

Policy Adaptation and Palestinian Resilience: The Role of the Palestinian Authority

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Received: April 6, 2026

Accepted: May 25, 2026

Online Published: June 15, 2026

doi:10.11114/smc.v14i3.8655

URL: <https://doi.org/10.11114/smc.v14i3.8655>

Abstract

This research explores how the Palestinian Authority's (PA) adaptive policies toward Israeli settler strategies and international donor demands impeded its statehood transformation and undermined Palestinian social resilience (*sumud*). Framed by settler-colonial theory, political adaptation, and critical resilience, it contends that three decades of adaptiveness shifted the PA from a potential state-building project to an outsourced administration that ultimately bolsters rather than defies the occupation regime, within conditions of prolonged structural asymmetry and external political constraint. The methodology involves vertical comparison of PA policies at critical historical moments coupled with a review of declarations before and after October 7th, 2023. Findings identify three major outcomes: facilitating the Zionist eliminationist project through "soft" mechanisms, hollowing out the Palestinian statehood project, and eroding collective and individual resilience, particularly through institutional dependency and constrained governance practices. Post-October 7th analysis reveals intensified adaptive strategies—heightened security coordination, concessionary politics, and crisis-management practices—deepening Palestinian societal vulnerability amid accelerating Israeli annexation measures, while further complicating the PA's relationship with popular legitimacy and national resilience (*sumud*).

Keywords: Palestinian Authority, settler colonialism, political adaptation, resilience (*sumud*), state-building

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Problem Statement

Oslo Agreement of 1993 created high expectations among Palestinians for their struggle under prolonged Israeli rule to be put to an end by the creation of an independent Palestinian state through the establishment of the Palestinian Authority (Khalidi, 2006). It has, however, failed to materialize even after over three decades since then. The evolution of the Palestinian Authority as an interim self-ruling entity into a sovereign state has been effectively blocked, leaving their dream of nationhood entangled in a political deadlock.

While extensive scholarship has examined the structural impediments inherent in the Oslo framework (Le More, 2008; Tartir, 2015) and the settler colonial or more precisely, eliminationist nature of the Zionist project (Wolfe, 2006), less attention has been paid to the adaptive strategies adopted by the PA's political leadership itself, particularly in relation to how these strategies reproduced institutional dependency under conditions of prolonged asymmetrical power relations. The PA has been in existence for three decades, during which time it has pursued adaptive policies to the demands of the Israeli occupation in response to what Wolfe (2006) calls the eliminationist logic of settler colonialism.

International donor pressures have further depoliticized the national project, stripping the vision of statehood long a symbol of Palestinian collective resilience of its emancipatory content. This even led some Israeli officials to admit that the PA is a double-edged entity. Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, for example, has argued that "the mere existence of the PA, inasmuch as it maintains a hope for statehood, is itself the cause of Palestinian resistance" (Iqtait, 2024). This recognition from within the Israeli establishment highlights the problematic position of the PA, particularly its simultaneous function as both a symbol of limited Palestinian self-governance and a structurally constrained institution operating within the broader framework of occupation management.

When the PA was uncooperative, such as in the example of the Second Intifada and even “the economic disengagement” program of the Shtayyeh government, it was generally by force of circumstance more than by design; and it has almost always resulted in negative repercussions that necessitated an adaptation, thus showing the very real political and economic limitations of the Authority.

This adaptive strategy has resulted in three outcomes which together make up the subject matter of this essay:

Firstly, the Zionists used the opportunity provided by the situation to continue with their policy of destruction that they have been using ever since the occupation of Palestine, and here the Palestinian Authority was used to accomplish this task with non-violent means such as governance, security, and administration.

Second, it has become difficult to discuss the establishment of an independent Palestinian state, not only in terms of reality and geography, but also in terms of the nature of the Palestinian Authority, its institutions, its capabilities, and level of trust it enjoys, both locally and internationally, as questions of sovereignty became increasingly subordinated to crisis management and institutional survival.

Third, the adaptive policies have had a significant negative impact on the resilience of the Palestinian citizen, either as a result of the economic, social, and security policies pursued by the Authority, or due to the occupation's exploitation of the Authority to undermine the resilience of both the individual citizen and Palestinian society, especially within conditions of prolonged economic dependency and political fragmentation.

This paper, therefore, investigates the characteristics and implications of the PA's adaptive strategies to the Zionist settler colonial project and their functions in the context of Palestinian resilience. It therefore connects the conceptual fields of settler colonial studies, political adaptation, and the critical literature on resilience. This interaction is used as an analytical framework to understand the trajectories of the PA over the past three decades, with particular attention to the interaction between structural coercion, institutional adaptation, and transformations in national legitimacy and collective resilience.

1.2 Research Question

This study aims to answer the following question: To what extent have the adaptive policies of the Palestinian Authority impeded its transition to a sovereign state, and to what extent have they undermined Palestinian resilience, particularly after October 7th, 2023?

This paper argues that the adaptive practices the Palestinian Authority has developed in response to the demands of the Israeli colonial state and donor states have contributed to weakening the prospects for the emergence of a Palestinian state, while simultaneously reinforcing patterns of institutional dependency and constrained governance. Far from being disrupted by the events of October 7th, such a dynamic has been reinforced in their wake.

1.3 Significance of the Study

This research is timely and important for at least three reasons. First, it deals with an urgent issue – the adaptation of the structure of the PA and its implications for Palestinian resilience – at a crucial juncture as the Israeli authorities announced their intention to displace Palestinians in both Gaza and the West Bank, along with discussions about the ‘day after’ and reforms to the PA. Second, this study makes an original contribution to knowledge as it draws together a number of theoretical insights from settler colonialism studies, theories of political adaptation, and critical studies of resilience into one analytical framework to understand the political dynamics within the PA. This framework can be used to analyse similar political dynamics elsewhere between indigenous polities and colonial authorities, particularly in contexts characterized by prolonged asymmetry, external dependency, and contested sovereignty. Third, this study critically examines the violence of the PA against Palestinians in its attempt to sustain the official structures of power. The majority of the debate on the plight of Palestinians focuses on the violence of the Israeli authorities. This research provides a critical analysis of the violence of Palestinian authorities, thereby explicitly rejecting notions that Palestinians are only haplessly caught between Israeli and international structures, while also recognizing the severe structural and coercive pressures shaping PA decision-making.

1.4 Research Gap

Despite the above-cited contributions, a discussion of the PA's role in a settler colonial framework remained absent in the literature until recently. Since 2011, the prospects of a two-state solution have become marginalized. The paradigm of annexation has become normalized, in the wake of the “Deal of the Century.” The prospects of normalization with the Arab regional states have progressed while the Palestinian national cause has become increasingly marginalized. These developments were jolted by the events of October 7th, 2023, resulting in debates about “the day after,” the future of the PA and the role of the PA, or the lack thereof, on the resilience of the citizen (Iqtait, 2024).

This research fills this gap therefore providing a critical assessment of the adaptation at the level of the PA itself, where the role of the Authority is crucial yet little examined in its contribution to the decline of the national Palestinian project.

It goes further to not only be an analysis of the structures but to analyze the choices that PA has made, which have led to this, and to contextualize these choices in relation to settler colonialism, donor conditionality, and institutional survival strategies.

2. Method

2.1 Research Approach

This research takes a qualitative longitudinal approach with a case study methodology that utilizes document analysis and process tracing. It examines changes in the Palestinian Authority's policies over five distinct periods: 1994-2000, 2000-2008, 2008-2020, 2020-2023, and post-October 7th, 2023. For each of these periods, this research reviewed the PA's policies in the same three categories: political policies (statements and actions of PA leaders), security policies (coordination with Israel), and economic policies (budgets, donor relations). The following typology was chosen as these constituted the key domains wherein such processes became apparent throughout history. This ability to observe comparable policies over different periods permit us to identify patterns of change over time. This approach was complemented by analysis of official documents, governmental plans, public statements, and semi-official positions. Key junctures of analysis include: the state-building agenda and debate on security coordination pursued by the Fayyad government, politics of clearance revenues and salaries; the Shtayyeh government's economic disengagement plan; and post-October 7th political/security behavior, among others-presidential rhetoric, security operations in camps, etc., and reform initiatives, such as the Amended Electoral Law and the Salaries Law. The unit of analysis is constituted by the official decision-making and political behavior of the PA, encompassing institutional conduct, notably of the security sector, and choices made by the formal and informal political leadership, especially when these were characterized by adaptation, restricted adaptation, or even institutional survival in response to external political or economic influences.

2.2 Period Selection and Justification

These five periods were chosen because they represent major turning points in the PA's history:

Table 1. Periodization of the Palestinian Authority and Key Historical Turning Points

Period	Significance
1994-2000	PA establishment under Oslo Accords
2000-2008	Second Intifada and PA near-collapse
2008-2020	Fayyad government and technocratic state-building
2020-2023	"Deal of the Century" and PA marginalization
Post-Oct 7, 2023	Gaza war and new pressures on PA

An analysis of these similar policies adopted in such varied contexts would give an indication as to whether PA has responded uniformly in view of the pressure applied by Israel and foreign donors, or whether there have been differences, as well as facilitating the tracking of changes in the PA's priorities and security governance over time.

2.3 Data Sources

The analysis draws on publicly available materials, all cited in this paper:

- PA official documents: 2025 Citizen Budget, Amended Electoral Law (2023), Salaries Law for Prisoners (2024)
- Government plans: Fayyad government program (2009), Shtayyeh economic disengagement plan (2022)
- Public statements: Presidential speeches after October 7th, 2023 (Wafa News Agency)
- International reports: UNCTAD (2025), UNHRC (2025)
- Public opinion data: PCPSR Poll 87 (2023), JMCC Poll 103 (2024)
- Academic studies: Sources cited throughout this paper

These sources were selected to allow triangulation between official institutional discourse, policy implementation, public perception, and external assessments of political and socioeconomic conditions.

2.4 Analytical Procedures

This process was undertaken in three main phases. Phase one entailed going through each of the documents thoroughly and identifying passages related to three themes: PA's relationship with Israel, references to a Palestinian state, and resilience/sumud. The selected passages were categorized under the identified themes. The following terms were operationalized for analysis in order to help with consistent coding during the periods being examined. Adaptation was defined as a change in behavior in relation to the context of constraints (demands by Israel for security or by donors) while at the same time pursuing PA's basic aim of state-building institutions. Assimilation was seen when adaptation resulted in true accommodation to the occupier's ruling process, such as continued cooperation on security issues, policy

accommodations without political accommodations, and reforms contingent upon the external environment. Resilience erosion (or sumud deterioration) was identified through several factors, such as reduced public trust (PCPSR polling data), disjointed discourse, dependence on foreign assistance, and inability to mobilize or voice resistance. These definitions were consistently utilized during all the five eras studied to allow for consistency in analysis and avoid inconsistencies in interpretation during longitudinal studies.

The second step included pattern recognition through time through analyzing the way each theme was presented during different periods, for instance, the case of security coordination theme in both 1995 and 2015 and even further to 2024. The comparative process tracing method allowed for an analysis of the continuities and changes in the behavior of institutions in the face of shifting political circumstances. The third step in the analysis involved considering the consequences of the policy choices made by PA in relation to statehood, its legitimacy, and resilience of Palestinian society, asking what the consequences were in each of those periods for PA policies related to statehood, PA's legitimacy, and the resilience of Palestinian society.

2.5 Limitations

Several shortcomings exist in this research study. To begin with, the first limitation exists because the functioning of the Palestinian Authority is confidential. The findings presented herein have been obtained based on interviews conducted in public. Hence, the research is mainly focused on the observable institutional actions and rhetoric as opposed to confidential discussions within the organization. Secondly, the analysis presented in this research study has relied on publicly obtainable documents, either printed or available online. This could mean that information from the confidential discussions within the institution or politically sensitive negotiations would not be obtained. Thirdly, the third stage starting with 7 October has not been conducted yet; hence, the findings on this stage will be dependent on events that took place until February 2026. Lastly, this research study is a case study of the Palestinian Authority; thus, it may provide some indications on other cases involving other indigenous/quasi-state institutions dominated externally.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by three different theoretical perspectives that have been developed through research on the themes of settler colonialism, political adaptation, and resilience. They provide an understanding of the structural context of the PA, the character of its adaptive strategies, and their intended and unintended consequences for Palestinian society, particularly under conditions of prolonged asymmetrical power relations and institutional dependency.

3.1 Settler Colonialism: Nature, Structure and variables

In its foundational concept, settler colonialism is, according to Wolfe (2006), not a historical event but an ongoing "structure," one that seeks to eliminate native societies and replace them with a new settler society. It accomplishes its aims through a dialectic of "soft" and "harsh" eliminationist policies that include, but are not limited to, violence, restructuring geography, demography, and economies to make the land more inhospitable for indigenous life (Veracini, 2010).

The Zionist project in Palestine is an example of this. From this logic, the Palestinian Authority presented a problematic issue: a (partly) colonial native authority. Within this framework, the PA is subject to a structural logic that ineluctably reduces it to a sub-contracted administrator whose survival depends on security cooperation and subordination to Israeli hegemony (Joronen & Griffiths, 2022), although the degree and form of this incorporation may vary across political periods and institutional contexts. This produces a state of permanent "ungovernability" and uncertainty that becomes a vehicle of colonial control, while simultaneously constraining the PA's capacity to pursue autonomous political alternatives.

3.2 Political Adaptation vs. Structural Coercion

Political adaptation refers to adjustments made by political actors in an exigent and uncertain environment in order to survive and satisfy basic demands (Hilal & Massad, 2000). Political actors will adapt when confronted with situations that threaten their survival, when they lose control over the distribution of resources, when legitimacy erodes from within, and when they cannot successfully transform the rules that regulate political play (Huntington, 1968). In theory, through successful political adaptation, actors are able to survive within the constraints and retain their essence (Hilal & Massad, 2000).

For the Palestinians, assimilation is proving to be tragically unintended consequence, not as a product of any conscious institutional plan, but as the consequence of structural coercion, political dependence, and inequality in power relations that have developed through time. In light of the extreme coercive circumstances, the PA's processes of adaptation are, in fact, showing evidence of turning into assimilation, i.e., the sacrifice of its *raison d'être*, liberation from occupation in favor of existence within it, especially those where survival is valued more highly than revolutionary political aims. This is visible in the PA's security policies, its political concessions to Israeli demands, and concessions after 7/10. As Nairat and Bisharat (2015) described above, the PA repressed the support base of resistance in the West Bank, demanding the disarmament of Hamas without the expected political returns. A clear instance, then, of the transition from adaptation to assimilation, due to extreme asymmetries, even though these must also be analyzed with regard to broader issues of institutional breakdown and lack of political capacity.

3.3 Resilience (*Sumud*) in the Palestinian Context: A Critical Approach

Resilience emerges here as a battleground of colonial struggle, wherein colonial powers seek to erode the native population's will to resist and to remain (Marie et al., 2018; Hammad & Tribe, 2021). According to classical resilience theory, resilience is understood as the capacity of a system to absorb stress and return to a state of equilibrium (Barrett & Constan, 2014). In contrast, the Palestinian concept of *sumud* fundamentally departs from this definition, emphasizing steadfastness, resistance, and the active assertion of presence under conditions of prolonged occupation (Hammad & Tribe, 2021).

As a Palestinian concept, *sumud* is an agentic practice of quotidian subsistence, constitutes a political act against the politics of erasure (Marie et al., 2018). Where classical resilience denotes adapting to difficult circumstances, *sumud* is about resistance against occupation and asserting one's identity and existence in the face of oppression on that very piece of land (Rijke & van Teeffelen, 2014), thereby linking everyday endurance with broader forms of collective political agency and national belonging.

However, under the PA, a resilient struggle has been redefined as a basic form of survival, with the PA navigating this survival in a way that does not contest the goals of the occupation, and in some cases, eases them, thereby undermining collective resistance (Tartir, 2015), especially through governance practices centered on stability, crisis management, and institutional continuity rather than political transformation. The events of October 7 have exposed this dichotomy of a people's will for a resistant resilient struggle versus the alternative interpretation of the term, reflecting the conflicts that exist between common perceptions of resistance and the containment-based strategies of institutions.

4. Analysis: Structural Adaptation and the Evacuation of the National Project

4.1 The Political Level: From Liberation to Administration

PA's political trajectory has shifted radically from national liberation to crisis management. While PA leaders have punctuated their speeches with the promise of "popular," "diplomatic" and "non-violent" struggle, very little of this has materialized, particularly at the level of sustained institutional transformation or coordinated political strategy. The logic of the Oslo paradigm has set up a system of governance anchored on the stabilization of security that precludes any sort of struggle that would jeopardize it (Tartir, 2015; Sayigh, 2011), thereby reinforcing administrative continuity and institutional survival over confrontational political mobilization.

PLO marginalization. The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) has historically been the representative of the Palestinian people. Its revolutionary institutions have become embedded in the administrative hegemony of the PA and lost their representative role and political relevance (Khalidi, 2010). Subordinating the PLO to the PA reverses the role played in the national movement and a further development in the process from liberation to administration, even though the change also results from other regional, international, and institutional influences that limited other political pathways.

4.2 The Security Level: The Centrality of Coordination

The most significant area of PA adaptation is policy in the security sector. Security sector policy is where the PA is most tied into the structure of occupation. Coordination of security measures with Israel and in particular the day-to-day sharing of information and cooperation between PA and Israeli security forces is diametrically at odds with the PA's self-defined national role vis-à-vis Israel, while simultaneously being justified by PA officials as necessary for institutional continuity, internal stability, and international legitimacy.

For the Israelis, the PA serves primarily as a security apparatus that acts as a subcontractor for the control of the Palestinian population under occupation (Sayigh, 2011). For the PA, security coordination initially emerged as an instrument for gaining political use to prove their seriousness to Israel and the international community. Whereas they should be serving the interests of Palestine, the security forces, due to their coordination-driven operational dynamics, have been operating within a model that has seen them described as tools of control within the context of occupation (Tartir, 2015), although supporters of the PA argue that such coordination emerged under conditions of severe asymmetry and restricted political alternatives.

In spite of the fact that the decision is periodically made to put a stop to the coordination process, for instance in 2015 and again in 2018, the process continued unabated. This situation has resulted in securitizing the politics in Palestine, whereby political decisions were based on the priorities of security, which had been coordinated with Israel. As the security apparatus occupies a huge part of public spending, there have been many arguments in recent years about the prioritization of the security sector and management of crisis under financial limitations imposed due to the occupation (UNCTAD, 2025). The security forces therefore continue to function within a framework largely shaped through coordination with Israel, contributing to their perception as protectors of the status quo rather than defenders of Palestinian national interests (Tartir, 2015), especially within portions of Palestinian public sentiment that are opposed to existing coordination practices.

4.3 The Economic Level: Engineered Dependency

The PA's economy is characterized by what Hanieh (2016) and Khalidi and Samour (2011) refer to as a "triple dependency." First, the system of clearance revenues gives Israel control over tax revenue collected on behalf of the PA and the ability to frequently withhold it, on political grounds. Second, donor aid is tied to political stability and to meeting the "good governance" criteria of donors rather than the Palestinian national agenda. Third, the free market economic agenda has further integrated the Palestinian economy into the Israeli economy, which will prevent the PA from building independent economic institutions and sovereignty.

This logic of dependency was perhaps the most evident in the Fayyad government (2007-2013), which led a technocratic state-building project inspired by Singapore, emphasizing institutional capacity, fiscal discipline, and good governance at the cost of true sovereignty and productive capacity. The Fayyad agenda was complicit with Israeli fiscal hegemony and the de-politicization of economic development, treating state-building as a technical rather than national emancipation project (Khalidi & Samour, 2011), even though those promoting this approach contended that institution building and fiscal stability were important precursors to statehood.

The impact has been significant. The economy is now service-oriented and credit-dependent rather than productive, and Palestinians rely on Israelis for jobs. Political parties and movements were stripped of their economic power as economic actors, giving way to a technocratic class which was responsive not to the people but to the donors. The economy rendered the PA particularly susceptible to pressure from the Israelis and the donors, while also fostering the development of dependence on external governance systems.

4.4 Outcomes of Pre-October 7th Adaptation

As such, the above-listed adaptations in the political, security, and economic spheres have led to three results.

First, the erosion of statehood. Despite the continued existence of the PA as an institution, the West Bank remains effectively under Israeli occupation. Consequently, the Palestinian state exists largely in name only, with limited sovereignty over territory, borders, security, and economic policy.

Second, the decline in legitimacy. The PA has lost considerable credibility among Palestinians and is widely perceived as detached from national aspirations and increasingly aligned with the occupying regime. Public confidence in PA institutions has reached historic lows, according to recent polls (PCPSR, 2023), reflecting broader frustrations with governance, political stagnation, and institutional ineffectiveness.

Third, the weakening of societal resilience. The continuation of these adaptive policies has contributed to growing social and political fragmentation within Palestinian society, limiting collective capacity to resist occupation and sustain national cohesion, while adaptation through governance systems played an important role in the stabilization of the overall political order, despite the ongoing territorial divisions.

Together, they amount to the evacuation of the contents of the national project while leaving its forms intact, especially considering the presence of governance structures in the absence of progress towards sovereignty or self-determination.

5. Post-October 7th: Deepening Adaptation and its Impact on Resilience

The events of October 7th, 2023, and the war that Israel waged against Gaza thereafter represent a drastic break in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Such a break could have offered the PA the possibility of not adapting since Israel appeared to do so initially not to want the PA to do so in the post-war arrangement. Instead, the PA doubled down on its assimilative trend, fearing "giving pretexts to Israel" to attack it further, a rationale used time and again by PA officials to explain their acts of restraint and cooperation, especially in a political atmosphere where coercion is prevalent, institutions are weak, and there is ambiguity about the future regional order.

5.1 PA Policies and Behavior

Reactions to the attacks of October 7th by the PA can be analyzed from four dimensions:

Political reaction: On the part of the PA, a stance of condemning the attacks of October 7th, as well as the Israeli forces' military operations, was taken. There was a sort of passive resilience adopted by the PA, showing their reactions through their pronouncements but without resulting in any political repercussions. Neither side was chosen by the PA, being at the same time involved in peace negotiations.

The second dimension is the security sector reaction. The PA suppressed expressions of solidarity with Gaza, particularly in the refugee camps on the West Bank, where support for the resistance was at its height, its security forces raiding, making arrests, and repressing demonstrations. Critics increasingly viewed these actions as policing Palestinian public expression in ways aligned with Israeli security priorities in the aftermath of October 7th.

Third, political concessions made by the PA. The PA made significant concessions, being touted as the preferred political

administrators of Gaza in any “day after” scenario. These included changes to election law (State of Palestine, 2023), as well as reforms to prisoners’ salaries (State of Palestine, 2024) and educational curricula. These concessions were made under heavy external influence; Le More (2008) argues that American and Israeli actors sought to reshape political rights in line with acceptance of Oslo terms, hence cementing the notion that the reform process was becoming more and more politically conditional.

Fourth, the PA’s continuation of its security coordination with Israel. Despite the Israeli army’s repeated invasions of West Bank cities, mass arrests, and rapid annexation of settlement blocs, the PA maintained security coordination with Israel. The fact that the PA was able to sustain security coordination despite the intensification of the occupation indicates the extent of the PA’s involvement in the security apparatus associated with the occupation. However, despite this, the representatives of PA continued to present coordination as crucial to averting institutional breakdown and preserving internal stability.

5.2 Impact on Palestinian Resilience (Sumud)

These PA policies have all had a significant impact on Palestinian steadfastness in the following three related ways:

5.2.1 National Resilience and Group Identity

The efforts by the PA to suppress Gaza solidarity, combined with the failure to make appropriate use of the unifying language of the nation, such as the Beijing Declaration, further widened the divide between Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, and ultimately worked against the collective effort to realize national liberation. The public is now turning to another source for national realization; the symbol of patriotism became the “October 7th experience,” and Palestinians turned to others, instead of the PA, to implement resistance and national agency (JMCC, 2024). This trend reveals the growing distance that exists between institutional legitimacy and popular views of representation.

5.2.2 Social and Economic Resilience

The security crackdowns by the PA have frayed the social fabric, while the economy has collapsed under the weight of Israel’s refusal to transfer clearance revenues, blockade of Palestinian workers, and military invasions (UNCTAD, 2025). The PA has defaulted on wages, and to meet basic obligations, the PA has had to take out loans. Neither the public nor the private sectors are functioning. This is not resilience; this is managing the status quo to the utter vulnerability of the society, where institutional survival increasingly occurs alongside deepening socioeconomic fragility and dependence.

5.2.3 Individual and Collective Security

The PA, whose security forces are designated to safeguard the Palestinians rather than to protect them, is collapsing under the weight of increasingly frenzied settler violence and the IDF’s ground operations. Demolitions, land grabs, ground invasions, and similar actions have surged while the world’s attention is on the war in Gaza, implementing a de facto fast track to annexation (UNHRC, 2025). The PA’s inability to provide security or deter such violence has added to the Palestinians’ sense of insecurity, while simultaneously intensifying perceptions of institutional ineffectiveness and declining public trust.

Collectively, these effects show how the institution in question that the Palestinians aspire to make the embodiment of their national dreams has, in its post-7 October transformations, become a vehicle for managing and containing their resilience, especially through processes of governance focused on stabilizing, managing crises, and maintaining institutional continuity within environments of sustained conflict and asymmetrical power relations.

6. Conclusion

This research has demonstrated that thirty years of rule by the Palestinian Authority, blending flexible adaptation to the Israeli settler colonial structure and its expansions, along with international donors and their neo-liberal conditionalities, have culminated in a very different entity than what was hoped—a body that was to become sovereign, but instead became a vehicle of management of the Palestinian population under occupation, functioning amidst a long period of structural imbalance and externally influenced forms of governance. Adaptation has resulted in assimilation; and thus, the price to pay for not losing national aspirations for liberation has been its complete erasure, especially with regard to the increasing preference for institutional longevity rather than revolutionary politics.

It is clear from the political, security, and economic analysis. Politically, the PA is away from the discourse of liberation and towards the language of managing the crisis; therefore, the Palestine Liberation Organization is marginalized, and its institutions of revolution and political activism are exhausted and transformed into a bureaucracy, hence it loses its representative role and political importance (Khalidi, 2010). The logic of security framework that the Oslo system has established is fundamentally incompatible with any struggle that could undermine this stability (Tartir, 2015; Sayigh, 2011), even as they promote governance systems based on stability and coordination.

Coordination with Israel in the security realm has continued despite periodic decisions by the PLO to suspend it (in 2015

and 2018), resulting in what has been called the "securitization of Palestinian politics." The security forces have become what Dana, (2020) refer to as a repressive apparatus in relation to the occupation, with the allocation of 21% to security compared to 19.3% to education in the 2025 budget (Citizen Budget, 2025). The security forces ultimately manage Palestinian behavior according to Israeli parameters, and as a result, they are despised for acting as guardians of the status quo rather than the Palestinian people (Sayigh, 2011). Nevertheless, supporters of the PA still justify such policies as necessary reactions to weaknesses in institutions and highly skewed politics.

Economically, the PA has been dependent on revenues customs clearance, which are controlled by Israel, on conditional aid from donors, and on the Israeli economy (Hanieh, 2016, p. 37; Khalidi & Samour, 2011). The technocratic state-building approach to governance under the Fayyad administration (2007-2013) was indicative of this logic, whereby the state's ability to function as a sovereign entity and to build productive capacity was subsumed under competence, thus strengthening dependency on foreign actors in matters of economic policy-making.

The effects of these adaptations have been as follows: the hollowing of statehood (what remains of the PA gives the illusion of the West Bank having sovereignty, whereas Israel completely occupies the territory), the hollowing of legitimacy (polls confirm years' low levels of popular support), and the consolidation of the settler expansion (the presence of the PA even provides a cover for settlements to indistinguishably advance toward a "de-facto settler state"), most especially by virtue of the existence of bureaucratic apparatuses without any gains towards sovereignty or self-determination.

The happenings of October 7th, 2023, and their consequences did not hinder this trend but rather strengthened it. Instead of providing an opportunity to take a break and make a change, the PA continued on its course toward assimilation, criticizing the attacks while preventing any public expression of support for Gaza, making some compromises in order to become an important actor in the post-conflict period, and retaining its security cooperation with Israel, despite its increasing incursions into the West Bank. The aftermath has further fragmented national consciousness, undermined social and economic resilience, and left ordinary Palestinians even more vulnerable to the rampaging violence of the settlers and the inexorable process of annexation (UNCTAD, 2025; UNHRC, 2025; JMCC, 2024), while enhancing broader impressions of institutional inefficacy and political legitimacy crisis.

These avenues present some of the multiple possibilities through which further research could continue the analysis developed here. Ethnographic research within PA institutions could open up the politics around moment-making and strategic decision-making. Comparative research could focus on other indigenous authorities situated within settler colonial logics – for example, tribal councils in North America or local authorities in Kashmir. Further research could also trace how the post-October 7th period continues to unfold and the implications this has for the PA, especially as far as issues of institutional adaptability, legitimacy, resilience, and governance in the context of persistent asymmetrical conflict and foreign domination are concerned.

Acknowledgments

The author acknowledges the support of An-Najah National University and appreciates the scholarly contributions of colleagues and institutions whose publicly available data and insights informed this research.

Author contributions

R.M.H.N. conceived the study, developed the research framework, supervised the research process, and contributed to the interpretation of findings and critical revision of the manuscript. M.B.I. was responsible for data collection, document analysis, literature review, drafting the manuscript, and organizing the results. Both authors contributed to the study design, analysis, and manuscript revision. All authors read and approved the final manuscript and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

Funding

No funding was received for this study.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Informed consent

Obtained.

Ethics approval

The Publication Ethics Committee of the Redfame Publishing.

The journal's policies adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

Provenance and peer review

Not commissioned; externally double-blind peer reviewed.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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