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PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY

Head of State	Mahmoud Abbas
Head of government	Salam Fayyad (replaced Isma'il Haniyeh in June)
Death penalty	retentionist
Population	3.9 million
Life expectancy	72.9 years
Under-5 mortality (m/f)	23/18 per 1,000
Adult literacy	92.4 per cent

Inter-factional political violence between Palestinians escalated dramatically in the first half of 2007 and led to different factions governing the West Bank and Gaza Strip in the second half of the year. Clashes between security forces and armed groups loyal to the Fatah party of Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas and to the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) of Prime Minister Isma'il Haniyeh caused hundreds of deaths. In June, after Hamas forcibly seized control of the Gaza Strip, President Abbas dismissed Prime Minister Haniyeh's government, declared a state of emergency and established an emergency government which excluded Hamas members. Both factions committed grave human rights abuses, including arbitrary detention and torture.

Air strikes and other attacks by Israeli forces killed hundreds of Palestinians and destroyed more than 100 Palestinian homes and properties. Economic and social problems caused by decades of Israeli occupation, military attacks, stifling blockades and punitive economic measures in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) grew more severe. The Israeli blockade on the Gaza Strip was tightened to an unprecedented level, trapping its entire 1.5 million population and forcing most Gazans into poverty and dependency on international aid that sometimes could not reach them (see Israel-OPT entry).

Palestinian armed groups killed 13 Israelis, seven of whom were civilians; Israeli forces killed some 370 Palestinians, almost half of them civilians and including some 50 children.

Background

Armed clashes between Palestinian factions and the deepening economic crisis both intensified in the first half of the year, particularly in the Gaza Strip, where Israeli and international economic sanctions had been imposed following the Hamas victory in the PA elections in 2006. The deteriorating economic conditions for Palestinians were exacerbated by the Israeli authorities' further tightening of their blockade on the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) and frequent Israeli military attacks on, and destruction of, Palestinian civil infrastructure.

In March 2007 Fatah and Hamas leaders agreed to end the in-fighting and formed a unity government led by Prime Minister Haniyeh. Armed clashes soon resumed, however, and intensified. On 14 June Hamas forces and their militias seized control of all Fatah-controlled PA security installations and government buildings in the Gaza Strip. The same day, President Abbas dismissed the unity government and established an emergency government based in the West Bank. He appointed Salam Fayyad as Prime Minister. Hamas refused to recognize the emergency government and set up a Hamas de facto administration which governed the Gaza Strip for the rest of the year. The EU, the USA and other international donors tightened sanctions on the Hamas de facto administration in Gaza and resumed direct financial aid to the PA emergency government in the West Bank. The Israeli government returned part of the previously confiscated tax revenue to the PA emergency government and simultaneously reinforced its blockade of the Gaza Strip. Among other measures, it refused to allow medical supplies to enter Gaza or patients in need of urgent medical treatment to leave. Some 40 patients died as a result.

In November the Israeli government and the PA President and emergency government participated in a US-sponsored international meeting in Annapolis, USA, from which Hamas was excluded. The meeting was aimed at resuming peace negotiations but no tangible progress was evident by the end of 2007. Contrary to their pre-meeting undertakings, the Israeli authorities did not lift their movement restrictions on Palestinians in the OPT and continued to expand Israeli settlements in the West Bank.

Throughout the year the main Palestinian armed groups – Islamic Jihad, Popular Resistance Committees (PRC), al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades (Fatah's armed wing) and the 'Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades (Hamas' armed wing) – frequently fired homemade "qassam" rockets from the Gaza Strip into southern Israel, killing two Israeli civilians and injuring several others.

Hamas' takeover in the Gaza Strip

In June, after Hamas forces and militias seized control of PA security installations and institutions, President Abbas ordered all PA security forces and judicial institutions in the Gaza Strip to suspend operation. The Hamas de facto administration filled the resulting legal and institutional vacuum by setting up security and judicial bodies. These lacked appropriately trained personnel, accountability mechanisms and human rights safeguards.

Some 40,000 members of the PA security forces and civil servants were dismissed by the PA emergency government because they were suspected of working for institutions controlled by Hamas in the Gaza Strip. Tens of thousands of others, who had not been paid in full for more than a year, received their salaries from the West Bank-based PA emergency government on condition that they did not continue to work in the Gaza Strip.

Hamas forces frequently harassed former members of the security forces and other officials loyal to the PA emergency government. On

16 August Hamas forces briefly detained the PA Attorney General and ordered him not to undertake any activities. On 4 September the Hamas administration announced the establishment of an alternative Supreme Justice Council to appoint judges to the Justice Department in the Gaza

Strip – a move which contradicted the principle of the independence of the judiciary and breached Palestinian laws.

The Fatah-Hamas divisions exacerbated the huge obstacles faced by the inhabitants of Gaza when seeking justice or redress from the PA's malfunctioning judicial and security institutions.

In June, after Hamas' forcible takeover in Gaza, Fatah gunmen carried out retaliatory attacks against known or suspected Hamas supporters in the West Bank, abducting and assaulting several people and burning down dozens of properties. They did so with impunity, often in the presence of PA security forces who failed to intervene and uphold the law.

Killings, lawlessness and impunity

January-June

The climate of lawlessness and impunity evident in previous years intensified in the first half of 2007 as inter-factional fighting escalated between Fatah and Hamas militants in the Gaza Strip.

Some 300 Palestinians were killed in the inter-factional fighting. Most were members of rival security forces and militias but dozens were unarmed civilian bystanders. Gunmen carried out attacks and gun battles in densely populated residential areas, including in and around hospitals, in reckless disregard for the lives of residents and passers-by.

Members of PA security forces and armed groups affiliated to Fatah and Hamas carried out unlawful killings and abductions of rivals with impunity. In June Hamas gunmen hunted down members of the PA security forces and Fatah's militia, the al-Aqsa Brigades, killing some and shooting others in the legs. Fatah gunmen also carried out similar attacks against Hamas members, although on a lesser scale.

- Mohammed Swerki, a cook with the Presidential Guard, was thrown to his death from a building in Gaza City on 10 June, after he and a colleague were captured by Hamas gunmen when they went to the wrong building to deliver food. Fatah gunmen retaliated by abducting suspected Hamas sympathizer Husam Abu Qinas when he was returning home from work and throwing him to his death from another building.
- A peaceful march calling for an end to the Fatah-Hamas clashes, organized by left-wing parties and others on 13 June in Gaza, was fired on. Three protestors were killed: Taghreed Salah al-'Alia , Shadi Tayseer al-'Ijla and Mohammad Mahmoud Adas.

June-December

Lawlessness, unlawful killings and abductions in the Gaza Strip decreased significantly after Hamas seized control in June. However, Hamas forces and militias frequently attacked Fatah activists and other critics and demonstrators, as well as journalists who covered such attacks. Meanwhile, members of Hamas forces were at times targeted in bomb attacks which Hamas blamed on Fatah activists.

- On 12 November at least six demonstrators were killed and dozens were injured when Hamas forces fired on protesters at a mass rally organized by Fatah activists to commemorate the third anniversary of the death of Yasser Arafat, former PA President and Fatah chairman.

In the West Bank, PA forces attacked demonstrators on several occasions.

- On 27 November in Hebron, one protester was shot dead at a demonstration against the Israeli-PA meeting in Annapolis.

The PA emergency government, under intense pressure from Western donors, took some steps to curb the lawlessness which had become rife in previous years, notably frequent abductions, assaults and other attacks by the al-Aqsa Brigades. In October the PA security forces implemented a set of measures devised by US security envoy General Keith Dayton to improve security in Nablus, an al-Aqsa Brigades stronghold. This led to a significant decrease, though not a total cessation, of attacks by such groups, but the PA failed to bring to justice al-Aqsa Brigades militants responsible for killings, abductions and other attacks.

Arbitrary detention, torture and other ill-treatment

Gaza

After mid-June, Hamas forces and militias detained some 1,500 people in a politically motivated detention campaign. Hundreds of people, mostly Fatah supporters, were arbitrarily detained for participating in non-violent demonstrations. Most were released within 48 hours but were required as a condition of release to sign pledges not to participate in further protests or other opposition. In many cases Hamas forces also demanded that detainees pay “fines”. Those detained were mostly held in former PA security installations and other locations which were not authorized to be used as detention facilities under Palestinian law.

Many detainees alleged that they were tortured or otherwise ill-treated by being beaten, tied in painful positions (shabeh) and threatened. Some said they were told that they would be shot in the legs. At least two detainees – Walid Abu Dalfa and Fadhel Dahmash – died in detention apparently as a result of torture or other ill-treatment.

- Tariq Mohammed Asfour, a former policeman, was detained by Hamas forces and militias in late June. He was beaten for six hours with metal wires, sticks and a shovel, and had nails driven into his shins with a hammer.
- Wa’el Ghalban, a Fatah activist, was severely beaten on the feet and other parts of the body by Hamas forces when he was detained overnight in November.

West Bank

After mid-June, PA security forces launched a crackdown on Hamas supporters throughout the West Bank and arrested some 1,500 people. Most were released within a few days without charge and often on condition that they denounced Hamas and pledged not to support it. Scores of others were detained for several weeks or months but then released uncharged.

From September on, however, Israeli forces frequently arrested those released from detention by the PA. Most detentions by the PA were carried out by security forces, notably Preventive Security, that were not authorized by Palestinian law to detain suspects, and detainees were also held in unauthorized places of detention. Families were rarely notified of detainees' arrests or whereabouts and in some cases security forces moved detainees from one place to another to prevent them appearing before a judge or to avoid complying with judges' orders to release them. Detainees were often not brought before a judge within the time required under Palestinian law.

Reports of torture and other ill-treatment, rare at first, became more common from August, with detainees reporting that they had been tied in deliberately painful positions (shabeh). Most victims, however, were reluctant to complain for fear that they would be rearrested by PA forces or detained by Israeli forces.

- Ahmad Doleh was arrested by PA forces in Nablus in early July and detained for five months without charge or trial in various places. Within days of his release from PA detention in early December he was arrested by Israeli forces.
- Hussein al-Sheikh, a lawyer from the Bethlehem area, was detained by PA forces for 13 days in September and then released without charge, but arrested by Israeli forces a week later and placed in administrative detention without charge or trial.

Impunity

Neither the PA in the West Bank nor Hamas in the Gaza Strip took any credible measures to ensure accountability for members of their security forces and militias, who continued to enjoy impunity for human rights abuses they committed, including unlawful killings, hostage-taking, arson and other attacks on people and property.

Abuses by armed groups

Palestinian armed groups carried out indiscriminate attacks on Israeli civilians. Thirteen Israelis, including seven civilians, were killed in such attacks, the lowest annual fatality figure since the outbreak of the intifada in 2000.

Palestinian armed groups frequently launched home-made "qassam" rockets from the Gaza Strip towards the nearby Israeli town of Sderot and surrounding areas, killing two Israelis and injuring several others.

- Shirel Friedman and Oshri Oz were killed in Sderot by "qassam" rocket attacks on 21 and 27 May.

Suicide bombings and shooting attacks almost ceased in 2007. One suicide attack was carried out by an Islamic Jihad group in Eilat on 29 January.

- Emile Ameliach, Israel Zamalloa and Michael Ben Sa'don were killed in a suicide bomb attack on a bakery in Eilat on 29 January.

In the first half of the year Palestinian armed groups continued to abduct members of rival groups and foreign nationals. Several Palestinian hostages were killed (see above), though most were released unharmed.

- In March the Army of Islam, a small and previously little known group, abducted British journalist Alan Johnston in Gaza City and held him for 114 days, threatening to kill or harm him on several occasions. He was released in early July following pressure from Hamas.
- In June Hamas and the PRC released an audio recording of Gilad Shalit, the Israeli soldier they captured in June 2006, but continued to refuse him access to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) or any communication with his family.

Violence against women

More than 10 women were killed in alleged “honour killings” and scores of others were killed or injured in attacks by Israeli forces or in inter-factional fighting between rival Palestinian groups.

- Nisreen Mohammad Abu Bureik and In'am Jaber Daifallah were killed in July and August respectively in Gaza. According to their families, they were both killed by male relatives in so-called “honour” crimes.

Women's lives were made even more difficult by the deteriorating humanitarian conditions, and the Israeli blockades on the OPT further restricted their access to health and other crucial services. At least three women gave birth at Israeli military checkpoints after they were prevented from passing through to reach nearby hospitals.

Amnesty International visits/reports

- Amnesty International delegates visited Gaza and the West Bank in June-July and in December.
 - Occupied Palestinian Territories: Torn apart by factional strife (MDE 21/020/2007)
 - Palestinian Authority: New government must end impunity for lawlessness (MDE 21/002/2007)
 - Palestinian Authority: New unity government must put civilian protection above politics (MDE 21/001/2007)