, were conducted under Israeli military occupation and within the context of colonial domination. Given the asymmetric relations of power between Israel and the Palestinians, as well as the preconditions laid down by both Israel and the international donor community, the formulation of the Palestinian security doctrine⁵ was tantamount to a diktat, whose effectiveness and legitimacy were met with profound skepticism by the Palestinian public in the West Bank.

In order to understand the magnitude of the enterprise, it is useful to keep in mind that the Palestinian security sector is today comprised of 83,276 individuals (West Bank and Gaza Strip combined), including 312 brigadier generals—to lend the latter figure perspective, the entire U.S.

Army boasts 410 brigadier generals—of whom 232 report to the PA and 80 to Hamas.⁶ The security sector employs around 44 percent of all civil servants,⁷ accounts for nearly \$1 billion of the PA budget,⁸ and is allocated around 30 percent of total international aid that is disbursed to the Palestinians.⁹

In addition to training programs and weapons upgrades, the SSR launched in the wake of the second intifada hinged on security campaigns carried out by U.S.-trained PASF troops in the West Bank. The objectives of the campaigns were to: check the activities of Hamas and Islamic Jihad, as well as their armed wings; contain Fatah-affiliated militants through co-optation, integration into the PASF, and amnesty arrangements; crack down on criminality, and restore public order.¹⁰ The governorates of Nablus and Jenin and, more specifically, Balata and Jenin refugee camps in the northern West Bank, which were designated as “bastions of resistance” (*qila'a muqawameh*) and/or “areas of chaos and anarchy” (*manatiq falatan wa fawda*)¹¹ were selected as the SSR’s “pilot projects.”¹²

What ordinary Palestinians thought of these campaigns—whether in terms of security or the broader dynamics of resistance against the occupation—constitutes the main focus of this article. The ethnographic data presented is based on a study conducted between August and December 2012 in both refugee camps, using a mix of semistructured interviews and focus groups with youth of both genders. The research sample encompassed a wide variety of social groups and aimed to reflect the voice of subaltern actors that are generally marginalized in mainstream discourse and literature. These included local camp leaders, midranking political faction cadres, armed group members, former fighters, men, women, and youth, as well as individuals who had been detained by the PA in the course of the security campaigns. Ethnographically speaking, the similarities between the camps were striking, and therefore this article will not compare and contrast the two but rather use both as one key unit of analysis. At its core, this article argues that the overarching goal of the SSR, in general, and the security campaigns, in particular, was to criminalize resistance against the Israeli occupation and to silence opposition to Israel’s colonial dominance. As a result, the campaigns can be seen as the early stages of the PA’s authoritarian transformation, manifest in the excessive use of arbitrary detention and torture in PA prisons as well as in the narrowing of space for opposition voices or resistance inside the Palestinian polity.

Balata and Jenin Refugee Camps: Setting the Stage

Jenin and Balata camps are located in the north of the occupied West Bank and were established by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in 1953 and 1950 respectively to house displaced and dispossessed Palestinians in the aftermath of the 1948 Nakba. With a surface area of 0.42 square kilometers, Jenin camp is home to some 16,260 inhabitants, while Balata camp, which is the West Bank’s largest in terms of population, stands on an area of only 0.25 square kilometers housing 23,600 inhabitants. Both camps share similar socioeconomic indicators: the average household size is 5.5, around 60 percent of the population is under twenty-four, and poverty and unemployment rates run at 35 to 40 percent.¹³

According to UNRWA, high unemployment, overcrowded schools, high population density, and poor water and sewage networks are some of the camps' most pressing problems.¹⁴

In addition to dire living conditions, camp residents have suffered continuous repression and persecution by the Israeli army over the years, including brutal raids and security crackdowns/sweeps. These camps were particularly targeted by Israel because of their active role in armed resistance and in nurturing the emergence of armed groups. The camps also played a major and pioneering role during the popular protests and civil disobedience of the first intifada (1987–93). During the second intifada (2000–2005), when Israel overran the West Bank, Jenin was the site of an eponymous battle in April 2002 during which, according to Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) committed war crimes.¹⁵ In addition to human losses, major parts of the camp were completely destroyed and more than one-quarter of the population was rendered homeless.

The resistance and steadfastness during this battle turned Jenin camp into the second intifada's symbol of resistance, which was celebrated by then Chairman Yasir Arafat as the Palestinians' Stalingrad. "Jeningrad," as Arafat called it, was and remains a major source of pride to both its leaders and inhabitants, and it has been central in shaping the refugee population's collective identity. Balata and Jenin camps witnessed the birth of Fatah's armed wing, the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, during the second intifada. Effectively, the PASF were not allowed to enter the camps as the armed factions controlled the two areas and claimed authority within them.¹⁶ These are a few reasons why these camps have remained a permanent target for Israel, and also why they were the first and main locations to be targeted by the PA's security campaigns.¹⁷

The security campaigns undertaken in 2007 were offensives carried out using traditional strong-arm tactics. They involved the redeployment of trained and equipped security forces in localities that challenged the PA's authority and control, in particular the PA's objective to establish a monopoly of violence in the security sphere.¹⁸ They were not regular security activities or routine operations, but rather focused offensives with objectives, timelines, methods, and strategies.

On the day the campaigns were launched, well-dressed, well-equipped, well-trained, and mostly masked PASF troops swarmed into Jenin and Balata camps in dozens of new, foreign-bought, military vehicles. Approaching the camps from multiple points the better to establish control, the PASF coordinated their movements and operations with the Israeli military, which remains the ultimate authority in the occupied West Bank. They entered the camp through its narrow lanes, with snipers positioning themselves on the roofs of strategic buildings or close to the center of operations. PASF troops raided homes to arrest targeted individuals and conducted weapons sweeps in which arms caches were uncovered and individual weapons confiscated. Violent clashes ensued, both with armed groups and with camp residents resisting the offensive.¹⁹

The idea was to cleanse the camps of non-PA weapons, to conduct a disarmament process, to arrest those that challenged the PA's authority, and to send a clear message to camp residents that the PA was the sole governing structure and power allowed. Achieving a monopoly of violence and consolidating power in the security sector were key objectives as the PA's security apparatus had not been allowed into the camps throughout the period of the second intifada, when ultimate power rested with the armed groups. As part of its institutional reform process and state-building project in the aftermath of the Palestinian parliamentary and presidential elections in 2006–7, and

the resulting intra-Palestinian divide, the PA targeted the camps and systematically criminalized resistance.²⁰

The security campaign in Nablus began in November 2007, and was followed in May 2008 by a similar campaign in Jenin that was ironically named “Smile and Hope”—to suggest that the PA was coming to the camps to restore people’s happiness and raise their hopes after years of lawlessness (*falatan amni*). From the PA’s perspective, the idea behind the campaigns was simple: “We wanted to demonstrate to donors and to Israel that the PA could govern Palestinian society,” one high-ranking PA official told me, “even in areas as intractable as Balata and Jenin camps.”²¹

The idea of establishing a security reform showpiece was shared at the highest international echelons.²² At a dinner with then Quartet Representative Tony Blair and top U.S. diplomats in the region, U.S. general Jim Jones had “proposed a new approach” to peace-making: rather than going for a grand deal with the Israelis, he advocated a piecemeal approach that entailed making a “model” of one place under Israeli occupation and “Pilot Jenin” was born.²³ Described as “an Israeli initiative,” Pilot Jenin was a “program currently implemented through direct coordination between the Palestinians and Israel, with limited American involvement. The program is part of the attempt to strengthen the moderate Palestinian camp, led by Abu-Mazen [PA president Mahmoud Abbas], implementing results from the Annapolis Conference.”²⁴ As a result, Jenin, one journalist wrote, “gained a reputation as a model security area where armed gangs and warlords have been replaced by organized security forces that respect one chain of command.”²⁵ The former mayor of Jenin later described 2008–9 as the “Golden Age”²⁶ and a U.S. journalist referred to it as a “quiet revolution.”²⁷

Turning Jenin and Nablus into models for other embattled West Bank localities²⁸ has been critiqued by a number of scholars. Linda Tabar has argued that “resistance in Jenin over time was subdued by separately intervening technologies of power, including most notably a long colonial counterinsurgency campaign that was followed by donor-driven projects to revamp the camp and re-establish security collaboration with Israel.”²⁹ In the case of Balata, Philip Leech has argued that the perceived success of the PA in imposing law and order in the camp (and Nablus generally) after 2007, as well as the initial popular consent to the PA’s security agenda, did “not demonstrate public endorsement of the PA’s legitimacy. Rather, the consent that such measures produced was superficial and, in the long term, the acceleration of the PA’s shift towards authoritarianism is likely to be profoundly debilitating for Palestinian society in general.”³⁰ In other words, a closer examination reveals that “this consensus was superficial and did not last. In April 2012, polling suggested that the level of popular consent for the Fayyad government was slipping overall.”³¹

Such critical observations are supported and further amplified by the perspectives of camp residents interviewed for this study. A local Fatah leader from Jenin camp put it as follows during our interview: “There was no phenomenon of security chaos (*falatan amni*). The PA just exaggerated it, which reflects their inability to lead. They used the media machine to portray us as a threat to security, both at the national and community levels.” A respondent from Balata camp with left-leaning political views used the following description: “There are three key words to the PA’s security campaigns: lies, media, and money (*kizib, i’lam, masari*). The media machine was all over them [the PA], covering their lies; and there is no scarcity of resources when it comes to

PA security.” A young woman from Balata described the security campaigns as “giving someone paracetamol [Tylenol] to cure cancer.”

The apparent gap between the narrative of the people and that of the authorities is striking. In the narrative of the voices from below, the words associated with the PA’s post-2007 state-building project are *donors*, *corruption*, and *police state* (*mumawilleen*, *fasad*, *dawlat bolees*).³² But more interestingly, these voices focus on resistance as the prism through which to explore the SSR’s implications for their lives and their national struggle. In other words, they measure the consequences and effectiveness of the SSR against its impact on people’s ability to resist the Israeli occupation. Those interviewed argued that conducting security reform to ensure stability within the context of colonial occupation and without addressing the imbalances of power and revisiting the terms of “peace agreements” can only ever have two outcomes: “better” collaboration with the occupying power, and violating the security and national rights of the Palestinian people by their own government and national security forces.

The PASF’s short-term technical successes were seen as fragile, temporary, and conditional upon Israeli goodwill and donor largesse. The consensus from below was that it ultimately came down to power dynamics. “That is what security was all about,” as one respondent from Jenin camp put it. The tools that the PA deployed in the process included the use of security coordination as a doctrine; the (ab)use of the judicial system to entrench authoritarian rule rather than mete out justice; the use of informal conciliation mechanisms; and the use of excessive force that perpetuated a culture of fear and discredited resistance to the Israeli occupation.

Mistrust and Crisis of Legitimacy

Despite differences in background, social class, and other demographic variables, the vast majority of people interviewed in both camps shared similar perspectives on the PASF’s efficacy and exhibited comparable levels of distrust towards them. The attitudes they expressed and statements they made regarding the security campaigns flew in the face of the authorities’ own narrative of glowing rhetoric, highlighting the lack of transparency and local ownership involved.

A female respondent from a women’s center in Jenin refugee camp told me: “When the security campaigns began in 2007, we felt somewhat hopeful and optimistic. But then things started to deteriorate: we couldn’t understand what they were up to, what kind of weapons they were targeting, why they were arresting local leaders who had headed the intifada or why they were killing others. We used to give them [the PASF] flowers and make them coffee and food, but they thanked us with bullets and by breaking into our houses.” A Fatah cadre from Balata camp who had been a local leader during the first intifada argued: “The security campaigns riddled our cause and national struggle with holes, as well as our bodies literally speaking, and the PASF never tried to mend those. With the security campaigns, the PA turned our communities into Swiss cheese . . . full of holes.”

During my fieldwork, the lack of trust between the PASF and camp residents was tangible in the dominant language of othering (“them” and “us”). A youth from Jenin camp concluded that the “camp was targeted not because we’re [a] bunch of thugs or criminals, as the PASF portray us, but because we are like a tree full of fruit: everyone wants to throw a stone at the fruit and collect

a piece for their selfish benefit.” For her part, a female Fatah cadre in Balata camp argued that “when the kids in the camps start to welcome the PASF with flowers and not stones,” then there might be a glimmer of hope for bridging the legitimacy gap.

In addition to the operational sphere, the distrust of the PA’s security establishment extended to the judicial realms, both formal and informal. In order to lend the process a degree of legitimacy, the PASF had initially relied on local leaders in the camps to facilitate the security campaigns and execute particular operations. These leaders were integral to the disarmament and weapons collection drives and bore witness to the financial compensation paid out when weapons were handed in to the PA. Not only did camp residents strongly contest this facilitation role, they also alleged that the local leadership stood to benefit financially from the security campaigns. Ironically, after the taking over, the PASF dismissed the local leaders and arrested many of them. The head of Jenin’s Fatah-led camp services committee was anxious to relate the following:

Once we had handed over Hamas and Islamic Jihad operatives, as well as [regular street] thugs to the PA, it was our (Fatah’s) turn next. The PA leadership, aided by its security doctrine and apparatus, dismantled our armed wing, they confiscated our weapons, basically doing us in—and we said OK, we’ll accept that. But now, they’re rounding us up, trying to get us to renege on our principles and ideals, to change our political beliefs, and they’re threatening us with the loss of our jobs on top of it all. In May of this year, after the death of the governor of Jenin, the PA detained and tortured some seven hundred people from the camp. In a nutshell, these unnecessary security operations resulted in the PA losing all legitimacy in the camp—if it ever had any.

In addition, the PASF coerced people to obey the outcomes of informal mechanisms of justice and deterred them from seeking redress through more formal routes.³³ The PASF committed many human rights violations such as torturing political prisoners, humiliating people publicly, and detaining people without charge, and families and clans were pressured to address these excesses on a personal basis, through traditional mechanisms of tribal conciliation, rather than through courts of law or the formal judicial system. Such matters were settled over “coffee and conciliation” (*finjan qahwa wa ‘atwa*), further entrenching the legitimacy gap and amplifying mistrust. A thirty-five-year-old woman from Jenin camp told me:

My husband was arrested and tortured by the PA for forty-five days. When we wanted to litigate the PA, the elder of the family came to our house—at the PA’s behest—with fifty men in tow in order to pressure my husband to resolve the matter on an amicable basis. They killed us and wanted us to solve it amicably! We had no choice. . . . But, of course, what it means is that we will carry this suffering and humiliation with us until our dying day. I will never forgive anyone who forces us to give up our rights.

The PASF’s priority was to consolidate power and guarantee that they had the monopoly on the use of violence in the Palestinian polity, regardless of the implications. Their mission was to establish the rule of “one gun, one law, one authority,”³⁴ a major electoral slogan of Abbas’s 2005 electoral campaign and a cardinal principle of successive Fayyad governments after 2007—even if this came at the expense of people’s security, basic human rights, or indeed their ability to resist the occupation. In fact, the implementation of the “one gun, one law, one authority” slogan meant

clashing head-on with the notion and practice of resistance, and particularly armed resistance to the Israeli occupation.

Taming Camps, Taming Resistance: Authoritarian Transformation and Arbitrary Detention

The PA's security campaigns were not only illegitimate in the eyes of their targets but they also had detrimental effects on the resistance movement, and it was this message that formed the core of what the voices from below had to say. The PA's "deliberate failure," as one respondent put it, to make a clear distinction between "the weapons of anarchy" and those of the "armed resistance" meant that people were equally targeted whether they were criminals or resistance fighters. As one Balata camp resident eloquently asked: "How can a thief be held in the same jail cell as a *muqawim* (freedom fighter)?"

Criminalizing resistance against the Israeli occupation was a common theme invoked by respondents. A former member of Fatah's al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, who was arrested by the PA during the Jenin security campaigns, commented as follows:

They consider us criminals and bring us before military court judges for resisting the occupation. Is it a crime to resist the occupation? Surely, it is a duty for an occupied people! They just want to subjugate us and strip us of our dignity. . . . I was tortured in the PA's Jericho jail for eighty-three days without charge or access to a lawyer. Then they assigned me a lawyer and his advice was that I should confess and sign a form stating that I would refrain from engaging in so-called criminal activity. I'm a freedom fighter, I'm not a thief!

Another former member of the brigades who was also arrested during one of the security campaigns in Nablus was held by the PA for fifty-four days in al-Juneid (Nablus), and then for a further thirty-two days at al-Dhahiriyya Prison in Hebron (from 25 June to 27 July 2012). Although he had successfully integrated into the PA's Civilian Police and was the father of four children, he was held on several charges that were ambiguous and sometimes contradictory. They included: presenting a security threat to his community; being a drug addict and dealer; engaging in criminal activities and corruption; owning weapons and arms dealing; being a follower of Mohammad Dahlan³⁵; and even being a member of Hamas! In November 2007, he had handed in two rifles to the PA, a short M16 with an Israeli logo, and a long M16 sporting a Lebanese cedar; he received \$18,500 for the two pieces, as well as a conditional Israeli amnesty one month after handing them in. The amnesty document, which he carries with him at all times (and showed me during the interview), states that if he is reported by any other person, or seen in the company of people wanted by the authorities, or carries any type of weapon, including his official PA-issued gun on duty, the amnesty will be canceled.

It was a "terrorism fest" (*haflet irhab*) in al-Dhahiriyya Prison. There's blood all over the walls and sounds of torture echo through the building—all while being kept blindfolded, you hear people screaming and shouting, doors slamming, the sound of people being slammed against walls. . . . Where did they learn all this aggression, I wonder? They enjoyed torturing me. I spent my days

in a miniscule cell, 1 meter 20 by 2 meters. One day they came with a bucket of dirty water and poured it all over the cell. It was a nightmare: torture, interrogation, being hung for hours using the *shabeh* technique,³⁶ being under constant surveillance with cameras and sound sensors everywhere, sleep deprivation at night, cells being raided after midnight, changing interrogators every day, and on and on—and all of that because they wanted to stop me from resisting the occupation!

Our conversation was interrupted by the sound of a very loud siren, which happened to be the ringtone on his mobile phone. He continued his account, with bitterness in his voice, as his legs shook and he sweated profusely. “Those fifty-four days were the worst of my life. I would have long conversations with the spiders, ants, and mosquitoes in my cell. I kept telling them: take your portion of my blood and please leave me alone! I watched the slow movements of the ants in my cell intensely. . . . I would feed them and then kill them. This is exactly what the PA is doing with us. They pay us our salaries and then they come and kill us.”

He stopped midsentence, gripped his stomach, and said he felt dizzy. Continuing to sweat and to shake, he added: “Whenever I talk about this topic, I get awful pains in my stomach and all over my body.” This man was eventually released from jail after President Abbas ordered security amnesties over Ramadan and Eid al-Fitr that year. Fearing that he might go to a human rights organization and sue, the PASF asked him for a fiscal guarantee of JD 7,000 (about \$10,000) underwritten by the Nablus Chamber of Commerce. They also asked him to sign a commitment, written in Arabic, English, and Hebrew, not to carry any weapons, nor travel or move within the West Bank, and to agree to be held overnight at the main police station in Nablus between 8:00 P.M. and 8:00 A.M. every day.

In our two-hour conversation, one of the leaders of the 2002 Jenin battle, who was on Israel’s most wanted list during the second intifada, described his arrest and subsequent detention in the PA’s Jericho prison between May and October 2012:

I received a call from the head of the Civil Police to go and have coffee with him, but when I got there, it was a trap. All of a sudden, a group of Preventive Security forces swarmed into the office, tied my hands behind my back roughly, hooded my head, and dragged me down the stairs to their jeep. They drove me all the way to Jericho, through all the Israeli checkpoints. How ironic that every single Israeli checkpoint was open for me when I was arrested by the PA! I even heard them [PASF] speaking on the phone in Hebrew saying, “We got him!” I have health issues, I still have five bullets in my legs and four bullets in my back from 2002. A bomb also exploded in my face [in 2002] but they [PASF] refused to allow the doctors to see me at the prison. After being on the dirty and wet cell floor for a week, I got a bacterial infection in my back. Then they started to torture me physically, they would shove me hard against the wall and stretch me on a chair using the *shabeh* technique for three days. After eight days of this, and even though I was entitled to have a mattress, they refused to let me have it if I didn’t confess to a crime that I never committed. In my five months in jail, I was not once questioned by the public prosecutor. They made an example of me, to show all the other so-called security prisoners that no one is an exception and that even the leaders of the armed resistance can be arrested and tortured. They blindfolded me, and had me lying on the ground with my head under the interrogator’s boots, and they opened

the little observation hatch at the top of the door so the other prisoners could see me in that state. It was so humiliating . . . talking about this upsets me, I feel overwhelmed.

A resident of Balata summed up the consequence of the security campaign on the space available for dissent in the following words: “Since 2007, public gatherings are only allowed on three occasions: weddings, funerals, or prison gatherings.” A local field researcher for a major Palestinian human rights organization told me that legal violations were rife; these included “arrests and house raids without legal warrants, prolonged interrogation in a security force compound without charge or trial, appearance in court after weeks of detention without charge, no formal charges, or specific accusations.” He added, “Actually, I just received a call from the Preventive Security Force to go and see them, and I am sure they want to question me about the latest report I wrote.”

A few weeks after his release, an eighteen-year-old youth from Jenin camp, with the marks of torture still visible on many parts of his body, told me: “I was accused of causing social unrest and threats to public order as the leader of the Devils gang. They accused me of writing a statement and spreading it all over the camp, but the thing is, I can’t read or write!”

Standing in his workshop, a sad-faced twenty-four-year-old carpenter told me as his hands and legs shook:

I was arrested and detained three times in PA jails in Jericho and Jenin. I was never ever as humiliated in my life as I was that year. Twelve days without sleep, stretched on a broken and painful chair. The chains in my hand ate into my skin and bones. Seventeen days in solitary confinement in a very cold cell with a rotten and disgusting mattress and the worst possible meals. I thought I was in Guantanamo. In Jericho, the prison is underground and it has twenty-eight cells, three bigger rooms, a kitchen that is often used for torture, and an interrogators’ room that includes a so-called health-care unit. It is the same design as in Israeli prisons.

It is clear from these and other similar testimonies that many people in both camps, whether civil society actors or members of local organizations, considered that the security campaigns’ objective was the creation of a culture of fear so that the PA could consolidate its power and illustrate its ability to govern notoriously difficult spaces. The dynamics of security coordination with Israel are such that for camp residents, internal, or homegrown, sources of insecurity form yet another layer of fear and humiliation in their experience of the Israeli occupation.

Security Coordination: Domination as Cooperation³⁷

Security coordination with Israel is a defining feature of the PA security doctrine and a major source of tension between the Palestinian people and their leadership.³⁸ Although it was an outcome of the 1993 Oslo Accords,³⁹ it gained both rhetorical and operational dominance once the PA’s state-building agenda became paramount and was subsequently entrenched post-2007.⁴⁰ However, its detractors view security coordination as having had a detrimental impact on the PA’s legitimacy and it is perceived by many Palestinians as a form of national betrayal.⁴¹

Security coordination between the PASF and the Israeli military manifests in a number of ways, including: the PASF’s arrest of Palestinian suspects wanted by Israel; the suppression of Palestinian

protests against Israeli soldiers and/or settlers; intelligence sharing between the IDF and the PASF; the revolving door between Israeli and PA jails through which Palestinian activists cycle successively for the same offenses; and regular joint Israeli-Palestinian meetings, workshops, and trainings.⁴²

In May 2014, President Abbas declared that “security coordination [with Israel] is sacred, [it is] sacred. And we’ll continue it regardless of policy difference or agreement.”⁴³ The vast majority of Palestinian people simply disagree, however. A poll of Palestinian residents of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip by the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies in 2014 showed that 80 percent of respondents opposed continued security coordination with Israel.⁴⁴

This fundamental disagreement between the Palestinian public and its official political leadership has given rise to popular anger, eventually leading to protests that were violently suppressed. Such anger is also reflected in the way that the PASF are perceived. After 2007, the PASF were often referred to as “the Dayton forces,” in reference to U.S. Lt. gen. Keith Dayton, the chief architect of the United States Security Coordinators team (USSC) responsible for training the nine battalions that carried out the security campaigns in Balata and Jenin refugee camps. In a 2009 speech in Washington, Dayton saluted the “new Palestinian men” his team had created and quoted senior IDF commanders as asking him, “How many more of these new Palestinians can you generate, and how quickly?” The U.S. general also referenced the words of a senior Palestinian official speaking to a graduating class of PASF troops in Jordan that were trained under USSC auspices. “You were not sent here to learn how to fight Israel,” Dayton quoted the official as saying, “but you were rather sent here to learn how to keep law and order, respect the right of all of our citizens, and implement the rule of law so that we can live in peace and security with Israel.”⁴⁵ Such statements, in addition to the revelations from the leaked Palestine Papers,⁴⁶ further fueled negative public perceptions about the security coordination doctrine and its consequences on and implications for ordinary Palestinians’ lives.⁴⁷

The vast majority of those interviewed in the camps expressed general dissatisfaction with security coordination. A community leader in Jenin camp told me: “I don’t have a problem with [it] as long as it is reciprocal. However, this is not the case. It’ll be an entirely different story when the PA can ask Israel to arrest a settler and protect Palestinian people’s security. There is no sense of coordination, only of domination.” A community leader from Balata camp put it more bluntly: “The security campaigns did one thing: they minimized daily and direct Israeli aggression and outsourced to PASF the role of the occupation forces—what they did was create a division of labor.”

The revolving door (*al-bab al-dawar*) phenomenon was a particularly sore point for those who had suffered from it. A respondent from Jenin camp who had done time in both Israeli and PA jails told me: “I was detained for nine months in the PA’s Preventive Security Forces prison because I belonged to Hamas. Three weeks after my release from the PA jail, Israel arrested me on the exact same charges. They literally used the same words.” For his part, a thirty-three-year-old Fatah cadre from Balata camp recounted: “After six months’ administrative detention [without charge or trial] in an Israeli prison and before I could enjoy the taste of freedom, PA forces raided our house after midnight and detained me for eight months. They did not ask me any questions in jail. They simply showed me a document and said “*beseder*” [alright, in Hebrew]; *beseder*, your file is ready, and now all you have to do is wait for God’s mercy!” Even those who thought that the

security campaigns and reforms had achieved positive results were cautious in voicing muted satisfaction.⁴⁸

“We Are Doing Our Job”

The PA’s security personnel held altogether different views than the ones conveyed by the broader public. They understood their job in technical terms and expressed a keenness to play by the rules as these were explained to them by their commanders. “Business is business, and I am doing my job,” a PASF member in Nablus told me. “Go and ask people and you will realize that we are doing things right and all the rest are wrong,” he added. “You can’t have two roosters in the same coop,” another local security official asserted confidently. “It’s either the PA security forces or militias and armed factions. There is no justification for the PA’s existence if its number-one task isn’t security enforcement.” An officer of the above-mentioned Preventive Security forces put it like this: “There is no such thing as resistance (let alone armed resistance) and this is why security conditions are better. Unfortunately, security campaigns also mean that the PA must devour their own (*al-Sulta lazim ta’kul wladha*). I mean everyone talks about prisoners and torture, even though there is no such thing, but no one talks about the problems facing interrogators. This is their job and they need to interrogate prisoners, but no one protects them if the prisoners later decide to seek retribution.”

When asked about the PASF’s aggressiveness and its excessive use of force both during the campaigns and inside PA prisons, a security official in the liaison office for the Nablus Police told me: “Well, excessive use of force may be a problem, but in certain instances there’s no choice but to resort to it. International law allows to the use of force according to what European and local experts taught us. But those laws are very biased [towards humanitarianism] and they need to be amended because we need more leeway to use physical force with detainees.” When I relayed these words to a senior Ministry of Interior official in the PA, his initial response was to ask, “Why are you surprised? That’s our job.” Then he added, “At the end of the day, the fact that Palestinian security forces are operating under [the auspices of the] occupation is embarrassing for everyone because people wish that these security forces would protect them from the Israelis, but that will never happen.”

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Security sector reform under the PA’s post-2007 state-building agenda did not only aim to enhance the PASF’s functionality and effectiveness and to ensure stability and security for Israel but it also sought to tame resistance to Israel’s occupation and colonial domination by criminalizing militancy and stripping it of its basic infrastructure. The PA and its security forces used harassment, marginalization, arrest, detention, and torture against those engaged in resisting Israel, and they dismantled the structures supporting such resistance through the conduct of aggressive security campaigns within the occupied West Bank’s most militant spaces.

As suggested by the ethnographic evidence gathered from ordinary people, what I have called the voices from below, in Balata and Jenin refugee camps, the security campaigns were widely perceived as both illegitimate and ineffective. The voices from below fundamentally challenged the claim that



Palestinian Authority Security Forces (PASF) patrol Nablus one day after a PASF weapons search in the Old City resulted in the killing of four Palestinians (two civilians and two security personnel). The patrol was part of a large contingent of reinforcements sent in by PA president Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah, who is also the PA's interior minister. (19 August, Jaafar Ashtiyeh/AFP/Getty Images)

the PASF were doing their job to maintain law and order and argued that rather than feeling a greater sense of security, they had witnessed the transformation of the PA into an authoritarian regime whose security forces conduct themselves in ways approaching a police state in the making. In sum, while the benchmark of security reform was to build a professional security establishment, ordinary people wanted protection from their major source of insecurity, namely the Israeli military occupation. As one respondent put it, “It means nothing to me if we have the best security forces and army in the world if they are not able to protect me.”

Epilogue

Capturing the narrative of ordinary people is a particularly challenging task. It is especially difficult in the case at hand not only because security issues are sensitive per se, but also because of the high level of frustration and despair among Palestinians resulting from the last two decades of Israeli occupation and increasingly authoritarian PA rule. On the way out of Jenin camp on the last day of my fieldwork, a number of people were gathered around a man. “When my child wishes to die, it is so painful to hear such a wish,” he screamed at passers-by. “When I don’t have one shekel to give her, then I better go kill myself. When the Palestinian leadership is hanging us

upside-down in the air, then what is left of this life?” Holding a bottle filled with gasoline and matches in one hand, and his daughter in the other, he was only dissuaded from starting the fire by the child’s terrorized cries. Such incidents are not particularly exceptional when misery, anger, and injustice are the defining features of daily life.

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 - 18 The PA's post-2007 state-building project aimed at establishing a Weberian monopoly of violence in the security sphere. This meant that the PA's statutory security forces were the only bodies with the right and exclusivity to control the security realm. In accordance with the Weberian model, other nonstate actors, nonstatutory bodies, and armed resistance groups had to be marginalized, dismantled, co-opted, integrated, disarmed, or punished. Within the overall context of Israeli occupation and colonization, however, the Weberian model is fraught with tensions and contradictions.
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- 34 "Security Chaos and Palestinian Elections" [in Arabic], interview with Mahmoud Abbas, transcript, Al Jazeera, last updated 17 January 2006, <https://goo.gl/1vgaFr>.
- 35 Mohammad Dahlan is a former member of Fatah's Central Committee and former head of the Preventive Security Force in Gaza and the Palestinian National Security Council. He was dismissed from Fatah in 2011 and exiled (and currently lives in Abu Dhabi) in the aftermath of the growing rift between him and the PA president and Fatah leader Abbas. Dahlan was accused of corruption, of poisoning Arafat, and of preparing a coup against Abbas. In November 2016, Fatah held their Seventh General Congress to elect a new leadership and eliminate Dahlan and his followers from the organization's leadership. The PA conducts security offensives in Balata and Jenin camps to this day, on the grounds that they are Dahlan strongholds.
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