

# The State of Palestine

A critical analysis

Philip Leech

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The Palestinian national movement reached a dead end and came close to disintegration at the beginning of the present century. This critical analysis of internal Palestinian politics in the West Bank traces the re-emergence of the Palestinian Authority's established elite in the aftermath of the failed unity government and examines the main security and economic agendas pursued by them during that period.

Based on extensive field research interviews and participant observation undertaken across several sites in Nablus and the surrounding area, it provides a bottom-up interpretation of the Palestinian Authority's agenda and challenges the popular interpretation that its governance represents the only realistic path to Palestinian independence. As the first major account of the Palestinian Authority's political agenda since the collapse of the unity government, this book offers a unique explanation for the failure to bring a Palestinian state into being and challenges assumptions within the existing literature by addressing the apparent incoherence between mainstream debates on Palestine and the reality of conditions there.

This book is a key addition to students and scholars interested in Politics, Middle-Eastern Studies and International Relations.

**Philip Leech** is Senior Fellow at the Institute for Government at the University of Ottawa, Canada, and a Visiting Fellow at the Kenyon Institute in Jerusalem. He has a PhD from Exeter University's Institute for Arab and Islamic Studies and is the co-editor of *Political Identities and Popular Uprisings in the Middle East* (2016).

*The State of Palestine provides a comprehensive critique of the false messiah of state-building as a strategy for Palestinian emancipation. Based on extensive research in the occupied Palestinian territory, particularly in the city of Nablus, Leech critically assesses 20 years of the Palestinian Authority, but with a focus on the post-2006 era. This book is essential reading for those who wish to understand Palestinian politics today and for why the so-called 'two-state solution' was – and remains – so fundamentally flawed.*

Dr Mandy Turner, Director of the Kenyon Institute in Jerusalem  
(Council for British Research in the Levant)

*The first thorough and scholarly examination of the post-Oslo reality in the West Bank. This careful and forensic study exposes the fallacies surrounding the reality on the ground in the areas under the Palestinian Authority control. A highly important source of information and deconstruction for anyone who wishes genuinely to understand, and change, the dismal reality on the ground in the West Bank and beyond.*

Ilan Pappé, Professor of History at the Institute for Arab  
and Islamic Studies, Exeter University

*Drawing upon original fieldwork in the north of the West Bank, Phil Leech provides a meticulous and much-needed critique of the Palestinian Authority's 'state building' project. This is a fascinating and timely account of Palestinian politics that deserves to be widely read.*

Adam Hanieh, Senior Lecturer in Development Studies, the School of  
Oriental and African Studies, University of London

*Leech makes a compelling case that the Palestinian Authority's and the international community's statebuilding project in the Occupied Territories never stood a real chance. Extensive engagement with the lived experience of those in cities, villages and refugee camps is married to a grasp of the higher politics and economic models at play. Although accessibly written, this is not a comfortable read, challenging many of the hopeful scenarios politicians and activists have held on to. Laying bare the real dynamics at work, Leech's analysis is a prerequisite for moving beyond the pious hopes and assertions of the past.*

Gerd Nonneman, Professor of International Relations,  
School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University

*In this excellent account, Philip Leech goes beyond the rhetoric of countless policymakers and journalists to deliver a meticulous critique of the Palestinian Authority's doomed statebuilding project. He convincingly demonstrates how a security agenda and a neoliberal economic strategy took precedence over democracy and the path to Palestinian independence.*

Rory McCarthy, *The Guardian's* Jerusalem correspondent, 2006–10

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**Philip Leech**

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To  
**Khai-Trí,**  
**Freya,**  
**Arthur, Albert and Audrey,**  
**and**  
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# Preface

Research for this book began in 2008. Since then, the project has developed, grown and – I hope – improved a great deal. There are two main reasons for this trajectory. The first is a natural product of learning more and more through my own research and writing. This is partly a result of the welcome advice from more senior colleagues, partly a product of undertaking further research and also partly resulting from simply sitting with the subject and thinking about it for longer, allowing sometimes disparate thoughts to coalesce into more solid ideas.

The second major reason was my strong desire to make this book accessible to a general audience as well as to academics. Obviously this volume remains a fairly focused account of a topic that might, at first, seem quite obscure to most readers. But I hope that this apparent opacity does not cause the reader to underestimate the topic's significance. My desire to make this account more accessible was – to some extent – born out of a sense of urgency of which I became conscious during my first experiences of teaching undergraduate and graduate courses at universities in the UK.

None of the main texts available at the time were capable of conveying the complexity and nuance of the Israel–Palestine conflict that truly spoke to what I had learned from my own research. The seriousness of this problem was intensified because of the fact that, for many students, much of the information on this issue that they absorbed was from the general media, which emphasised the most sensational events, often with little regard for the subtler or more complex detail.

The third reason for the changes was in acknowledgement of – and in response to – the reality of the so-called 'Arab Spring'. While I have suggested in this volume that the protests in Palestine in 2011–12 are better seen as the consequences of distinctly domestic dynamics (and therefore I downplay the idea of a 'contagion' or anything similar with respect to Palestine and protests elsewhere), the uprisings of 2011 and their respective aftermaths certainly shook my understanding of how to approach the topic of contemporary Palestine. In particular I have become aware that media accounts – particularly in the UK and North America – apparently suffer from an acute form of

Eurocentrism in relation to the Middle East. It sometimes appears as if most English-language accounts of politics in the Middle East are only capable of interpreting events in the region through a lens defined by European regional concerns.

For example, human catastrophes in North Africa and the Levant in recent years have been transmuted into issues of European security and immigration; the resurgence of authoritarian rule in some countries is applauded as a necessary bulwark against ‘terrorism’; and, perhaps most arrogantly, the complex political, economic and social causes of strife – no matter where in the region it takes place – are grouped together and discussed under the blanket heading of a ‘reformation’ in Islam – or similar – as if the agency of nearly 400 million people across 18 countries can be simply explained away with the analogy of Europe’s own bellicose and combustible past!

A similar perspective continues to frame the discussion of Israel and Palestine in the West. Though a new discipline of Palestine Studies has emerged recently – involving some of the best academic expertise available – popular discourse remains dominated by Eurocentricism and exhibits signs of a seriously blinkered logic. As Rashid Khalidi (2009, 70) has put it:

The Middle East attracts, and for a very long time has attracted, an inordinate share of people who are obsessed. This is true whether they are obsessed with God, with themselves and their own narratives, or with something else. Those obsessed with one area or aspect of the Middle East often lose sight of larger patterns that may in fact determine or explain outcomes throughout this region and beyond.

As an observer who is at least conscious of this context, I have no desire for this book to add more of the same. I am neither a Palestinian nor an Israeli and I cannot speak for anyone other than myself. However, what I intend for this book is that it puts forward a clear and coherent argument that is supported by evidence and – hopefully – makes a contribution to broader debates.

With this in mind, this book is directed primarily at a Western audience. In particular, it is intended to appeal to those readers who are willing to challenge conventional approaches to the Israel–Palestine conflict and keep their minds open to alternative perspectives and new ideas.

# Acknowledgements

I owe my greatest debt of gratitude to all the people in Nablus, and elsewhere in the West Bank, who have helped me complete this research through agreeing to be interviewed, having informal conversations with me and often simply by extending their warm hospitality and allowing me some insights into life in the occupied West Bank. Especially to Anan, Ismat, Kifah, Bessan, Taleb, Mustafa, Ahmed, Ibrahim, Omar and Ez, I am extremely grateful.

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Finally, thanks also to my friends and colleagues who I have not mentioned by name – I am grateful for the innumerable demonstrations of kindness and encouragement you have shown me. Of course, any errors in the pages that follow are my own.

# 1 Introduction

In 2010, As'ad Ghanem described the apparent demise of the Palestinian national movement:

The Palestinian national movement reached a dead end and came close to disintegration at the beginning of the present century. In the Post-Arafat period, in particular in 2006, internal and external processes ripened in the Palestinian national movement, which provided clear evidence of its failure and made it a 'failed national movement'.

(2010, 18)

This book offers a critical analysis of internal Palestinian politics in the West Bank during the period 2007–12, when the Palestinian Authority (PA) appeared to be searching for an escape route out of Ghanem's 'dead end'. It tracks the re-emergence of the PA as a significant institutional force in the context of Palestinian politics in the aftermath of the Second Intifada – a major uprising by Palestinians against Israeli rule between 2000 and 2007 – and the main security and economic agenda pursued by the PA during that period. Its primary concern is to challenge the popular interpretation of the PA's governance, that is, to challenge the idea that the PA's statebuilding project represented a realistic path to achieving Palestinian independence.

Instead, the argument of this book paints a very different picture: that Palestinian statebuilding never stood any real chance of success. This is for two main reasons. First was simply that any and all efforts that would be undertaken by the PA – regardless of what underlay the motivation for them – could never be capable of challenging the strategic envelope imposed on the Palestinians by Israel. The second reason was that, despite a great deal of rhetoric emanating from international actors – including foreign states, donor organisations or multinational groups – that pledged commitment to the creation of a Palestinian State, there would be no real help forthcoming. A strong case can be made that international interference in the conflict was never intended to rein in Israel's occupation, but, instead, was largely self-serving. Moreover, the impact of international actors actually bolstered Israeli supremacy over the Palestinians and, when it counted, they

## 2 Introduction

even abandoned their rhetorical support for the PA by rolling back on their own promises of seeking a two-state solution through peaceful means (for instance, when the US threatened its veto-power to scupper Palestinian hopes of a United Nations (UN) Security Council Resolution recognising its independence in 2015). In short, any effort to challenge the status quo during this period – including the PA's statebuilding project – was doomed even before it had begun. This was because, from below, Palestinian agency alone had insufficient force and, from above, the international actors that did have the power to change the situation were deficient in their commitment to the cause. Thus, there was never a real hope of challenging Israel's debilitating occupation of Palestinian lands and Palestinian lives during this period.

More generally, this book's three main original contributions to contemporary Palestine Studies are as follows: first, it is based on extensive field research undertaken across several sites in Nablus – a place with a unique heritage of resistance and a historic centre of Palestinian intellectual and political life (Moors 1994; Doumani 1995) – and the surrounding region. This distinguishes it from the majority of academic research in this field to date, which tends to be based on fieldwork conducted primarily in Ramallah (the PA's *de facto* capital) or East Jerusalem (the *de jure* capital of Palestine, which exists under direct Israeli occupation). Second, it serves as the first book-length account of the PA's statebuilding agenda – which has been discussed at length in academic and journalistic circles – as an apparently distinct and previously untested path to independence. Third, this book's argument does not take for granted an analytical framework that is predicated on either the 'one-state' or 'two-state solutions', which have become near-ubiquitous as the sole points of reference in most contemporary academic literature on the subject. (The 'two-state solution' refers a possible partition of the land between the River Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea, while a 'one-state solution' describes the possibility of Israelis and Palestinians sharing it, perhaps in a bi-national state.) Rather, drawing on Antonio Gramsci's 'War of Position', this book presents a broader standard that rests on a more comprehensive analysis of the deeper power dynamics in this context.

This book presents a detailed critique of the PA's statebuilding project. While it argues that the statebuilding agenda never really offered a serious challenge to the status quo, it suggests that a better way to understand the project was as a programme of internal reforms that were designed to make the PA more efficient in terms of executing the priorities of interested external parties. These priorities were (a) reform and development of the Palestinian security forces in order to make them more capable of combating Hamas – an Islamist movement that rejects negotiations with Israel – and (b) the implementation of a range of austerity-focused reforms of the Palestinian public sector. The first of these priorities was driven by the Israeli desire to stave off a potential third popular uprising and it also aligned with broader Western concerns regarding Islamist political movements in the context of the 'Global War on Terror'. The second priority was also a product of multiple drivers.

In the short term, the major priority of the international community was to curtail the serious issue of corruption within the PA that had syphoned off an indeterminate (though reportedly significant) quantity of foreign aid donations. At the same time, this statebuilding project appeared to offer international actors a renewed opportunity to implement an economic agenda that combined the concept of ‘functionalism’ – a sub-school of liberal peace theory emphasising the idea that though working together in the day-to-day mechanics of governance, broader peace becomes more likely – with a long-standing commitment to neoliberalism as a development strategy.

However, neither of these agendas would play out that way. The improvement of the Palestinian security forces effectively served to strengthen the hand of some of the PA’s most anti-democratic forces. Moreover, the neoliberal economic agenda suffered from the fact that the basic framework underlying Israel’s domination of the West Bank was never challenged. This included the basic legal norms that were in use, as well as the structures – both legal and material – that constrained Palestinian agency and frustrated Palestinian political coherence. Rather, in a continuation of the same philosophy that underlay Israel’s ‘disengagement’ from the Gaza Strip – a strategic withdrawal to militarised borders in 2005 – the material structure of the occupation in the West Bank was further entrenched during this period of time.

There was another factor, however. This was a surge of popular outrage that coincided with the uprisings across the region known as the ‘Arab Spring’. There were several factors that produced these events in Palestine. First was the resumption of so-called peace negotiations between the PA’s leadership and Israel despite the fact that Israel continued to construct illegal settlements in the West Bank, effectively undermining its rhetorical commitment to peace and continuing the expropriation of Palestinian lands and resources in the process. Second was a failure on the part of international donors to maintain the level of financial support to the PA necessary for it to meet its outgoings. This resulted in a severe fiscal crisis for the PA that was so bad that public sector salaries went unpaid. All of this added to already significant levels of popular discontent. In the end, this series of events brought about the demise of the statebuilding project as it had originally been formulated. It also allowed the President of the PA, Mahmoud Abbas, to take advantage of the situation to remove his perceived rival, the then Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, and opportunistically hijack the notion of statebuilding by taking the issue to the UN General Assembly in pursuit of high-profile, but largely meaningless, symbolic recognition.

These events also exposed the fact that the roles undertaken by Western donors in terms of the statebuilding project were apparently often incoherent. For example, where on the one hand there is strong evidence to support an argument that the Western governments – particular the UK and the US governments – played an instrumental role in inculcating authoritarianism in Palestine for the sake of preventing unrest, the fact that donors failed in the relatively simple task of ensuring that the PA did not run out of money – and

#### 4 Introduction

thereby indirectly inculcating popular strife – demonstrates that their approach to the project was inconsistent to say the least. In addition, while it was clear that some of the institutions working on the ground (for instance, the policy team from the UK government's Department for International Development (DFID)) seemed to be seriously committed to Palestinian 'statehood' in some form or other, achieving parity between the two sides was never a serious prospect. Rather, the 'state' that they had in mind would have been little more than a façade designed to mask continued Israeli dominance.

#### Background to this discussion

At a donors' conference in Paris in 2007, the PA launched the precursor to its statebuilding agenda, the Palestinian Reform and Development Plan (PRDP), which was met with an enthusiastic reception from representatives of various Western governments, all of which had – until only a few months before – supported a crippling boycott on all aid to the occupied Palestinian territories (oPts). However, having purged any Hamas influence from its ranks (effectively overturning the results of the 2006 legislative elections) in a brutal crackdown – with the support of Western intelligence agencies (see Rose 2008; Black and Milne 2011) – in the eyes of its donor audience, the PA was reborn as the presentable face of Palestinian governance.

Through both in the development of the PRDP itself and in its willingness to work with Western backers – in coordination with Israel – against Hamas, the PA appeared to be embarking on a previously untested strategy. This was to accede to the key demands of Israel and the international community with the aim of achieving economic development and, ultimately, ensuring Palestinian independence from Israel's occupation. This would be through statebuilding rather than through direct resistance or confrontation as had been tried in the past. According to this strategy – which was formalised in subsequent documents: *Palestine: Ending the Occupation, Establishing the State* (2009) and *Homestretch to Freedom* (2010)<sup>1</sup> – the PA would embrace the role that had been demanded of it by foreign governments ever since its inception as a product of the so-called Oslo 'peace process' (1993–2000). In practical terms, this meant that the PA would build on two major policies that were of central importance to Israel, the US and its allies. First, it would continue to comply with Israeli security demands, in particular disrupting and degrading Hamas and its support network in the West Bank. Second, it would confront issues of corruption, which had plagued its recent history and had become a serious concern for donor countries (some of which had invested and lost millions of dollars).

The international community was extremely receptive and, at the meeting in Paris's Hôtel Park Hyatt; donors pledged \$7.7 billion (some \$2.2 billion more than had been requested) in support of the PA. Tony Blair, the recently appointed representative of the International Quartet, adopted the role of an advocate to the Israeli government on behalf of the PA, lobbying

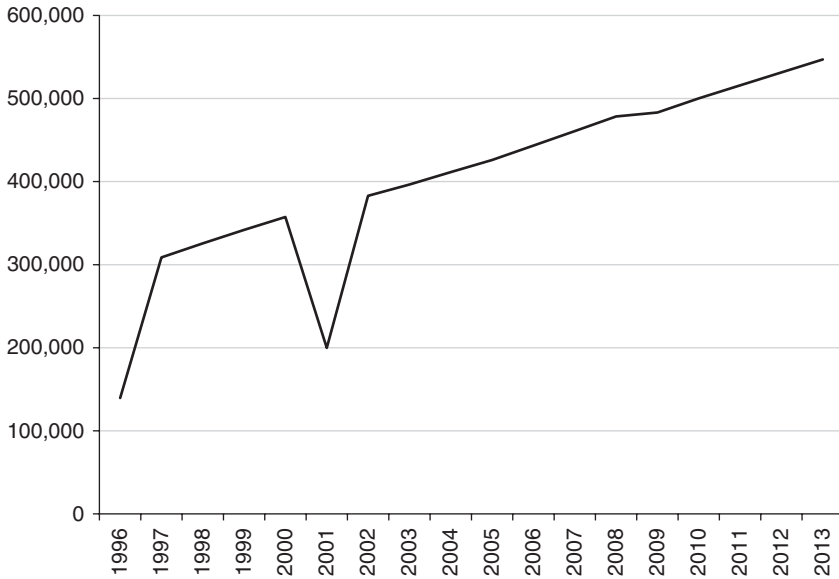


Figure 1.1 Total Israeli settlement population<sup>5</sup>

for greater cooperation between the two sides and the facilitation of the PA's agenda through, for example, the easing of some restrictions on movement. However, some five years on from these events, and despite winning overwhelming support from members of the UN General Assembly in 2012, the Palestinian national project stalled once again and the new 'State of Palestine' that emerged lacked independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty. Though various moves towards achieving more substantive progress had been attempted, Israel countered by accelerating the construction of illegal settlements in the West Bank and threatened expansion into the highly contentious 'E1' area, a move that would effectively and decisively cut off East Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank, thereby terminating any prospect of a two-state solution to the conflict.

\*\*\*\*

This book addresses the reasons behind how and why these events came to pass and offers an explanation from within the sphere of Palestinian political dynamics for the PA's failure to bring a meaningful Palestinian state into being. In addressing this question, the book presents a bottom-up analysis of the political and economic impact of the PA's statebuilding agenda. Thus, it offers a very different approach from the majority of commentaries and analyses that have become prevalent and have tended to adopt an external and often top-down perspective (for an example, see Bröning 2011). Towards

this end, this book performs two important tasks. First, it serves as a diagnostic of the impact of the PA's agenda on the general Palestinian population in four sites in the Nablus region: (1) a major urban centre – Nablus city, (2) Balata Camp, the largest refugee camp in the West Bank, and two villages, (3) Qaryut and (4) Yanoun. Second, it interprets that data in the context of the broader conflict and its impact on the power relationships between Palestinian, Israelis and other relevant actors.

## **Data collection<sup>2</sup>**

As mentioned above, one product of Israel's occupation has been to fragment and divide Palestinian society based on geography. In this context, it made sense to focus on geography as the main variable. This was in order to analyse the consequences of that statebuilding agenda on a cross-section of Palestinian society living under these fragmented conditions. The following sections provide background information on all four of the main sites that formed the basis for this research.

## **The city of Nablus**

Nablus' rich and intricate history as a cultural and economic hub and as the political power base for a number of Palestine's oldest and most powerful families is an intriguing topic of study in its own right. There is not sufficient room here to outline a historical narrative of Nablus in any great depth. However, given the relevance of Nablus' role in Palestinian history to its current political status, for the purposes of this account, it is appropriate to outline a few of the reasons for Nablus' reputation. According to Beshara Doumani, the appellation 'Jabal an-Nar' (The Mountains of Fire) illustrates the city's reputation for fierce resistance to foreign conquest as the name originates from the turn of the nineteenth century when, in order to repel the invasion of Napoleon Bonaparte's army, the population of the city (colloquially known as Nabulsi) 'set forests and olive groves ablaze, burning the French soldiers' (Doumani 2004, 37). Further, in 1834, the city led a revolt against the Egyptian invasion under Ali Pasha, and 102 years later, it was an important nucleus of resistance in the Arab Uprising (1936) against the British mandate. Further, in 1963, four years before the beginning of the Israeli occupation, Nablus declared its autonomy from Jordanian rule. The city was also famously a focal point of resistance movements in both the First and the Second Intifadas and became known as the centre of terrorism in the Israeli media (Doumani 1995; 2004).

Nablus' Old City was symbolically important because of its historic role as the hub of soap and olive oil production, a vibrant commercial exchange and as the seat of power for the city's dynastic ruling class. It was also the nucleus for wider networks of social and economic relationships. Evidence of this was visible in the variety of churches, mosques and other sites of historical significance

dotted in and around the Old City, including one of the highest concentrations of Turkish Baths outside Istanbul and Damascus. Such is the significance of the Old City to the character of Nablus that it is perhaps best considered as the heart of a wider, more recent, yet complementary, urban milieu.

However, because of its position as both the iconic and physical centre of Nablus, and because its architectural environment reveals some glimpses of Nablus' previous lives as an economic, political and social hub, contemporary shifts in the nature and distribution of power during the period of the PA's statebuilding agenda are shown in sharper contrast. For example, the destruction of Nablus' soap factories and the consequences of the city's detachment from both its traditionally productive hinterland and export routes are clear demonstrations of how Israel's occupation has plagued Palestinian economic and political life in the Old City and beyond. Moreover, the PA's efforts to breathe new life into the city through various projects – such as the building of a taxi station, a large shopping centre including a cinema and a series of 'shopping festivals' – as well as the overwhelming influx of foreign-made textiles (previously one of Nablus' key industrial outputs) are indicative of a the city's embrace of neoliberal economic and social norms.

### **Villages in Area 'C'**

In 2007, the village of Qaryut has a population of 2,321 (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) 2008). It was located 20 km south-west of Nablus, on the edge of the governorate. Its main access to transport is via Route 60, a shared highway where both Palestinians and Israelis are permitted to drive (which is not the case on many 'Jewish-only roads' between settlements). Qaryut lies between the large Israeli settlements Eli and Shilo, though, throughout the research period, there was little interaction with the settlers, save for a few attempts by settlers to close off a dirt access road. The village remained largely unaffected by the direct violence during the Second Intifada.<sup>3</sup> However, the impact of Israel's closure policy was detrimental to the village's economy.

Yanoun on the other hand is significantly smaller than Qaryut. At the time, its population was 15 families, or approximately 102 people (PCBS 2008), though by December 2011, one family had moved away. The village was also split across two sites – Upper Yanoun, which is fully in area 'C', and Lower Yanoun, which is in area 'B'. There was a single-track road that connected the two parts of the village which are approximately three-quarters of a kilometre apart. The village had been entirely cleared of its inhabitants by Israeli settlers in 2002 (the first instance of this happening to a whole village since 1948). Because of this, since 2003, an Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI) team has provided a constant international presence in the village. This team operated on two-and-a-half-month rotations (including responsibility for visiting other villages), which included filing regular reports on incidents that

involved settlers from nearby Itamar and several small outposts that encircle the Upper Yanoun.

### **Balata Camp**

Balata Camp is largest of the three refugee camps in Nablus. The camp measures a quarter of a kilometre squared and is home to 23,000 registered refugees (United Nations Relief Works Agency (UNRWA) 2008). Historically, it has been known as a strong centre for civil society and armed resistance. The UNRWA provides the following description of the society within Balata Camp:

The refugees came from 60 villages and the cities of Lydd, Jaffa and Ramleh. Many are of Bedouin origin. Civil society and political actors in Balata are especially strong. The first West Bank group to defend refugee rights, the Refugee Committee to Defend Refugee Rights, was established in Balata in early 1994. The camp committee is one of the most active committees in the area. Three of its members serve on the Palestinian Legislative Council. The youth activities centre and the women's programme centre organise many activities as well. The camp fell under serious pressure from the Israeli army during the intifada.

(UNRWA 2015)

Indeed, throughout the Second Intifada, Balata Camp was subject to some of the bloodiest fighting and numerous incursions by the Israeli military. At the time that this research was undertaken, scars of these conflict remained omnipresent in various forms, such as damaged – or destroyed – property, martyrs' posters and in the crowded graveyard adjacent to the camp.

### **Findings**

There is an important distinction between the material changes undertaken as part of the PA's post-2007 agenda and the promises of statehood that accompanied it. In reality, the PA's material agenda comprised two main elements. The first was a security agenda that focused on (a) subduing the threat from Hamas and (b) collaborating with foreign governments at the expense of Palestine's democratic character and the basic rights of those under its rule. The second was an economic agenda that prioritised neoliberalism rather than challenging the real constraints on Palestinian development.

Of course, Palestinians in the West Bank experienced the impact of the PA's 2007–11 agenda differently according to a range of variables. However, the key conclusions of this research were relatively constant. These were that the underlying power imbalance between Palestinians and Israel in the West Bank did not narrow. Rather, it was evident from the outset that since its

return to power, the PA's elites never intended to challenge the prevailing hierarchy of power. Instead, the PA pursued a very limited range of goals, defined by the restrictions imposed on it by Israel and the West, its own interests in terms of survival and the relative prosperity of its elite supporters, through complying with Israel's major demands and the requirements of international donors.

In practical terms, this meant that the apparatus of Israel's occupation was allowed to grow more entrenched in the West Bank, while the PA, in some respects, actively encouraged the growing influence of other foreign powers in Palestinian politics, while dramatically diminishing the ability of the general public to hold any sway over its own destiny.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the PA's programme effectively meant that the power exercised over Palestinian lives was taken even further out of the hands of those living on the lands that were – ostensibly – intended to become a Palestinian state. In more specific terms, the real impact of the PA's statebuilding agenda can be summarised in the following three points:

1. The statebuilding agenda was – in reality – not a serious attempt to challenge Israel's military, political and economic dominance over Palestinian lives and Palestinian lands in the occupied West Bank.
2. Though important divisions did exist within the PA leadership, the factions that dominated adopted a conciliatory approach towards the occupation and pursued a security agenda designed to integrate further entrenchment of the occupation. As a result, all aspects of democratic governance were prorogued and the PA essentially acceded to a role as an integrated part of the overarching power structure that did not offer any meaningful challenge the status quo.
3. The PA also embraced neoliberalism as an economic strategy, an approach that weakened what remained of Palestinian autonomy in its economic decision making, worsened the conditions of already vulnerable communities in the West Bank and helped undermine the basis for the productive sectors in Palestine's economy.

Other analyses have also outlined the deficiencies of the PA's agenda. According to Adam Hanieh, for instance, the reform programme had a severely deleterious effect on Palestinian society and Palestinian national claims (Hanieh 2008a, 2008b, 2011, 2013). Instead of furthering an agenda of Palestinian national liberation, in practice it allowed the occupation to become further entrenched (sometimes doing so with the PA's assistance), and the PA has abandoned most – if not all – of Palestinian political capital in pursuit of a 'state' that, given the limitations that Palestinians would have to accept, could only ever be symbolic (Hanieh 2008a). As Raja Khalidi – a prominent Palestinian economist – suggested in an interview, the statebuilding project seemed to be detached from reality: