

**Americans for Justice in Palestine Action (AJP Action)**  
**Palestine Policy Memos | Policy Memo #1**  
**Ending US Complicity in Palestinian Authority Repression**

To better understand the US' role in enabling the Palestinian Authority's (PA) repression of Palestinians, **Americans for Justice in Palestine Action (AJP Action)**, a nonprofit organization advocating for legislation supporting the human rights of the Palestinian people, presents Members of Congress and their staff with the following memo.

The memo provides background on the emergence of the Palestinian Authority in 1994 as a follow-up to the Oslo I Accord and the increasingly repressive role of its security services over the years. It traces the US role in this repression, examining how the US and Israel employ the PA and its security services to perpetuate Israeli occupation rather than shore them up as the nucleus of Palestinian freedom and independence. The memo concludes with asks for your office: introduce, cosponsor, and vote for legislation that ends US complicity in PA violence and supports Palestinian self-determination and human rights.

## Introduction

In the early morning of June 24, 2021, some two dozen Palestinian Authority security forces dragged Nizar Banat from his bed in the West Bank city of Hebron. They [pepper sprayed](#) and [beat him](#) with metal sticks and rifle butts before taking him into custody. He was pronounced dead a few hours later, his [corpse covered in black and blue lesions](#).

Banat, a father of five, was a well-known activist who had intended to run in Palestinian parliamentary elections before they were cancelled earlier this year. He was a vocal critic of the PA, [accusing](#) it of corruption as well as being a

subcontractor of Israel, serving the interests of Israel’s military occupation of the West Bank, Gaza Strip, East Jerusalem, and Golan Heights.

Outrage erupted on social media at Banat’s death, and protests commenced in Ramallah, Hebron, Bethlehem, and beyond. PA forces [cracked down](#) on the peaceful demonstrators, firing tear gas and sound bombs at crowds. Plainclothes officers with the PA intelligence and preventative security services and those loyal to Fatah, the PA’s dominant political party, attacked protesters with rocks and bats. When the families of protesters who had been detained in Ramallah [staged a sit-in](#) in front of the city’s police detention center to demand their relatives’ release, PA security forces attacked and arrested some of them, too.

Such behavior by the PA security services is not an anomaly, nor is it new. In 2018, Human Rights Watch [published a report](#) on how the PA “routinely arrest[s] and torture[s] peaceful critics and opponents.” And as Palestinian researcher and writer Mariam Barghouti [told Democracy Now!](#) in July 2021, “We have been speaking about this for over a decade. Over a decade Palestinians [have been] getting beaten in the streets. Every time this happens a little media attention comes...but the support and the tolerance of it continues.”

Moreover, the United States government is implicated in this repression through its funding to the Palestinian Authority, as well as its larger and broader support for Israel. Barghouti pointed out that a significant amount of the financial resources supplied to the PA from the US, EU, and other actors goes to the security forces. The US also facilitates the training of PA security services through the [United States Security Coordinator for Israel and the Palestinian Authority](#).

“This is what Israel also wants,” Barghouti said, explaining that Israel desires the PA’s role to be one of a watchdog so that its occupation comes at a less of a cost. This was apparent in 2019 when President Trump ceased to fund the Palestinians at the request of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. However, Israeli officials then asked the US to reinstate funds – but only for the PA security forces, which, as the *Axios* article covering the incident [noted](#), “work hand in hand with the Israelis in the West Bank.”

## The Creation of the PA and Increasing Repression

The [Palestinian Authority](#) was created in 1994 through the Gaza-Jericho agreement, a follow-up to the Oslo I Accord of 1993. Though the PA was meant to serve only as a five-year interim governing body, at the end of which Israel and the PLO were to have agreed upon all permanent status issues and terminated the interim status of the PA, it continues to this day. The PA's security sector also has its origins in the Oslo Accords; the 1995 Oslo II agreement [mandated](#) a "strong police force" for the Palestinians, as well as joint Israeli-Palestinian security operations.

The original vision for the police force was one of [9,000 recruits](#), but by 1999 there were nearly 50,000 security personnel. Today, there are over 83,000 in the security sector in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, making up close to half of Palestinian public sector jobs and [comprising](#) one of the highest proportions of security personnel to civilians in the world. With such a large force, it is unsurprising that the Palestinian Authority spends around one-third of its annual budget on security – more than education, health care, and agriculture [combined](#).

As the PA has continued and its president, Mahmoud Abbas, has become more authoritarian – [remaining in power](#) for more than 15 years despite an original four-year term and [consolidating power](#) by assuming both the executive and legislative roles and issuing legislation through presidential decrees – the security services have also become more despotic. Such a repressive security sector in turn shores up the PA's autocracy. As Carnegie Middle East Center Senior Fellow Yezid Sayigh [observed](#) ten years ago, "the central emphasis...on Palestinian Authority Security Force development in the absence of democratic governance is actively contributing to [Palestinian] authoritarianism."

These conditions have resulted in an environment that is anything but secure for Palestinians. The 2018 Human Rights Watch report, for instance, [details](#) dozens of cases in a nearly two-year period in which security forces detained Palestinians without charge or trial, often for such nebulous reasons as insulting "higher authorities," creating "sectarian strife," or "harming the revolutionary unity." Detainees were often threatened, beaten, and/or forced into painful stress

positions for long periods. Human Rights Watch also found that few security officers were prosecuted and none had been convicted for wrongful arrest or torture.

Further, the PA security forces coordinate with Israel, arresting wanted Palestinian suspects such as activist and intellectual Basil al-Araj, who was detained and released by the PA in 2016 and later [assassinated](#) by Israel. PA security services also [collaborate](#) with Israel by suppressing Palestinian protests against Israeli soldiers and/or settlers, sharing intelligence, and holding regular trainings. Such coordination creates, [according](#) to analyst Alaa Tartir, security forces that “largely protect the security of the occupier and not that of the occupied.” As a result, Palestinians have no entity to turn to for protection from violence or for a guarantee of their rights; if Israel does not attack or suppress them, their own security forces will.

The United States helps fund and support this status quo, and research by political scientist Dana El Kurd [shows](#) that PA officials adhere to policies such as arresting opposition figures and security coordination with Israel to avoid any threat to US funding. Moreover, since 2006 the US has facilitated the training of Palestinian security forces, creating a cadre with US and Israeli interests, rather than the goal of Palestinian rights and independence, at its core.

## The US Role in PA Violations

The Second Palestinian Intifada (2000-2005) created a security vacuum, as Israel [destroyed](#) the PA’s security infrastructure when PA security forces participated in the uprising. After the Intifada, international actors led the reform of the PA’s security sector, chief among them the US, which in 2005 created the [United States Security Coordinator for Israel and the Palestinian Authority](#) (USSC) led by Lieutenant General Keith Dayton.

Dayton’s forces, as they became known, went through rigorous training that taught them to crack down on any Palestinian resistance and to coordinate closely with Israel. This has often meant repressing members of Hamas to protect Fatah’s power. After Hamas defeated Fatah in the 2006 parliamentary

elections, Dayton – at the behest of then-President George W. Bush, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, and Deputy National Security Adviser Elliott Abrams – [covertly supplied](#) Fatah strongman Muhammad Dahlan with equipment, salaries, and training for Fatah forces to precipitate civil war and remove Hamas from power. It is clear Dahlan’s men committed torture, including brutal beatings and shooting captors’ knees and feet, during their failed bid to oust Hamas.

While Dayton consistently denied that PA forces supported and facilitated by the United States engaged in torture, the leaked [Palestine Papers](#) also make clear that they in fact did. Dayton himself is recorded [having said](#) in a meeting with the Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erakat on June 24, 2009: “[T]he intelligence guys [from the General Intelligence Service] are good. The Israelis like them. They say they are giving as much as they are taking from them – but they are causing some problems for international donors because they are torturing people.”

Despite knowledge of such immoral and illegal activities, a month earlier Dayton had [delivered](#) a glowing address at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy claiming that the results of the PA-Israeli security partnership “have exceeded the most optimistic expectations...In coordination with the IDF [Israel Defense Forces], the [PA] battalions have sustained the rule of law and have begun to reestablish the PA’s authority.” Israeli leaders were also pleased with the trained PA forces. Dayton [said](#) in the same speech that IDF commanders asked him, “How many more of these new Palestinians can you generate, and how quickly?”

Indeed, the trained PA security forces do their job well – at least as far as Israel, the US, and PA elites are concerned – by repressing any dissent against Israel or the PA and shoring up PA authoritarianism. Yet maintaining such a status quo does not serve Palestinians like Nizar Banat and others who have been imprisoned, tortured, or killed for such small offenses as posting critiques of their corrupt and autocratic government on [social media](#).

Palestinians unsurprisingly largely [disapprove](#) of the security forces and their collaboration with Israel. Though President Abbas occasionally threatens to sever the PA-Israel security relationship to win public favor, coordination continues. In fact, close collaboration with Israel helped Abbas secure his own

domination after taking over from the late Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, and today helps him retain his power as well as ensure his position as the US and international community's leader of choice in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, as opposed to his Hamas rivals. As such, perhaps unsurprisingly, he has also [called](#) security collaboration a "Palestinian national interest" and a "sacred" doctrine.

Though during the Trump presidency the US cut funding to the PA to close to nothing and ended aid to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the Biden administration has announced that this year it plans to supply the Palestinians with [\\$360 million in aid](#). Much will go to UNRWA, though the amount does not fully make up for the Trump cuts. Such funding is being closely scrutinized by members of Congress, as the 2018 [Taylor Force Act](#) – signed into law by Trump – prohibits funding going to the Palestinian Authority until it eliminates its "martyrs' fund," which provides pensions to the families of political prisoners and Palestinians killed by Israel. However, Biden also [announced](#) that the US will resume security assistance programs, and called for [\\$33 million](#) for PA security forces in his FY2022 budget request.

Here it must be said that whatever aid the US provides the Palestinians, their political rights and self-determination are not realized. Further, at the same time the US [funds](#) Israel militarily in the amount of \$3.8 billion annually, making Israel the largest overall recipient of US foreign aid since World War II. As analyst Josh Ruebner [told Middle East Eye](#) in July 2021, "The Biden administration is pursuing the same strategy that the Obama administration pursued, which is to provide Israel with the weapons that it uses to demolish Palestinians' homes and Palestinian infrastructure in the Gaza Strip, only to have US aid come in and rebuild what Israel destroys, only to go on to the next cycle of Israel's destruction and US rebuilding."

How can Members of Congress end this destructive cycle so harmful to Palestinians and counterproductive for the United States?

## Ending US Complicity: Policy Recommendations

### **ASK: Condition US aid to the Palestinian Authority security services**

President Biden has proposed restarting security funding in the West Bank for FY 2022 in the amount of [\\$33 million](#) – approximately 15% of all US aid to the West Bank and Gaza Strip. While the State Department’s budget has passed the House, Congress still has the opportunity to ensure conditionality on International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement (INCLE) appropriations to the West Bank in this year’s budget cycle. Such a provision would withhold a percentage of funds until the State Department certifies and reports to the Committees on Appropriations that the Palestinian Authority is taking sustained and effective steps to improve human rights in the following ways:

- implement reforms that protect freedoms of expression, association, and peaceful assembly, including the ability of civil society organizations, human rights defenders, and the media to function without interference;
- hold Palestinian security forces accountable, including officers credibly alleged to have violated human rights;
- investigate and prosecute cases of extrajudicial killings, forced disappearances, and torture; and
- provide regular access for US officials to monitor such assistance in areas where the assistance is used.

**AJP Action** calls on Congress to amend INCLE funding to the Palestinian Authority so that at least half of the appropriated amount is withheld from obligation until the above suggested certification and reporting requirements are met.

**ASK: Introduce, cosponsor, and vote for legislation that gets to the root of Palestinian Authority human rights violations by holding Israel to account**

The root cause of PA security forces violations lies with Israel, namely its continuing and expanding military occupation and the international community's tolerance of it through such acts as the training of Palestinian forces to ensure the security of Jewish Israelis at the expense of Palestinians, as well as extensive military funding.

Though Israeli violations of Palestinian human rights are beyond the scope of this policy memo, a number of Congressional actions seek to hold Israel to account for abuses of international humanitarian law such as Palestinian home demolitions, the detention and ill-treatment of Palestinian children, and the unilateral annexation of Palestinian territory. One example is Representative Betty McCollum's (D-MN) [April 2021 act](#), Defending the Human Rights of Palestinian Children and Families Living Under Israeli Military Occupation, which prohibits Israel from using US taxpayer dollars in the West Bank and East Jerusalem for the above violations.

And though Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT) ultimately did not force a vote on his [May 2021 resolution](#) blocking the sale of \$735 million in weapons to Israel in the wake of Israeli attacks on Gaza that killed [at least 67 children](#), similar resolutions are likely to arise in the future.

**AJP Action** urges Members of Congress to cosponsor these bills or introduce their own that similarly hold Israel accountable for its mistreatment of Palestinian lives and property. Doing so sets the stage for a reality where human rights and security for all – Jewish Israelis and Palestinians alike – are given precedence.