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## The Palestinian Security Forces: Capabilities and Effects on the Arab-Israeli Military Balance

*Gal Luft*<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

Despite its engagement in diplomatic negotiations with Israel since 1993, the Palestinian Authority (PA) has proven that it has not renounced the use of force as a viable instrument of policy. On the contrary, throughout the eight years of diplomatic negotiations with Israel, it has repeatedly and deliberately used violent means whenever diplomacy failed to fulfil the Palestinians' political aspirations. Palestinian Minister of Information, Yasser Abd Rabou, confirmed this two-prong strategy. "The Palestinian side," he said, "will make clear that the negotiations will go on alongside the Palestinian struggle against the occupation. It would be impossible to continue the negotiations unless it is to a certain extent combined with a certain [level] of struggle against the occupation."<sup>1</sup>

The most recent manifestation of this mode of operation, known to many as the "second *intifada*" or the "al-Aqsa *intifada*", which broke out in September 2000, has brought Israel and the PA to the lowest point in their relations, perhaps even to the verge of an all-out war. To be able to combine violence and diplomacy, the PA needs to develop a military capability that would allow it to offset Israel's overwhelming military superiority. And indeed, since the signing of the 1993 Oslo Accords, under the guise of an innocent looking police body and despite the official Israeli policy of Israeli governments which negated such a possibility, a

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<sup>1</sup> **Gal Luft** is a doctoral candidate at the Department of Strategic Studies at the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS), Johns Hopkins University. He is a lieutenant colonel in the reserves of the IDF. In his military career, **GL** commanded battalions in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and worked with the Palestinian Police since its inauguration in 1994. He is the author of a Washington Institute for Near East Policy monograph *The Palestinian Security Forces: Between Police and Army* (Washington DC, 1998) as well as several articles on Israeli-Palestinian security issues published in *Commentary Magazine*, *Middle East Quarterly*, and *Middle East Review of International Affairs*. He is also the author of the chapter on the Palestinian army in *Armed Forces in the Middle East*, Barry Rubin, ed. (Frank Cass, 2001).

sizable Palestinian military apparatus has emerged west of the Jordan River Valley. This armed force, which seemed to many as merely a potential irritant, has grown to become one of the most challenging opponents that the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) is facing today.

Asymmetrical warfare has emerged in modern history as the weapon of the weak and as such, if used persistently, could yield substantial gains. The success of dedicated, poorly equipped guerrilla forces in prevailing over superior conventional armies in places like Algiers, Vietnam, Sudan, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, and Lebanon, has been a source of inspiration to many Palestinians. The current conflict between Israel and the PA shows that the Palestinians are committed to emulate the success of predecessor liberation movements, especially that of Hizbullah in South Lebanon. To do so, they have been cultivating military apparatuses to fight the daily guerrilla war as well as preparing for a full-scale war with Israel in case the conflict spirals out of control.

The second *intifada* is not the first military encounter between the IDF and Palestinian armed forces. In addition to the 1982 Lebanon War in which Israel defeated Palestinian brigades belonging to the Palestinian National Liberation Army, the IDF met the Palestinian armed forces in combat twice before the summer of 2000. The first incident occurred in September 1996 following a controversial decision made by then Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to open to the public a Herodian Tunnel in the Old City of Jerusalem. The decision sparked a three-day combat in which 69 Palestinians and 14 IDF soldiers died, and over 1,200 people were wounded. Most of the fire in this encounter was generated by uniformed Palestinian policemen who had been trained to prevent exactly such occurrence. For the IDF, the Tunnel riots were a seminal event that changed the attitude toward the PA's security services from a partner for peace to a potential foe. As a result, the IDF revised its doctrine and began to seriously prepare for the possibility of an armed clash with the Palestinian security services.<sup>2</sup>

May 2000 brought the outbreak of a second wave of riots, referred to by the Palestinians as the "al-Nakba Riots". The participation of the uniformed Palestinian security forces in these riots was much more limited than in 1996. Alternatively, the riots introduced Tanzim, the armed faction of the Fateh movement, as an independent armed militia and a key player in the Israeli-Palestinian security arena. It became apparent that by arming and financing popular militias in the PA controlled territories, Yasser Arafat has been preparing an alternative military force to operate alongside his official, uniformed security apparatuses.

The two violent clashes exposed the duality in the PA's way of using force. The PA has managed to integrate conventional military capabilities with popular elements operating at the grass-roots level. These two components – in addition to the use of terror by PA-sponsored Islamic fundamentalist groups such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad, a massive propaganda campaign and the use of diplomatic manipulations in an attempt to internationalize the conflict – have been the tenets of the PA's strategy of fighting Israel in the first year of the *intifada*. The merit of this duality of means is that it allows the PA to engage in a popular war and yet continue to build its conventional military capabilities that might be needed for a wider, high-intensity conflict.

This chapter will present an updated assessment of the PA's military capabilities. It will describe the status of the various apparatuses, their weapons, missions, doctrine, training and relations with fellow security bodies. It will also present an assessment of the positive and the negative implications of the second *intifada* on the readiness of the forces and their ability to endure a long period of fighting with Israel.

The second part of this work will examine the different aspects in which Palestinian military forces could pose a military challenge to the IDF and to Israel at large. These aspects will be reviewed through three scenarios. The first is, in essence, a prolongation of the existing situation in which Israel and the PA military bodies fight each other using guerrilla and counter-guerrilla tactics. The tactics used by the Palestinians under this scenario include ambushes, bombings, drive-by shootings, and coordinated attacks on Israeli military outposts in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The IDF's action involves the use of high-tech weapons and specialized units and is directed mainly toward Palestinian military installations, infrastructure of terror organizations and individuals suspected in military activity against Israel. At times, IDF units carry out incursions into Palestinian controlled territories for punitive purposes or to remove threats from the vicinity of Israeli settlements. Nevertheless, despite the intensity of the fighting, both sides refrain from declaring their former peace partners an enemy and, hence, avoid using their entire arsenal and military capabilities against each other.

The second scenario will describe an all-out Israeli-Palestinian military confrontation in which the PA uses all the weapons, units and tactics that have not been used until now for reasons that will be addressed later. Naturally, such escalation will force Israel to expand its own arsenal of lethal weapons, including the extensive use of air power, artillery and heavy armored formations. According to various reports, Israel is not ruling out the possibility of launching an all-out attack against the PA in response to escalated violence and the wave of terror attacks. Such radical measures would entail the IDF to move into Palestinian controlled territories in order to destroy the military and political infrastructure of the PA and the terror organizations it hosts. This, in turn, would put the PA in a battle for its survival. The Palestinian lack of a comprehensive defense system and the disparity in power between the PA forces and the IDF could bring about a complete destruction of the PA's military infrastructure as well as its political institutions. But before this happens, the IDF will have to meet Arafat's soldiers in the narrow streets of cities like Nablus, Hebron, Gaza and Khan Yunis. Urban war, as the IDF experienced in the battles in Beirut during 1982, could be complex and costly in term of casualties. Success in such a war depends mostly on the ability of the attacker to crush the fighting will of the defender before international intervention takes place. The degree of persistence and willpower of the Palestinian security forces and the Palestinian population from which these forces draw their support is likely to be one of the most important considerations that would determine whether Israel should embark on such an operation. The PA, seeking new means of deterrence to deter Israel from launching such an attack, may resort to examining unorthodox options in the sphere of non-conventional weapons.

The third scenario will focus on the role of the Palestinian military forces in the event of a regional war involving one or few Arab players such as Syria, Libya, Iran, Iraq and Hizbullah. The danger of intervention of more moderate Arab states such as Saudi Arabia or Morocco as well as the abrogation of existing peace treaties with Jordan and Egypt should not be discounted. Fighting in the framework of an Arab coalition, the PA military units could have an important supporting role with considerable operational implications on the IDF's ability to mobilize its essential reserve component. Palestinian military and para-military forces could also attempt to attack important military and civilian installations inside Israel itself, creating havoc and significant psychological damage.

The plausibility of all three scenarios have been, somewhat, reduced in the wake of the terror attacks on New York and Washington on September 11, 2001 and the subsequent US declaration of war on terrorist organizations and their host nations. As of this writing, it

appears that America's war on international terrorism and the efforts to sustain a broad multinational coalition which includes Arab countries could force Israelis and Palestinians into an imposed cease-fire. Palestinian commitment to end its support of the terrorist organizations hosted in its territory could prevent a new wave of terror attacks on Israel which could invite Israeli massive retaliation. Arab support of the US-led coalition against terror is also likely to reduce the likelihood of a confrontation of the kind described in the third scenario. But the unpredictable nature of the region, the conflicting agendas of the different players and the traditional fragility of military coalitions still give the three scenarios a high degree of plausibility, at least in the longer run.

## **I. The PA Security Services: Structure and Organization<sup>3</sup>**

The formation of the Palestinian security apparatuses were explicitly defined by the Cairo Agreement signed in May 1994 and the subsequent Oslo II Agreement signed in September 1995. The Cairo Agreement determined that the Palestinian Authority could establish a strong police force that would be referred to as "the Palestinian Police". The duties, functions, structure, deployment and composition of the Palestinian Police, together with provisions regarding its equipment and operation, were prescribed in the agreement. The PA police undertook to perform normal police functions, including maintaining internal security and public order, protecting the public and its property and acting to provide a feeling of security and safety, adopting all measures necessary for preventing crime and protecting public installations and places of special importance.

The Oslo II Agreement signed in September 1995 added an important duty to the Palestinian Police: to combat terrorism and violence and prevent incitement to violence.

The agreements also provided the means to do the job. Israel allowed the PA to absorb up to 7,000 veterans of the Palestinian Liberation Army (PLA) living throughout the Arab world and recruit them into the ranks of the Palestinian Police. The rest of the men were to be recruited from the local population of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The Palestinian Police was to be composed of seven integral branches: Civil Police, Public Security, Preventive Security, Intelligence, Presidential Guard, Coastal Guard and Emergency Services and Rescue. The agreement specified that except for the Palestinian Police referred to in the agreement, no other armed forces shall be established or operate in the Gaza Strip or the West Bank. In reality, the PA employs today at least 12 different security apparatuses, this without taking into account the Tanzim, Fateh's armed militia, the most dominant force in the second *intifada* and other armed groups such as the Popular Resistance Committees and the al-Aqsa Martyr Brigades which will be described later.

### **National-Security Force (*Kuwaat Al-Amn Watani*) (NSF)**

As the largest security service, numbering about 14,000 men, the NSF is responsible for most of the missions along the borders of "Area A", the area under exclusive Palestinian control, and inside the cities. Soldiers of the NSF guard most of the checkpoints on the outskirts of main cities taking part in other general security-related missions. Until the outbreak of the second *intifada*, the force also operated a company specializing in the Israeli-Palestinian Joint Patrols (JP).

The forces in Gaza are organized in three brigades, a northern brigade, responsible for the northern part of the Gaza Strip including Gaza City, a southern brigade responsible for the

southern region of Rafah and Khan-Yunis, and a border brigade of approximately 1,000 troops which patrols along the eastern border of the Gaza Strip. In the West Bank, the NSF consists of eight battalions of 400-450 troops deployed in the large Palestinian cities of Ramallah, Jenin, Tulkarem, Jericho, Kalkilyah, Nablus, Hebron, and Bethlehem.

The NSF recruited most of its men from the PLA and gradually added increasing numbers of local recruits. Commanding the NSF in Gaza is General Abdel al Razzak Majaideh. The commander in the West Bank is General Haj Ismail, both officers are PLA veterans. NSF units are equipped with 30 armored vehicles BRDM2. They carry AK-47s and pistols but also keep heavier weapons in their arsenal.

### **Civil Police (*Shurta Madaniyya*)**

The civil police, known as the Blue Police, is the PA's main law enforcement apparatus. It handles ordinary police functions such as directing traffic, arresting common criminals, fighting drug trafficking and keeping public order. Headed by General Ghazi Jubali, it employs over 7,500 policemen in Gaza and approximately 4,700 in the West Bank. According to the interim agreement, the Civil Police would also deploy in 25 selected villages and towns throughout the West Bank's Area B, the area of PA civilian jurisdiction and Israeli military control. The policemen in these villages are allowed to carry firearms within the village territory, and to maintain public order.

The police forces are equipped with light weapons and drive blue vehicles.

Members of the Civil Police, including its commander, Jubali were involved several times in terror attacks against Israeli targets. In July 1997, the IDF caught three policemen who were on their way to attack a Jewish settlement near Nablus. Jubali turned out to be the person who masterminded the attack and since then he is wanted by the Israeli authorities. As a result, he was excluded from all the security negotiations between Israel and the PA. Jubali is prohibited from leaving the Gaza Strip and cannot have direct command over his troops in the West Bank. Police operations in the West Bank are, therefore, directed by the local police chief, Muhammad Jabari, whose headquarters are in Ramallah.

In December 2000, the death of Jubali's deputy Abdel Muati al-Sabawi while trying to dismantle a bomb, revealed the connection of members of the Civil Police to an illicit weapons industry in Gaza. According to Israeli sources, Jubali and some of his deputies were personally involved in coordinating the production of mortar shells and hand grenades.<sup>4</sup>

### **Rapid Deployment Special Police Unit**

This is the spearhead of the Civil Police. This force of a few thousand highly trained men specializes in handling complex crises such as severe riots, and counter-terrorism operations. The unit is specifically trained in urban warfare and is the most capable in restoring order in the PA's crowded refugee camps. Many of the commanders of the unit have undergone training in the Soviet Union and one of their important roles is to train instructors for the other Palestinian security services.<sup>5</sup> The unit is commanded by Hussein Ghush.

### **Presidential Security – Force 17 (*Amn Al-Ri'asah*)<sup>6</sup>**

Force 17 is the unit that is responsible for the protection of Yasser Arafat as well as other VIPs and important installations in the PA. This high quality security apparatus, commanded

by Faisal Abu-Sharah since 1994, is based on the historical Force 17 which provided PLO leaders intelligence and protection against internal rivals during the 1970s and 1980s.

The force is estimated at 2,000 men in the Gaza Strip, deployed in three geographical battalions: a northern battalion, a southern battalion and a battalion, which controls Gaza City. In the West Bank, the force consists of approximately 1,500 men, most of whom are deployed in Ramallah and commanded by Mahmoud Damara, also known as “Abu-Us”.

In addition to providing security guards, Force 17 deals with counter- terrorism and the arrests of opposition activists and suspects of collaboration with Israel. It also assists the NSF in routine security missions along the border with Israel and patrols the main cities. It is equipped with 15 armored vehicles BRDM2 and light weapons.

Force 17 has two subsidiary bodies, subjected to the Presidential Security command. The first is **Force 17 Intelligence Unit** whose main mission is gathering information about the activities of the opposition movements and other domestic threats. The other is the **Presidential Guard**, Arafat’s most loyal and trusted inner circle. This small unit of several dozen elite fighters provides the tight security around him, preventing any assassination attempts. The unit commander is Yusuf Ali Ahmed Abdallah, also known as “Dr. Yusuf”.

Unlike the other security services, Force 17 consists mainly of officers who came from Tunisia in 1994. These officers are hardly known in the public and lack local ties and popularity that many of the other military leaders enjoy.

According to the IDF, Force 17 members, especially in the West Bank branch, were involved in numerous terror attacks against Israeli soldiers and civilians such as shooting attacks, roadside bombs and mortar attacks. In February 2000, a cell of Force 17 members in coordination with Hizbullah, was associated with launching mortars on a Gaza Strip settlement. The group’s leader, Mas’oud Ayad, was assassinated by the IDF shortly afterwards. On March 30, 2001, Israeli forces bombarded from the air two of the headquarters of this force in Ramallah and Gaza. Soon after, in early April, Israeli forces arrested several members of this force inside Area A.

### **Preventive Security Forces (*Amn Al-Wiqa’i*) (PSF)**

This plainclothes security force operates in the West Bank and Gaza with an estimated power of close to 5,000 agents and is known to be the largest of the PA’s intelligence forces. Headed by Jibril Rajub in the West Bank and Muhammad Dahlan in Gaza, this body is involved in preventive actions against terrorist and opposition groups as well as information gathering in Israel. The PSF has its own prison and interrogation installations. Some of the PSF activities are associated with violence, abduction of civilians, interrogations, tortures, and other illegal actions. The PSF has achieved, therefore, a reputation for human rights violations including the death of tortured detainees.<sup>7</sup>

PSF leaders are involved in the economic life of the PA; they have control over the PA’s imports and exports of goods and services. They are also known to be involved in corrupt practices such as collection of protection fees, issuing of business licenses, extortion and theft. The PSF is the most feared organization by the local population, but its leaders, Rajub and Dahlan are politically influential due to their power among the grass roots as well as their political connections with the political leadership of the PA.

Rajub and Dahlan are amongst the most powerful individuals in the security establishment. Both of them were part of the Fateh leadership at the beginning of the first *intifada* and both

were imprisoned in Israel. During the heydays of the peace process, they worked in close cooperation with the Israeli security forces especially in the fields of counter-terrorism and crime prevention. But with the outbreak of the second *intifada*, both leaders were faced with increasing criticism regarding their previous collaboration with Israel. To enhance their credibility and patriotism in the eyes of the Palestinian public, they had to re-invent themselves and adopt hard-line positions. As a result, the PSF, especially its Gaza branch, has gradually become an active participant in the fighting. Dahlan and his deputy, Rashid Abu-Shabak, were reportedly involved in directing and sponsoring terror attacks against Israeli targets in the Gaza Strip.

### **General Intelligence (*Mukhabbarat Al-Amma*)**

The General Intelligence is the PA's official intelligence body specializing mainly in counter-insurgency and the hunt of collaborators with Israel. It is also involved in intelligence gathering outside the territories, counter-espionage operations and developing relations with other foreign intelligence bodies.

The organization's size is estimated to be 1,000 men, many of whom are highly experienced intelligence agents who worked at the PLO headquarters in Tunis prior to the establishment of the PA. In addition, there are up to 2,000 informers and unofficial employees who render various services to the General Intelligence.

The General Intelligence is headed by Maj. Gen. Amin al-Hindi, who was involved in the 1972 massacre of the Israeli athletes in the Munich Olympics. He disappeared after the attack and emerged 22 years later as the commander of the General Intelligence. But the more visible man in the organization is the West Bank director Tawfik Tirawi, who since the beginning of the *intifada*, is known to have been involved in organizing civil disobedience as well as numerous terror attacks.

On September 1, 2001, the General Intelligence organization suffered a severe blow with the death of al-Hindi's deputy, Colonel Taisir Khatab. He was reportedly assassinated by an unknown Palestinian organization calling itself the Martyr Bilal al-Ghoul Group.<sup>8</sup> The cause and circumstances of Khatab's death were not established but if he was indeed assassinated by a Palestinian group, this could be another indicator of dissent among the Palestinian armed groups.

### **Military Intelligence (*Astkhbarat Al-Ashkarim*)**

A smaller intelligence body of 500-600 men, is headed by Mussa Arafat, Yasser Arafat's nephew. The Military Intelligence is a preventive apparatus, which deals mainly with arrests and interrogations of opposition activists who might endanger the stability of the regime. This body also investigates some of the illegal actions carried out by other intelligence and security bodies. The Military Intelligence is also involved in intelligence gathering in and on Israel. In addition, it arbitrates in the occasional feuds between the different security forces.

Unlike Gaza Preventive Security Service chief Mohammed Dahlan, who used to be a Fateh leader, or Palestinian Intelligence chief Amin al-Hindi, who earned his reputation as a PLO fighter, Mussa Arafat has very little popular support. His power is mainly derived from his special relationship with Yasser Arafat. On several occasions his unit was involved in fighting, ending up with casualties, with other Palestinian armed bodies. In 1998, Mussa Arafat's men raided the Tanzim office in Ramallah, accidentally killing one Tanzim activist.

In other incidents, they fired at the Chairman of the Tanzim in the West Bank, Marwan Barghouti, and few of his associates, thus causing great tension with the local population. In July 2001, the Military Intelligence was involved in armed clashes with members of Hamas and the Palestinian Popular Resistance Committees following the arrests of some of the Committees' men.

### **Military Police**

This is a subordinate body to the Military Intelligence which specializes in riot control, arrests, protection of VIPs and important installations, maintenance of prisons and enforcement of order and discipline among the security bodies. The military police is the PA's ceremonial force and Arafat's guard of honor upon his arrival and departure from Gaza.

### **Special Security Force (*Amn Al-Khatz*) (SSF)**

The Special Security Force was established in January 1995 and works under Arafat's direct supervision. Its official objective is to gather information about the activities of opposition groups in foreign countries, especially Arab ones, but its actual function is to spy on the PA's other security services. The SSF supplies Arafat with information about cases of corruption and illegal actions of PA officials. It is the smallest of the organizations, numbering several dozen, and headed by Muhammad Natur who is very close to Arafat.

### **Coast Guard (*Shurta Bahariyya*)**

The official objective of the Coast Guard is the protection of the PA's territorial water mainly against arms and drug smugglers from Egypt. It owns 13 motorboats equipped with machine guns. Most of the members are foreign recruits who used to belong to the Fateh naval unit abroad. They are trained in diving and underwater sabotage. The unit is deployed mainly in Gaza and consists of about 600 men in Gaza and 400 in the West Bank. What is the use of hundreds of seamen in the West Bank which has no access to the sea? Upon their arrival to the PA areas, the soldiers of the Coast Guard, who had received special commando training in Egypt, made the unit highly valuable and able to deal with dangerous challenges. As an elite unit, the Coast Guard in the West Bank is responsible for the protection of prisons and other important installations. The Gaza branch of the Coastal Guard is commanded by Fathi Ghas'm and the West Bank component is commanded by Abu-Zaki.

### **Aerial Police (*Shurta Al-Joya*)**

The aerial police is a rudimentary aerial unit based on "Force 14", Fateh's aviation unit, responsible for operating and maintaining the PA's five helicopters, used mainly for Arafat's and other VIP's transportation. The unit numbers several dozen and is commanded by Shukri Tabet. In addition, there are some 200 Palestinians who have reportedly undergone training in Arab militaries as fighter and helicopter pilots. However, only a small fraction of them, are young and fit enough to serve as pilots in a Palestinian air force. The only airfield in the PA is at Dahaniya in the Gaza Strip.

### **Civil Defense (*Al-Dafah Al-Madani*)**

Consisting of the fire department and rescue services, the Civil Defense coordinates these and other civilian services during emergencies. In normal times, the body administers a massive program of first aid and rescue training for the civilian population. This unit, numbering approximately 2,000 men, has its own ambulances and rescue vehicles and is commanded by General Mahmud Abu-Marzuk.

### **County Guard (*Amn Al-Makhapta*)**

The county guard is a small force which supplies security services to the county governors and their offices. It engages in summoning people for questioning, resolving local quarrels and enforcing decisions of the Palestinian courts of arbitration.

### **Command and Control**

The most prominent feature of the Palestinian security forces is the proliferation and amorphousness of the aforementioned units, which makes a precise definition of their different responsibilities nearly impossible. There are, for example, seven different bodies dealing in various capacities with intelligence and counter-insurgency operations. The abundance of intelligence units has dual reasoning. First, it represents Arafat's emphasis on the survival of his regime through counter-insurgency operations in an attempt to weaken the militant opposition as much as possible. The opposition movements, Hamas and Islamic Jihad, must be under permanent surveillance in order to diminish the political threat which they pose. Second, the intelligence bodies are mostly plainclothed apparatuses employing agents who look and dress like regular civilians. This can allow the PA to inflate the number of security personnel to a large extent without violating the quotas prescribed in the Oslo and Cairo agreements.

With so many security bodies no wonder that their jurisdictions overlap each other often causing street clashes, confusion and inefficient work. In more extreme cases confusion may lead to harsh results when one security branch ends up battling with a competing one over blurred jurisdictions. Coordinating the services to prevent such unfortunate events is complicated because Arafat, practicing the strategy of "divide and rule", has built his forces in such a manner that only he could arbitrate between them.

Another factor creating command and control problems is the separation of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. The geographical barriers prevent Palestinian commanders from moving freely between Gaza and the West Bank and exercising their command over their troops in both areas. As a result, each one of the apparatuses has two branches independent of each other: one in the West Bank and the other in the Gaza Strip. The regional commanders work directly under Arafat without any intermediate level of command. This results in friction between West Bank commanders and their Gaza colleagues over funding, prestige and political influence.

Unlike most militaries, the PA security forces do not work under the supervision of a general-staff-like body. There are two umbrella organizations to coordinate the work of the different services but their authorities are limited. First is the General Directorate of Palestinian Security Services, established in May 1994, which is responsible for the logistic coordination and maintenance of the Palestinian security bodies and services. The supreme commander of all the security and intelligence apparatuses is the Chairman of the PA, Yasser Arafat. Under

him, General Nasr Yusef, a former PLA general, serves as the chief-of-staff. His responsibility is to coordinate nine administrative departments responsible for training, logistics, communication, finance and political guidance. Nevertheless, the Directorate has no operational jurisdiction and no authority to interfere with the activities of the different services.

Another body that has become increasingly influential since the outbreak of the *intifada* is the Palestinian High Security Council chaired by Arafat and comprising all the PA security organs. The council is the PA's highest body of national security decision making but it serves mainly to demonstrate national solidarity and to convey a false image of cooperation between the various services.

## Weapons

One of the key principles of the Israeli-Palestinian agreement was the Palestinian right to bear arms in order to ensure its security as well as the security of Israelis. To do so, the Israeli agreement allowed the PA forces to hold 15,000 rifles and pistols and another 240 machine guns of 0.3" or 0.5" caliber. This number was later doubled. The agreement did not prescribe the number of weapons each one of the apparatuses would be allowed to have but determined that only authorized members of the Palestinian Police would be allowed to carry them.

Except for the arms, ammunition and equipment of the Palestinian Police described in the agreement, no organization or individual in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank area is allowed to manufacture, sell, acquire, possess, import or otherwise introduce into the Palestinian controlled territories any firearms, ammunition, weapons, explosives, gunpowder or any related equipment.

The PA has been violating the above provisions almost since its establishment. It is hard to determine precisely the number of weapons in the PA, but it is estimated to be more than four times the allowed number. Tens of thousands of illegal weapons are in the hands of members of the security forces as well as in the hands of unauthorized civilian members of the Tanzim, Hamas, Islamic Jihad and other political groups and criminal groups. Severe discrepancies also exist between the types of light weapons allowed by the agreement and the weapons that the PA is actually stocking. The Palestinians have obtained anti-armor missiles such as LAW and AT-3 Sagger, M203 grenade launchers, rocket propelled grenades, mortars of various calibers, 107mm katyusha rockets, land mines, hand grenades, shoulder launched anti-aircraft missiles and truck mounted anti-aircraft guns.<sup>9</sup> As of this writing, with the exception of the katyushas, the anti-armor missiles and the anti-aircraft weapons, the Palestinians have made use of all the above weapons during the second *intifada*.

The general assessment is that the PA is involved in a massive effort to amass stocks of illegal weapons and ammunition to enable it to have an extended fighting capability.

The accumulation of weapons is carried out mainly by smuggling them into the PA through the Dead Sea and into the West Bank, or through the Mediterranean Sea into the Gaza Strip.<sup>10</sup> On January 29, 2001 the Israeli security forces found on the beach near Ashkelon sealed barrels containing dozens of rocket propelled grenade launchers and hundreds of grenades and mortar shells. The barrels were part of a larger cargo, directed to Gaza, that was discharged by a smugglers' ship from Lebanon. On May 7, 2001, the Israeli Navy managed to capture a fishing boat off the coast of Haifa with a large quantity of arms and ammunition bound for the forces in the Gaza Strip. The cargo included rocket-propelled grenades, mortars, 50 katyusha rockets, mines, grenades and shoulder launched anti-aircraft missiles. This arsenal was sent to

the PA by Ahmed Jibril's Lebanese based Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC). It has been established that several similar shipments made it through to the PA and the weapons are in the hands of various armed groups, including the official security services.<sup>11</sup>

Another channel of smuggling is from Egypt by means of secret underground tunnels, which connect Egypt to Rafah in the Gaza Strip. Despite the IDF's extensive efforts to locate and destroy these tunnels, all of them dug underneath the Israeli controlled borderline, the underground channels are still very active.<sup>12</sup>

The border with Jordan is also a place for weapons transfers. Israel thwarted several Palestinian efforts to smuggle weapons and ammunition through the Dead Sea and the Jordan River. It is hard to assess, though, the extent of weapons that successfully filtered through the porous border. In addition, there are continuous efforts to break into Israeli military installations and steal valuable weapons. Some of these efforts were very fruitful, and dozens of anti-tank missiles as well as machine guns, rifles and ammunition were transferred into Palestinian hands. In February 1997, for example, a former IDF scout was arrested for stealing a military patrol vehicle loaded with weapons and ammunition. In the investigation he admitted that the weapons were ordered by the PA through a Palestinian who served as a connection with the suspect. Israeli arms dealers and other criminals have an important role in assisting the Palestinian procurement efforts. Some of the weapons are smuggled into the PA through regular commercial import channels. Weapons hidden in trucks and containers escape the eyes of Israeli customs inspectors and are then transferred directly to the PA.<sup>13</sup>

### **Indigenous Arms Production**

The PA is prohibited from manufacturing weapons and ammunition both domestically and outside its borders. Furthermore, it should prevent weapon production by terror organizations such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad. In the first four years of its operation, there was no evidence that the PA was involved in arms production. There were, however, several attempts by Hamas members to build workshops and laboratories to produce bombs and grenades. But due to fruitful Palestinian-Israeli security cooperation, these attempts were thwarted. In one case, the PA raided a grenade factory that produced more than 6,000 grenades, but the ammunition was kept by the PA and never handed to Israel as agreed.

In 1997, there was a change in the PA's policy regarding indigenous weapons production. In May 1998, the Palestinian Legislative Council completed the legislation of the Firearms and Ammunition Law, a law that enables the production of weapons and ammunition in the Palestinian controlled territories, thus laying the foundation for an indigenous defense industry capable of producing light arms and ammunition. And indeed, such factories have been established, working under the scientific committee of the Fateh movement and adding to the PA's arsenal large quantity of light ammunition.

On January 30, 2001, the Palestinians fired, for the first time, mortar shells on an Israeli target. Since then, mortar fire on Israeli settlements has become almost a daily routine. Whereas in the beginning it was thought that the PA is using smuggled mortar shells, by mid-May, the Israeli General Security Services uncovered a network of Palestinian operatives who were involved in the manufacturing of mortar rounds in Gaza. Senior ranking officers of the Palestinian Police were involved in the production of thousands of shells in various calibers. A similar operation was initiated by the Preventive Security Service, headed by Muhammad

Dahlan. Preventive Security agents were asked to produce 120mm aluminum mortar shells which could provide Palestinian artillery with extended range.<sup>14</sup>

As of this writing, it appears that most of the activities of weapons production take place in Gaza City and Khan Yunis. The IDF destroyed several weapons factories but it is almost certain that the attempts to establish a clandestine arms industry would continue. The PA sees indigenous arms production as a necessity since this is the only way to ensure the supply of weapons and ammunitions to its forces.

## Training

According to the Oslo Agreements, Palestinians joining the security forces should be trained as policemen, not as combat soldiers. To do that, the PA received assistance from several countries including Britain, Austria, the Netherlands, Egypt and the Scandinavian nations. The CIA also had an important part in the training of the various services hoping that such training would facilitate the PA's war against terrorism. Palestinian intelligence agents received training by CIA instructors both in the Palestinian controlled territories as well as in the United States. The CIA training focused on advanced surveillance and photography methods, sniper training and advanced VIP protection techniques. The CIA also provided the PA with listening devices and computer programs capable of scanning large numbers of radio frequencies. With such radio scanners, the Palestinian forces can listen in on IDF radio communication.<sup>15</sup> The funding of the donor countries enabled the PA to establish training bases in the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip. Until the outbreak of the *intifada*, training courses for new recruits were conducted regularly and according to an annual training program. But since each one of the security services recruits and trains its own men, there has been little coordination or information exchange between the services on how to improve the quality of training. The Palestinian security forces still lack the resources for extensive training program. As a result, basic training is usually insufficient and runs from 10 days to one month of intensive courses. For more elite units like Force 17, the training is three months.<sup>16</sup> The daily contact with the IDF, when cooperation still existed, also had a positive influence on the quality of the Palestinian forces. Although Israel was never directly involved in the training and instruction of Palestinian forces, it was only natural that the Palestinian Police, by simply operating alongside a well equipped standing army like the IDF, emulated and adopted many of the drills and techniques performed by the Israelis.

Since 1998, there has been a change in the training routines of the PA. The services began to adopt training programs with gradually stronger military orientation rather than focusing exclusively on police work. Palestinian company and battalion commanders were sent to undergo training in Egypt, Yemen, Algeria and Pakistan as commanders of combat units. Many of those who were previously qualified to function exclusively as law enforcers can now think, plan and function as professional soldiers. In addition, the size of the formations trained by the PA has also grown. In 1998, the training of Palestinian security forces was limited to small-sized units such as platoons and companies, but since the beginning of 2000, when it became apparent that crisis was imminent, the PA started training battalion-sized formations. In 2000 alone, until the outbreak of the *intifada*, the NSF conducted six battalion exercises. The training focused on various combat scenarios including urban warfare, gaining control of an area of land, mock attacks on IDF posts and Jewish settlements, and use of mechanized forces.<sup>17</sup>

## II. The Palestinian Security Forces and the Second *Intifada*

The second *intifada* which enters its second year as these lines are being written, is the most serious confrontation between Israel and the Palestinians since the 1982 war in Lebanon. In one year of low-intensity fighting, more than 600 Palestinians have been killed and more than 10,000 have been wounded. On the Israeli side, more than 175 people have been killed and more than 1,700 people have been wounded. Both sides have suffered a serious setback to their economy and national morale. The *intifada* has been identified, among other things, by the rise of Tanzim as the leading organization in the popular struggle against Israel. Tanzim's high popularity and visibility has eroded the status of the security services as the PA's primary instrument of force. An interesting dynamic has, therefore, developed between the two bodies, each trying to prove its irreducible contribution to the Palestinian armed struggle for independence.

Tanzim is not a newcomer in the Palestinian arena. During the seven years of the first *intifada*, most armed operations against Israel were carried out by the Fateh Hawks, which used to be the military wing of the Fateh movement. With the signing of the Oslo agreements and renunciation of the violent struggle, the Fateh Hawks organization was abolished. But despite the proliferation of uniformed security bodies since 1994, Arafat insisted on maintaining a militia that would not be part of the formal administration of the PA. He therefore approved and funded a successor body known as Tanzim. It was comprised of small cadres of armed activists operating throughout the West Bank and to a lesser extent in the Gaza Strip during the years of the peace process. Their primary occupation was to control the opposition to Arafat in the PA and to be his independent arm to lead popular action against Israel, in case the need for such action arose.

In the May 2000 Nakba Riots, Tanzim activists were in the forefront of the demonstrations and were those who generated most of the fire against the IDF. Despite the increasing armament of Tanzim, Israel has never acted decisively against Arafat's violation of the agreements which prohibited the formation of any armed body outside the official security forces. With the outbreak of the second *intifada*, Tanzim, under the leadership of Marwan Barghouti, immediately assumed the leadership over the Palestinian masses.

The precise size of Tanzim is not known. Estimates range between 10,000 and 40,000 members. These members are mostly Fateh supporters who were either not recruited to the PA security services or students and unemployed Palestinians. Many of the activists are graduates of the first *intifada* and some have been imprisoned in Israel. Most members have undergone training in PA sponsored training camps in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

Tanzim's influence is not uniform across the PA territory. The organization is specifically influential in Ramallah and Nablus, less so in cities like Bethlehem and Jenin. The Gaza Strip branch of Tanzim is characterized by a higher percentage of employees of the security services who work during the day as intelligence agents or police officers and when off duty, as Tanzim activists. As a result, many of the Tanzim weapons used in attacks against Israel are, in fact, those weapons that Israel had supplied the PA as part of the Oslo agreement.

In the first few weeks of the fighting, the performance of the Palestinian security forces was rather poor. The violent demonstrations were part of the PA's strategy to present the crisis with Israel as a genuine act of disillusionment and rage by the Palestinian people. Arafat, therefore, refrained from ordering his security forces to act against his people's display of anger. Not only did the PA forces not attempt to restore order, they became increasingly involved in the fighting, though only on an individual basis. Palestinian policemen exchanged fire with IDF troops in numerous occasions but overall displayed a low level of military

competence. They generated a great deal of sporadic, inaccurate fire with very little results. Contrary to the riots in September 1996, when the PA forces succeeded in killing 14 Israeli soldiers in two days, in the first two weeks of the second *intifada*, not one Israeli soldier was killed in combat with the Palestinian police. In the entire year of the second *intifada*, fewer than 50 Israeli soldiers have been killed and only 20 of them in direct combat. The rest were victims of bombing and lynching. By any military standards, this toll is minimal considering the intensity and duration of the fighting. It reflects more than anything the superb military readiness of the IDF units but no less a poor military competence of the Palestinian side. The Palestinian security forces have also surprised the IDF by using none of the special weapons – such as anti-tank and anti-aircraft weapons – in their possession, and by failing to execute any military operation against Israel beyond the level of a squad.<sup>18</sup>

The poor performance of the PA security forces as demonstrated in the first year of the *intifada* may bring many observers to underestimate the PA military units. But one should not be misled. Throughout the *intifada*, the spearhead of the PA military forces and the most suitable armed body to conduct conventional warfare against the IDF, the NSF, was not allowed to participate in the fighting. This was mainly due to Arafat's desire to maintain the popular image of the *intifada* rather than presenting it as a war between two conventional armed forces.

But the decision to spare the NSF from the fray created resentment in the Palestinian public. Many Palestinians, especially members of the Fateh, complained about the minimal contribution of the NSF to the fighting.<sup>19</sup> The criticism created tension within the ranks of the NSF, between those who call for more active participation in the fighting and those who believe that the NSF should be excluded from the fighting unless the PA and Israel become involved in a full-scale war. Despite the pressure for activism and the condemnation by Tanzim, many NSF officers, especially the veterans of the 1982 war in Lebanon, are not eager to join the fighting. They are aware of the IDF's real power and know that the NSF is likely to be destroyed if used against Israel prematurely.<sup>20</sup>

Nevertheless, with the escalation of the fighting and the apparent demise of the peace process, pressure grew on the security forces to take a more active role in the fighting. Arafat needed a mechanism that would allow members of the security forces to serve the Palestinian cause without giving up the seemingly popular nature of the *intifada*. He also realized that such a mechanism is needed to alleviate the frustration and resentment among his soldiers. Such a mechanism was established in October 2000 in the shape of a new organ called the al-Aqsa Martyr Brigades. This organization is, in essence, a cluster of unaffiliated armed gangs, several hundreds in force, which operate mainly in the refugee camps of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. It allows members of the security forces to take part in the execution of terror attacks without incriminating their uniformed forces. And indeed, hundreds of NSF, PSF, General Intelligence, the Civil Police and Force 17 are active participants in the brigades. In fact, the commander of Force 17 in the West Bank, Mahmud Damara, is known to be one of the senior commanders of the al-Aqsa Martyr Brigades. As the *intifada* proceeds, the organization's power in the West Bank is increasing and it aspires to become the official armed branch of the Fateh movement. Its ideology is uncompromising; it opposes the peace process and it is committed to an unlimited armed struggle with Israel. The al-Aqsa Martyrs have been responsible for hundreds of terror attacks since October 2000, including ambushes, drive-by shootings, mortar firing, and bombings.<sup>21</sup>

The fighters of the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades also serve as a link between the PA security forces and the opposition movements Hamas and Islamic Jihad, allowing the PA deniability when accused of supporting those terrorist groups. With the establishment of the Martyr

Brigades, the Palestinian military establishment has become even more complex than it used to be. Even Palestinians closely associated with Arafat's close circle cannot understand the chain of command and system of affiliations and allegiances that exists inside the PA's security establishment. Many of the Palestinians involved in the *intifada* have double or even triple affiliations. Member of Force 17, for example, could also become associated with Tanzim and at the same time carry out operations on behalf of the al-Aqsa Martyrs. As the popularity of the popular militias is growing, many members of the uniformed bodies cross the lines and join the militias bringing with them their weapons and expertise. Today, thousands of the employees of the Palestinian security forces, especially in the Gaza Strip, are also militiamen. The main reason they still keep their allegiance to their uniformed jobs is financial. The security forces are among the few sectors in the Palestinian government establishment that are still being paid regularly. As long as Arafat can deliver pay checks to his troops, the loyalty of the uniformed bodies is guaranteed. But economic collapse of the PA and inability to pay salaries to the public sector may lead to a subsequent collapse of the security forces and mass desertion into the embracing hands of the opposition movements.

### **Effect on Training and Combat Readiness**

The *intifada* had mixed impact on the training and quality of the Palestinian forces. On the one hand, it had a detrimental effect on the ability to conduct regular training, recruit new members and maintain high level of readiness. Most of the PA's training infrastructure has been destroyed by IDF missiles including the newest training facility of the PSF near Ramallah and the Civil Police in Gaza. IDF operations have also taken a heavy toll on maintenance and logistics. Consequently, the PA logistic support of its units has significantly deteriorated since the outbreak of the *intifada*. Many of the vehicles used by the PA forces have been destroyed in IDF attacks and those that survived suffer from shortage of spare parts, technicians and fuel to keep them in operational shape. Palestinian weapons, radio equipment and machinery are also badly maintained with great implications on the effectiveness of the forces.

The Palestinians are also facing an ammunition shortage. While during the first weeks of the *intifada* there had been a massive use of firearms, including automatic fire at demonstrations and funerals, Palestinian guerrillas have become increasingly aware of the fact that ammunition is a finite resource. The leadership of the *intifada* has called several times for a more economic use of ammunition and the need to preserve resources for a prolonged struggle. As mentioned before, there are great efforts to replenish the ammunition stocks by smuggling ammunition from outside sources. The most important way of ensuring weapons inflow is by maintaining a set of underground tunnels passing underneath the road passing along the border-fence in the southern area of the Gaza Strip, in the area which separates Palestinian Rafah and Egyptian Rafah. According to Israeli sources, there are approximately 20 active tunnels and the PA is waging an ongoing battle along the borderline in order to secure the inflow of weapons and prevent IDF patrols from thwarting their smuggling operations. To protect their lifeline, the Palestinians generate heavy fire on IDF armored vehicles patrolling near the city of Rafah. As a result, on average, 50% of the total daily number of shooting attacks and roadside bombs in the territories occur in this area.<sup>22</sup>

Despite the erosion in Palestinian military power, in some areas the *intifada* had a positive effect on the PA's military readiness. It enabled many Palestinian servicemen to improve their combat skills by participating in gunfire battles against the IDF. Palestinian troops had an opportunity to use their weapons on live targets including against heavy equipment such as

IDF tanks and armored personnel carriers. The fighting enabled them to test some of their capabilities and to draw important tactical lessons. The experience that has been accumulated is useful for the training of future Palestinian recruits. It is important to note, though, that only a small part of the Palestinian soldiers gained such combat experience. The majority of the troops, especially those affiliated with the NSF, have been deprived of training for more than a year and their combat readiness is likely to have been degraded.

### III. Future Scenarios

#### 1. Prolonged Low Intensity Conflict

According to this scenario Israel and the PA continue to engage in a low intensity fighting for an unlimited period of time or until the two sides rescind violence and return to peaceful negotiations. In the months since Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's unilateral cease-fire, declared in May 2001 and followed by the CIA brokered cease-fire agreement, there have been on average 15-30 Palestinian armed attacks each day. The attacks included ambushes, bombings, drive-by shootings, grenade throwing, and stabbing. Approximately 45% of these attacks were carried out by members of Tanzim, al-Aqsa Martyr Brigades, the Palestinian Popular Resistance Committees and members of the PA security forces. The rest were carried out by Hamas and Islamic Jihad, but many of these were assisted, sponsored or joined by PA-related elements. Most of the attacks in the future are likely to be carried out in the West Bank and Gaza Strip territories and directed mainly at Jewish settlers in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and IDF troops in these areas.

Palestinian strategy according to this scenario would be to generate a high level of Jewish casualties over a long period of time, and to create a sense of insecurity among Israeli civilians both in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, as well as in Israel itself. The Palestinians would hope to make Jewish life in the West Bank and Gaza Strip intolerable and economically unfavorable and this might lead to voluntary departure of disillusioned settlers and weakening of the Israeli will to continue the occupation.

Israel, on its side, is likely to continue its operations against individuals and groups involved in terror attacks through the policy of targeted killing of Palestinian military activists suspected of planning and executing terror attacks. Israel's military strategy would be to contain the violence, prevent terror attacks in Israel itself, increase the economic pressure on the PA and degrade the military capabilities of the various organizations. This means that Israel would continue to target Palestinian weapons factories, training bases, headquarters and offices of the various bodies and Palestinian posts from which fire was originated. In addition, Israel would continue to resist arms smuggling into the West Bank and Gaza Strip both via land and sea.

Continuation of the existing situation has several implications on the PA military. The erosion in the military effectiveness of the PA formal security bodies due to Israel's attacks on training bases, headquarters, individuals and other installations is likely to continue. With no operative training bases, and logistic support the military bodies, especially the NSF, are deprived of proper training and their new recruits cannot reach the minimal standards of military professionalism.

Furthermore, prolonged *intifada* would continue to take its economic toll on the PA. Under economic adversity the PA compensation to its security operatives is likely to decline, a fact that would increase the incentive of many members of the security forces to offer their services to terrorist groups and rough militias.

In sum, a prolonged *intifada* could have disastrous effects on the structure, organization, discipline, and readiness of the Palestinian security forces. The police and paramilitary units are not likely to maintain the level of military effectiveness they had before the *intifada* and the Palestinian military establishment's equipment and expertise will gradually shift into the hands of a group of warlords, gangs and local militias.

## 2. Full-Scale Confrontation

Continuous escalation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict due to an increase in the terrorist activity within Israel might lead to an Israeli decision to use overwhelming force against the PA with the intention of destroying its military infrastructure. Such decision is essentially tantamount to an Israeli declaration of war on the PA. In such a scenario, it is likely that the IDF would use air and artillery forces followed by entry into the Palestinian controlled territories with armored and infantry units. It is also likely that any Israeli operation would be extensive in scope and would aim to reach a rapid military decision before the international community intervenes. Clearly under this scenario, the PA would put to action every military capability at its disposal. This includes the use of anti-tank and anti-aircraft weapons, mortars and rockets.

The crucial component of the PA's preparation for a major showdown with Israel is the ability to inflict psychological and material damage to the Israeli home front. The most effective way to do so would be by means of deployment of many long-range weapons such as mortars, rockets and low trajectory artillery weapons. The proximity to Israel's population centers would enable the Palestinians with primitive artillery pieces to cover major Israeli cities such as Jerusalem, Netanya, Hadera, Kfar Sava, Modi'in, Rosh Ha'ayin and Ashkelon. In addition, Palestinian artillery could reach strategic targets, such as critical road junctions, oil and gas farms, communication installations, power stations, industrial complexes, IDF bases and headquarters, government buildings, cultural centers and most importantly, Israel's seaports and airports. Palestinian known artillery capabilities include low caliber weapons such as 60mm, 90mm and 120mm mortars up to a range of six miles and 107mm katyusha rockets up to a range of five miles.

As part of their preparations for a wider conflict with the IDF, the PA might import heavier weapons such as 122mm and 130mm towed guns, 122mm katyusha rocket launchers, and 120mm and 160mm heavy mortars. All of these weapons are easily obtained and cheaply maintained. Acquisition of 122mm katyusha rockets similar to those used by Hizbullah in Lebanon could extend Palestinian artillery range up to 13 miles, enough to reach most strategic targets within Israel.

## Non-Conventional Weapons

Due to their tactical inferiority, the Palestinians realize that they are likely to fare poorly in an all out one-on-one confrontation with Israel. In order to defend themselves against Israeli aggression, the Palestinians are likely to adopt a defensive doctrine the main pillar of which would be the emphasis on deterrence capability *vis-à-vis* Israel. In their search for means of deterrence against Israel, the PA could resort to the acquisition and introduction of non-conventional capabilities.

The thought of the use of non-conventional weapons by the PA or other Palestinian elements is unsettling but should not be dismissed. There are several technological, political and psychological explanations as to why the PA might want to opt for acquiring weapons of

mass destruction, among them are the cheap cost of such weapons and the sense of prestige and security they grant to the owner.<sup>23</sup> And indeed, in the tenth month of the *intifada*, Palestinian media began to call for serious consideration of the deployment and perhaps use of chemical and biological weapons.

The general atmosphere in the PA is that if attacked by Israel, the Palestinian people would be called to fight for their survival using all available means. It is clear that without international intervention, the PA would not be able to deter Israel from launching a massive attack with the aim of destroying the PA. If such attack occurs, the only meaningful deterrent the PA could have is the ability to threaten the vulnerable Israeli home front in a similar way that Saddam Hussein exploited this vulnerability during the 1991 Gulf War.

Many Palestinians believe that biological and chemical weapons are a legitimate and desirable means in the struggle against Israel, especially since Israel itself is known to have non-conventional weapons in its arsenal. Furthermore, in order to tarnish Israel's image, Palestinian spokesmen and media have published false claims of Israel's alleged use of non-conventional weapons against the defenseless Palestinian population. They have blamed Israel for using shells containing depleted uranium, dispensing poisonous chocolate sweets in the Gaza Strip, employing "Black Gas" that causes nausea, and shelling the Palestinians with cans of paint containing poison. Israel has been blamed for spreading foot and mouth disease in PA territory, and Arafat's wife, Suha, claimed during a visit by Hillary Clinton, that Israel poisons Palestinian wells. Ludicrous as they are, these allegations are widely believed, and they help create legitimacy in the eyes of the Palestinian public for the introduction and perhaps the use of non-conventional weapons.

To achieve non-conventional capability, the PA could either acquire munitions carrying chemical weapons or alternatively use chemical or biological agents delivered by suicide bombers. Artillery shells and 122mm rockets armed with chemical warheads have already been developed and are being produced by Arab countries like Syria, Iran and Iraq. This ammunition is easily transferred and could be smuggled into the PA via sea or air, but the PA does not have the necessary artillery to deliver it. The long-range weapons that are already known to be in the hands of the PA, namely light mortars and rocket launchers could potentially be used to fire artillery shells carrying chemical and agents but their payload is so small that the damage they could inflict would be negligent.

A more promising delivery device would be the use of suicide bombers armed with non-conventional material. "A few bombs or death-carrying devices will be enough, once they are deployed in secluded areas and directed at the Israeli water resources or the Israeli beaches, let alone the markets and the residential centers," suggested a Palestinian newspaper.

[This will be carried out] without explosions, noise, blood, or pictures that are used to serve the Israeli propaganda. Anyone who is capable, with complete self-control, of turning his body into shrapnel and scattered organs, is also capable of carrying a small device that cannot be traced and throw it in the targeted location.<sup>24</sup>

This proposition should not be treated lightly. Though the experience of terrorism by means of weapons of mass destruction has been very limited, the taboo of using such weapons was broken by the Japanese cult *Aum Shinrikyo* in 1990 when its members planned to spray botulinum toxin in the streets of Tokyo. Three years later, a failed plan to use anthrax in residential areas was discovered. The cult intended to kill thousands of people by using chemical weapons in Tokyo's subway system and in at least one case, in 1995, succeeded in causing panic and casualties. Since the September 11<sup>th</sup> terror attacks on the Pentagon and the

World Trade Center, several plots by terror organizations to conduct mass killing by means of chemical and biological weapons have been uncovered.

Israel's small size, its dependency on few fresh water sources, its dense population, its porous borders and the increasing number of Palestinians willing to sacrifice their lives in suicide missions, are factors which make it more vulnerable to attacks of the nature discussed above than other countries. It is hard to determine precisely how real and immediate the threat of Palestinian use of non-conventional weapons is. Clearly the motivation for such an option, at least among fringe groups, exists, and the means to do that are at their disposal. Naturally, the position of the Palestinian leadership on the subject is elusive. But an escalation of the *intifada* may put this leadership in a direct existential threat which may make the idea of doomsday weaponry very compelling.

Israel, for its part, should be aware of the strategic as well as psychological implications of the threat to use, or the actual use, of such weapons by the PA or any of the terrorist groups under its umbrella. An Israeli perception that such capabilities exist in the hands of a Palestinian opponent may increase the degree of nervousness in the public and force the government to adopt harsh measures against the PA.

### 3. Regional War

The outbreak of a regional war in the Middle East is the most unsettling scenario which could develop from a long period of gradual escalation in the military relations between Israel and the Palestinians and a stalemate in the diplomatic efforts to end the violence. In the summer of 2001, the annual strategic assessment of the IDF General Staff presented a possible scenario in which the *intifada* escalates to a point which leaves members of the Arab world little choice but to become actively involved in hostilities against Israel. Such deterioration could occur either as a result of a Palestinian or a Syrian-Iranian-Lebanese catalyst. Continuous provocations by Hizbullah along Israel's northern border could lead to harsh IDF retaliation against Syrian targets. This could, in turn, invite further escalation by dragging additional regional actors into the cycle of violence. Israel, as a result, could find itself fighting a war in two or three fronts against an unpredictable combination of Arab militaries. In addition to the automatic participation of Syria, Lebanon and Hizbullah, it is likely that other Muslim countries such as Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Libya and Algeria could also join the fray. The response of Jordan and Egypt is unpredictable since they are bound by peace agreements with Israel as well as other international commitments. But any assertion that these countries are no more potential adversaries is misplaced.

Whereas this scenario is clearly most unfavorable for Israel, many Palestinians believe that regional war is the only way to break the political-military deadlock in which they are caught. They believe that a regional crisis involving several Arab countries would be the only way to balance Israel's military superiority and to exert international pressure on it by using the "oil weapon".

One way to ensure Arab intervention in case Israel launches an attack against the PA would be to enter into defense treaties with fellow Arab countries. By doing so, the Palestinians would send a message to Israel that a military attack on Palestine, if and when a Palestinian state would be founded, would automatically invite intervention by other militaries. Knowing that an attack on Palestine would result in a regional confrontation could well deter Israel from using force against its weak Palestinian neighbor.

An Arab-Israeli war could also include the use of ballistic missiles against urban population centers in Israel. This means that the Israeli home front would be under constant attacks and would be unable to effectively support the war effort as it did in previous wars. This is especially problematic since the IDF depends on the rapid mobilization of its reserve units.

To contain an attack from Israel's eastern border, Israel would be required to establish a strong line of defense in the Jordan River Valley and the mountain ranges overlooking the Valley. This means that the IDF would have to move armored formations across Israel and deploy them in defensive positions along the Jordanian border.

Palestine's main contribution to the coalition effort would be the disruption of the IDF's mobilization system by creating chaos and confusion in Israel. Since the backbone of the IDF is its reserve units, the speed of their call up, their travel to their bases and from there to their fighting positions carries strategic importance, especially in the event scenario of a surprise attack. Israel's miniscule size, its over reliance on reserve forces, its congested traffic and the IDF's heavy reliance on a limited number of transportation routes, many of them running in mountainous terrain, could be an Achilles heel easily exploited by the Palestinians. The Palestinians' greatest impact on the Israeli deployment could be felt in routes connecting Israel's major population centers along the coastal plain with the security strip along the Jordan River Valley. The emergence of a threat from the east would force the IDF to send armored reserve formations to the eastern border. These units would have to force their way through Judea and Samaria's narrow corridors and could be easily subjected to the Palestinian Army's direct fire.

The involvement of the Israeli Arabs in the Palestinian uprising, resulting in the death of 13 Arab demonstrators, has shown that their allegiance to Israel in the event of a regional war is not guaranteed. Many towns and villages inhabited by Arab-Israelis are located along strategic routes of transportation connecting Israel's coastal plain with the Galilee, the Golan and the Jordan River Valley. The participation of Israeli Arabs in the Palestinian efforts to disrupt IDF units from moving to the front is a disturbing thought that deserves to be treated with great care.

Nevertheless, regardless of the disturbances, the IDF is likely to apply enough air cover to allow reinforcements to eventually reach the front line early enough to confront enemy forces crossing the Jordan River, but these reinforcements would most likely arrive at the front after experiencing considerable delays and fighting.

Another scenario, suggested by several military experts, describes Palestinian incursions into Israel's rear in the event of an all-out confrontation between Israel and the PA. Lightly armed Palestinian forces could cross the porous border either by foot or by trucks and attack critical strategic locations in Israel. They could disrupt the mobilization of Israeli reservists, attack from the rear IDF units deployed along the Jordan River Valley, attack airforce bases with shoulder launched anti-aircraft missiles, attack settlements and create panic and havoc in Israel population centers. Palestinian soldiers could also successfully infiltrate deep into Israel attacking IDF headquarters, electronic media installations, public figures and government buildings.<sup>25</sup>

Such attacks by Palestinian infantry are likely to face highly alert IDF and border police units that would probably decimate them in most cases well before they reach their destination. But even few successful penetrations into Israeli territory could cause significant operational as well as psychological damage. Furthermore, it is likely that a Palestinian attack would take place in conjunction with simultaneous attacks by other Arab militaries. In such a case, the

IDF's attention and resources would be divided among several fronts and its ability to contain minor incursions by Palestinian commandos is likely to be weakened.

## **Conclusion**

In light of the year-long recent turmoil in the Middle East, a great debate was sparked about the merits and the pitfalls of the Oslo Agreements. Whether Oslo was successful or not, one fact remains beyond doubt: the eight years of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process allowed the PA to lay the foundations for a viable conventional military force. Rudimentary as they are, the Palestinian security services are developed and capable enough to pose Israel with an array of new threats and challenges. The fact that this armed force is deployed no further than five miles from Ben Gurion Airport, Israel's main international airport, eleven miles from the IDF headquarters in Tel Aviv and two miles from the Knesset in Jerusalem only emphasizes the need to treat it with utmost care.

Military analysts, who measure countries' military potential mainly by counting hardware, such as platforms, weapons and formations, find the PA armed forces to be a challenge to assess. On its face, it is a poorly equipped, complex web of apparatuses which often spend more energy competing against each other than fighting against their external enemy. But the world's exacerbating war against terrorist groups in places like Iraq and Afghanistan has demonstrated that rag-tag opponents could often offset conventional military superiority by resorting to tactics of terror, guerrilla and attrition. Judged by its role in the asymmetric war of the kind Israel is facing, the Palestinian security forces, inferior as they may be, should not be treated as a negligible addition to the Arab-Israeli military balance.

A militarized Palestinian state west of the Jordan River Valley could pose significant strategic challenge to Israel. The geographical location of the West Bank and Gaza Strip makes the future Palestinian state a potential land-bridge between Israel and other Arab countries. Furthermore, through the deployment of long-range artillery, a Palestinian army could impose a threat to Israel's population centers, airfields and other strategic targets. Palestinian anti-aircraft weapons, deployed in high locations in the West Bank could severely impair Israel's domination in the sky and disturb air-traffic control. The Palestinian proximity to Israel's population centers, and main arteries of transportation enable it to hinder the IDF's reserve mobilization process, on which Israel relies in an emergency situation. Though the size and capabilities of the Palestinian military are not likely to allow it to deny IDF units access to the front, it could significantly erode the IDF's strength by forcing it to fight its way to the front line.

Therefore, either in the case of prolonged war with the PA or in the case of a conflict between Israel and an Arab coalition, the role of the armed forces of Palestine would be far more significant than their intrinsic military value. Israeli governments have understood the potential dangers posed by allowing Palestinian militarization and have taken action to stop this trend. But after a year of fighting between Israel and the PA, with Israeli towns and settlements, not to mention the city of Jerusalem, attacked by artillery fire, it became clear that the Palestinian military capabilities are far beyond what had been the intention of the architects of Oslo and that the emerging army of Palestine should receive no less attention than any other military in the region.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat*, July 29, 2001, Quoted in Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI), Special Dispatch - PA, July 30, 2001, No. 247.
- <sup>2</sup> Gal Luft, *The Palestinian Security Forces: Between Police and Army* (Washington, DC: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1998), pp. 25-28.
- <sup>3</sup> Information on PA units was adapted from discussions with US and regional military and intelligence experts as well as various open sources such as: Shlomo Brom and Yiftah Shapir eds. *The Middle East Military Balance 1999-2000* (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 2000); International Institute of Strategic Studies (IISS), *The Military Balance 2000/2001* (London: Oxford University Press, 2001); Gal Luft, *The Palestinian Security Forces: Between Police and Army* (Washington, DC: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1998); Avner Avrahami, "Structure of the Palestinian Security Apparatus", *Ha'aretz*, July 30, 2001. Figures of members and weapons are estimates and may not correlate with figures published by the media.
- <sup>4</sup> *Ha'aretz*, May 24, 2001; *Jerusalem Post*, May 24, 2001.
- <sup>5</sup> The only unclassified information about this unit was published by the Russian TV in May 1998 after the PSS had sent to Russia a request for assistance in supplying special purpose equipment for the unit. "Palestinian Special Purpose Police Want Russian Equipment", *Moscow NTV*, May 28, 1998, in FBIS-NES, June 2, 1998, p. 150.
- <sup>6</sup> For more information on Force 17 see: Reuven Paz, "Force 17: The Renewal of Old Competition Motivates Violence", *Peacewatch #316*, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, April 5, 2001; IDF Spokesperson, "Force 17 Background Material", <[www.idf.il/english/news/info\\_force17.stm](http://www.idf.il/english/news/info_force17.stm)>
- <sup>7</sup> See B'Tselem report, "Neither Law nor Justice", Report on the Palestinian Preventive Security Service, Jerusalem, August 1995. Also "Amnesty International Report 1997: Palestinian Authority" (internet edition), specifying that 1,200 people were arrested by the PSS on security grounds and 10 died in Palestinian prisons.
- <sup>8</sup> *Jerusalem Post*, September 2, 2001.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ha'aretz*, June 23, 2000.
- <sup>10</sup> An attempt to smuggle dozens of weapons via the Dead Sea was foiled by the IDF. Yoav Limor, Hanan Shlein and Uri Binder, "Weapons Were Smuggled for the Palestinian Authority", *Ma'ariv*, March 1, 1998.
- <sup>11</sup> *Jerusalem Post*, May 7, 2001; *Ha'aretz*, May 7, 2001.
- <sup>12</sup> It is estimated that there are six underground tunnels connecting the Sinai to the PA controlled Gaza Strip. Steve Rodan and Arie O'Sullivan, "PA Smuggles Arms Via Sinai Tunnels", *Jerusalem Post*, International Edition, June 6, 1998, p. 32.
- <sup>13</sup> See: Alex Fishman and Ron Leshem, "We Gave Them Guns", *Yediot Aharonot*, Weekend Supplement, February 16, 2001; Lior El-Hai, "Palestinian Intelligence Sent an Israeli to Steal Shoulder-Fired Missiles", *Yediot Aharonot*, March 25, 1998.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ha'aretz*, May 24, 2001; *Jerusalem Post*, May 24, 2001.
- <sup>15</sup> On CIA training of the PA security forces see: Arnon Regoler, "The Intelligence Pros", *Kol Hair*, November 24, 2000; *Yediot Aharonot*, February 16, 2001.
- <sup>16</sup> Interview with commander of Palestinian Police Gen. Nasser Yussef in Niel MacFarquhar, "How Palestinian Policemen Were Drawn Into the Conflict", *The New York Times*, September 29, 1996, p. 1.

- <sup>17</sup> *Ha'aretz*, July 6, 2000, July 12, 2000; News Channel 2 TV, July 11, 2000; *Yediot Aharonot*, February 16, 2001.
- <sup>18</sup> Gal Luft, "The Palestinian Military Performance and the 2000 *Intifada*", *Middle East Review of International Affairs (MERIA)*, vol. 4, no. 4, December 2000.
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- <sup>20</sup> Gal Luft, "Who is Winning in *Intifada* ?", *Commentary Magazine*, July-August 2001.
- <sup>21</sup> Roni Shaked, "Arafat's New Army", *Yediot Aharonot* Weekend Supplement, July 27, 2001.
- <sup>22</sup> Amos Harel, "Egyptian Border Police Smuggling Weaponry to PA", *Ha'aretz*, August 17, 2001.
- <sup>23</sup> Gal Luft, "The Mirage of Demilitarized Palestine", *Middle East Quarterly*, vol. VIII, no. 3, p. 57.
- <sup>24</sup> "A Palestinian Information Center: There is Serious Thinking about Obtaining Biological Weapons", *Al-Manar*, August 13, 2001, translated by and quoted in Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI), Special Dispatch-PA, August 14, 2001, No. 255.
- <sup>25</sup> Yuval Steinitz, "When the Palestinian Army Invades the Center of the Country", *Commentary Magazine*, December 1999.

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