

Democratization and the Palestinian National Authority: From State-in-the-Making to Statehood

HUSSEIN SIRRIYEH

Most attempts at writing about the establishment and consolidation of democracy are based on the assumption that democracy is a desirable political trait. This article also advocates this assumption despite acknowledging that democracy can still have its drawbacks. These include, *inter alia*, the encouragement of excessive individualism at times at the expense of community life and family cohesion, the rendering of state security vulnerable to internal and external threats that could manipulate the atmosphere of openness, and the relative laxity regarding the prevention of crime. Despite competing claims to democracy by rival political models (e.g., the socialist, participatory, consociational and the Islamic), it must be admitted that the evaluation of the democratic performance of a certain polity is still based, by and large, on the varieties of the liberal democratic model as they are generally practised in the West. However, the definition of democracy should not merely be restricted to the narrower sense of free elections and a multi-party system. It should also encompass a broader spectrum of ingredients, including government by consent and accountability, freedom of expression, tolerance, individual rights, legal and actual equality, self-determination, protection of minority rights, and the right to seek information.¹ In other words, democracy is a language of communication within both state and society and between them.

Whether it is fair to use a political value from one society for evaluating another society's performance is a debatable matter, in view of the different historical, social, political and security circumstances of the two societies. However, since the principal components of democracy have come to be much desired outside the Western world in recent years, it should be worthwhile conducting such an intellectual

Hussein Sirriyeh is Senior Lecturer in Arabic and Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Leeds.

exercise with reference to non-Western political systems. The case of the Palestinian National Authority (hereafter the PNA) presents particular problems because it is neither a fully-fledged state nor a revolutionary body. It occupies an intermediate position between the two and is encountering a wide range of political, security, economic and logistical problems that make the evaluation of its democratic credentials a rather difficult task. Nevertheless, as the Palestinian movement is in the process of a state-in-the-making and is probably heading towards statehood, it would be interesting to assess its present practices and make some projections on its democratic potential in light of its performance, limitations and prospects.

AUTHORITARIANISM OR DEMOCRACY: THE PNA STYLE

On the level of practice it is not difficult to observe that the undemocratic aspects of PNA policies are more predominant than the democratic ones, although certain positive features can be discerned. The elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council and the PNA president in January 1996, for example, were conducted by and large along democratic lines. Although these elections were subject to some criticisms regarding the subtle ways of running Fatah candidates as independents in order to gain both a Fatah majority, and Council composition favouring the Oslo Accords,² the elections were described as the fairest ever conducted in the Arab world, knowing that Yasser Arafat had tried, unsuccessfully, to persuade the anti-Oslo opposition not to boycott the elections.³ Moreover, Arafat's personal leadership has been in dispute. While acknowledging his merits in promoting Palestinian national goals, one biographer described Arafat's leadership style as dictatorial, due to his attempt to eliminate opponents critical of his policies.⁴ An alternative assessment has regarded Arafat as a co-ordinator and balancer between different Palestinian factions rather than a dictator.⁵ While both descriptions may have some validity, the consensus politics that used to characterize the work of the PLO Executive Committee and the Palestine National Council has not been advocated adequately by the PNA, once in power. The death of key Fatah personalities (such as Abu Jihad and Abu Iyyad) who would have moderated Arafat's monopoly of power, in addition to the highly delicate internal and regional situation in which the PNA has found itself since 1993, which necessitates decisive action, probably make Arafat less open to democratic consultation.

However, the democratic record of the PNA has been tarnished by other shortcomings. Although the Palestinian Legislative Council was freely elected, it does not have the power that parliaments normally have in democratic countries. What has been pointed out, in particular, is the unwillingness of the PNA to make itself accountable to the council and responsive to its many resolutions, including matters such as finance and

corruption,⁶ knowing that decisions regarding other security and political matters are too complex and sensitive to be taken by the council and imposed on the PNA. This problem becomes further magnified by the fact that the council members, as newly established parliamentarians tend to have an idealised image of how the council as a parliament should act, regardless of the difficult and constraining situation that the PNA as a transitional authority faces in the context of the Palestine-Israel dispute, as will be explained below.

The more problematic issue is connected with the conduct of the security forces in silencing the opposition and maintaining public order, along with the derivative issues of human rights violations and press censorship. The basic problem underlying the discontent of the opposition is a general dissatisfaction with the Oslo Accords and the further frustration with the lack of progress on the peace settlement, even within this perceived limited framework, along with the disappointing political, economic and social implications for the Palestinian community. Since the political leadership is not in a position to resolve these problems successfully in time, the task of dealing with the opponents and critics is left to the security forces (including the police). While the Oslo-II Agreement referred to the task of the security forces as consisting of acting on all expressions of violence and terror and the exchanging of information and co-ordination with the Israeli security force,⁷ the policy of suppression has been even more broadly defined to include all forms of non-violent opposition. What makes the conduct of these organisations less accountable and prone to the abuse of power is their multiplicity (there are about nine of them), their overlapping and confused responsibilities, the lack of coordination between them and the absence of a central institution that could exercise control and impose discipline on their activities, the only real instrument of control being Arafat himself. It has been mentioned that Arafat had personally 'encouraged the proliferation' of these organisations,⁸ possibly to inhibit the rise of power centres that would challenge the PNA. The absence of an effective control by an identifiable institution led to the excessive manipulation of responsibilities by members and leaders of these organizations. An obvious result of this has been a violation of human rights, as recorded by local and international organisations. These include detention without trial, the holding of suspects without specific charges, the lack of proper trials, torture, ill-treatment and the implementation of the death sentence. The scale of violations has increased with the establishment of the State Security Court by Arafat in February 1995, as Amnesty International reports indicate, with the repressive measures ultimately resulting from Israeli (and possibly American) pressure on the PNA to arrest those accused of perpetrating violence.⁹ Related also to the repressive policy implemented by the security forces, has been the progressive self- and PNA-imposed censorship on Palestinian mass media including the press, radio and TV.

This policy, according to an observer, has been increasingly implemented since the signing of the Wye II Agreement between Israel and the PNA in October 1998.

What has been particularly censored is the news on the Islamic opposition's activities against Israel and the PNA, the violation of human rights and the intelligence co-operation between the Palestinian and Israeli security forces.¹⁰

The PNA's restrictive policies have also been extended into the area of civil society institutions, the flourishing of which is regarded as an important symbol of modern democracies. The Palestinian civil society has been growing since the early 1980s, especially during the years of the Palestinian intifada which erupted in 1987. As is the case with other Middle Eastern states, the PNA regarded the exclusion of 'state' authority from this domain as a threat to its prestige and sovereignty and perceived these institutions as non-political avenues through which political activists could channel their political acts.

Therefore, attempts have been made by the PNA, both through direct policy measures and through the security forces, to contain and control the activities of these institutions. Such measures, according to observers, include the attempt to incorporate some of these societies or their leading members into the PNA institutions, the requirement for Non-Governmental Organizations to register with the PNA Ministry of Social Welfare and the drive by the PNA to control their financial resources, both by requiring them not to accept foreign funds without permission and by lobbying foreign donors to direct funds to the PNA, which would then distribute funds to the organizations as it sees fit.

Moreover, the PNA intelligence organisations have been monitoring the activities of these organisations and harassing, intimidating or even arresting some of their active members.¹¹ The pervasive repressive policies of the PNA, combined with its failure to deliver on the peace process, reached intolerable proportions by late 1999. On 27 November 1999, a group of twenty political activists, members of the Legislative Council and other intellectuals published a statement accusing the PNA of misleading the people by raising false expectations with regard to the attainment of their national rights, exploiting them, getting involved in corruption and heightening the social, economic and moral frustration of the Palestinian people. Without citing Arafat's name, the statement accused the PNA president of surrounding himself with opportunists and corrupt elements, and called on the Palestinian people to stand together to confront corruption and tyranny.¹² In reaction to this statement, the PNA imprisoned several signatories and accused those who signed the statement of having undermined national unity. Later, under domestic and external Palestinian pressure, the PNA released the prisoners. Since the statement was the latest in a series of accusations of PNA corruption, especially in the financial field, raised by the opposition, members of the Palestinian public and the Palestinian Legislative Council, Arafat issued a

decree on 11 January 2000 establishing a Higher Council for Development that would exercise control over the financial input and investment and be monitored centrally by the PNA.¹³

However, this statement still demonstrates the increasing interaction between the wider level of frustration generated by the lack of satisfactory achievement of the peace settlement and the repressive policies practised by both the PNA and the Israeli authorities against the opposition. The personal criticism of the PNA president reveals the patrimonial nature of Arafat's leadership. Whereas the relationship between the government and the governed is run in modern democratic countries through institutions, Arafat tends to give his leadership a personalised character. According to a close observer of the Palestinian scene, Arafat's choice of his aides and ministers is based on personal and factional loyalty rather than on competence and efficiency.¹⁴

Before we pass a judgment on its authoritarian record, however, it is necessary to examine the difficult situation in which the PNA is operating in order to be able to appreciate some of the dilemmas that have contributed to its failure to democratise. This is not to suggest, however, that the absence of such dilemmas would automatically turn the PNA-system into a democratic institution.

THE DYNAMICS OF PRESSURES AND CONSTRAINTS:

THE PNA DILEMMA

Several theses could be put forward to explain the authoritarian orientation of the PNA. Prominent among them is the security thesis. It has both an external Israeli and an internal Palestinian component. It is public knowledge now that Israel has been putting pressure on the PNA to curb violent opposition to the Oslo process by holding the PNA directly responsible for uncontrollable acts of violence against Israeli targets. Besides acting on its own in dealing with threats to its security, Israel sometimes retaliated by putting pressure on the PNA, either politically through stalling the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, especially during the time of the Likud-led government from 1996-99, or economically by closing its border on the green line, thus preventing Palestinian workers from entering Israel.

However, although the Oslo Agreements contain a commitment on the part of the PNA to suppress active opponents, it has been argued that what Israel demanded of the PNA has been to suppress acts of violence against it, not to commit human rights violations by arresting or torturing those involved in peaceful opposition.¹⁵ Part of the reason for those wider PNA policies may have been to make an impression on the Israelis by showing them the ostensible effectiveness and seriousness of the PNA in suppressing anti-Oslo opposition. Another important part of the explanation lies in the internalised feeling of insecurity experienced by the PNA itself. Its credibility in the eyes of the Palestinian public has

been undermined by the perceived image that it has been acting as a surrogate of the Israelis, by its failure to deliver on the peace settlement and by its status as a quasi-government, not seen to be taken as seriously as formal governments in sovereign states. It is partly out of this feeling of insecurity that the PNA has been attempting to impose its authority on the community by resorting to forceful measures against those who question or challenge this authority.

This experience of insecurity is also related to another thesis which may further explain the PNA's authoritarian drive. Such a thesis may be termed the Insider-Outsider thesis. This thesis stipulates that, despite the emotional and familial ties between the formerly exiled PLO leaders and the community in the West Bank and Gaza, the PNA leadership is regarded as an 'outsider' political elite who have been attempting to consolidate their power over an 'insider' counter-elite in the West Bank and Gaza, who do not completely trust the leadership, a situation exacerbated by the PNA's limited political experience.¹⁶ This thesis is not entirely unfounded, for there exists a perception of being from inside or outside between the community in the West Bank and Gaza and the diaspora Palestinians, both on the level of leadership and the broader social scene. However, the thesis should be qualified on two grounds. First, in terms of the staffing of the PNA leadership and its institutions as well as the classification of both opponents and supporters of the PNA and Fateh, the lines cannot be sharply drawn between insiders and outsiders, as both categories of people are present at all levels and Arafat is said to have been attempting to maintain a balance.¹⁷ The second qualification is more political in nature. Since the Palestinian leaders from the diaspora (including Arafat) have had long-standing credentials in leading the Palestinian movement, they tend to be slightly more predominant in senior positions in the PNA. They also tend to consider Palestinian issues from a broader perspective than that of the community in the West Bank and Gaza, incorporating all Palestinians inside and outside these territories. They see their mission as being to re-integrate the fragmented Palestinian society rather than look at it from the rather narrower view taken by some leaders from the West Bank and Gaza. Hence it is conceivable that there is a difference in perspective between the local leaders in the West Bank and Gaza and those from outside. To the extent that this challenge exists, the 'outsider' PNA leaders tend to assert their will over the insiders, thus resulting in authoritarian policies.

Arising out of the PNA broader perspective on the Palestinian community is what may be called the national unity thesis, which is usually advocated by the PNA leadership. Basically it calls for the need to subordinate the Palestinian divisions and differences for the achievement of national solidarity in an effort to unite Palestinian ranks, in order to deal with the Israeli problem. This thesis predates the establishment of the PNA and it goes back to the 1960s when the Palestinian national movement was established. However, its latest

expression is found in the PNA reaction to the statement of the twenty, which was signed on 27 November 1999 and which was critical of the PNA. The PNA accused those who signed the statement of having gone astray from the national path and undermined Palestinian national unity.¹⁸ This thesis has found a favourable reception among both opponents and supporters of the PNA, as well as with the Palestinian public, because of the perceived threat to Palestinian national aspirations and the expected readiness of the Palestinians to give priority to the achievement of national interest over other factional considerations. However, this thesis has also been utilized by the PNA to suppress dissent, partly out of a genuine desire to strengthen the Palestinian position vis-à-vis Israel, partly out of a feeling of insecurity on the part of the PNA regarding its status as a governing authority and partly in an attempt to induce the critics and opponents to conform to PNA policy on the peace process. The thesis is also used to silence critics of PNA failures and to justify various methods of repression against elements seen as threatening to the PNA position and policy. It is in this sense that any calls for democratization that could have this potential threat to the PNA are either disregarded or suppressed.

The ability of both senior and junior leaders of the PNA to act in this way becomes more possible in the absence of legitimate institutionalised communication between the PNA and the community. Hence, what may be called the institutional thesis has gained prominence in explaining the lack of democracy in the Palestinian territories. This rests on the claim that during the 1980s, especially during the era of the intifada, the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza managed to build a structure of grass root institutions which was democratic and pluralistic and which involved a devolution of authority to the lower strata of society. As the new elite of the PNA found this structure an impediment to its attempt to consolidate power, they began to attack it by replacing it with centralization and a personalization of authority.¹⁹ A further elaboration of the thesis indicates that the Palestinian Legislative Council, as an embodiment of institutionalization, has failed to perform its functions due, amongst other reasons, to its unsuccessful working relationship with the PNA, the lack of clarity of its mandate, the failure of the PNA to make the transition from the stage of revolution to that of statchood, and the Israeli lack of interest in seeing the emergence of Palestinian democratic institutions.²⁰

Although it is powerful and has its merits, the institutional thesis needs to be further clarified. In view of the transitional nature of the PNA and the very limited sovereignty it has, it is difficult to envisage the establishment of an adequate number of institutions that are needed to run the various affairs of the Palestinian community. Even more importantly, although some relevant institutions do exist at different levels, it is noticeable that some major ones are not operating satisfactorily because the authority of the individuals in command and in

positions of responsibility transcends these institutions and are not limited and disciplined by them. The task of running all-encompassing institutions becomes even more difficult for the PNA when one takes into account what may be described as the logistical thesis. The PNA controls only very small portions of West Bank and Gaza territory and those which are under its control are disjointed and disconnected by other areas either under Israeli or shared control, or by Jewish settlements and the concomitant roads and communications network linked to them. This arrangement not only impedes communication and co-ordination, which are essential processes in any democracy, but it also weakens the PNA image and enhances its sense of insecurity with regard to its sovereignty over the Palestinian community. This, in part, may explain the PNA anxiety to demonstrate its ability to control these areas by occasional resort to authoritarian methods.

The discussion of these theses is meant to explain the problematic situation of the PNA rather than to seek justifying answers for its resort to authoritarian policies. It is clear from the discussion that, notwithstanding these problems and pressures, there is a latitude for the PNA to exercise more democratic rule, such as involving the Legislative Council and even the opposition in the general aspects of its policy-making, improving its record on human rights, curbing corruption, especially at the level of senior leadership, and making some of the less sensitive policies in the economic, social and other developmental fields more accountable to the community and the Legislative Council. It is possible that some of these dilemmas that the PNA has been facing as a transitional authority could be overcome with the possible transfer of more responsibility to it and the eventual establishment of a Palestinian state. Although the present record of the PNA may not show encouraging signs about the future emergence of democracy during statehood, it may be fairer to attempt to transcend the present situation and venture some projections on the limits and likelihood of democratic development as a state comes into being, without losing sight of what has actually been happening on the ground so far.

THE PALESTINIAN STATE: AUTHORITARIAN AND DEMOCRATIC SCENARIOS

One can advance both pessimistic and optimistic arguments respectively on the authoritarian and democratic prospects of a future Palestinian state. The most pessimistic and frequently adopted explanation is based on the cultural argument. This argument maintains that Arab-Islamic culture contains ingredients and elements incompatible with modern democracy. These include: a belief in divine rather than popular sovereignty, emphasis on maintaining public order as opposed to anarchy, the lack of fundamental equality for women and religious minorities, the emphasis on primordial ties (clan, tribe, sect) as opposed

to common citizenship and the lack of a tradition of liberal tolerance, pluralism and dissent. Such views are adopted by both non-Arab as well as some Arab writers and intellectuals.²¹ The cultural explanation of democracy tends to also be emphasized by proponents of modernization theory, relating the commitment to democratic participation, moderation and tolerance of opposition to the level of education.²² Based on these conceptions, one may infer that, since the Palestinians are part of the Arab world and are mostly Muslims, a future Palestinian polity is expected to be authoritarian in orientation. The cultural argument is difficult to dispel completely, in view of the fact that one's personality is partially moulded by one's culture. This explanation does have its shortcomings, however. Culture is not static but continuously subject to change, depending on advancements in the areas of socio-economic development, education, interaction with other cultures and the lessons derived from the rise of common crises. Such a change may take a long time to emerge, although it cannot be guaranteed. Added to this possibility is the fact that, even though the practice in Islamic countries tends to be authoritarian, the Islamic text is open to interpretation both inimical to and compatible with the modern notions of democracy.²³ On the Palestinian level, the cultural argument could be moderated (rather than completely ruled out) by the fact that the level of education among the Palestinians is very high in comparison with other Arab-Islamic countries and, in line with the premises of the modernization theory, a future achievement by the Palestinians of a better level of socio-economic development under statehood may make the Palestinian political system more amenable to democratic development.

Another pessimistic argument, which is not unrelated to the cultural one, may be called the Arab analogy argument. It rests on the assumption that a future Palestinian state, being an Arab one, is likely to adopt authoritarian policies similar to those of other Arab states surrounding it. One variant of this pessimistic argument equates the future Palestinian state with other Arab states by regarding it as what Samuel Huntington called a 'praetorian' state, seeing it as characterized by a low level of institutionalisation and a weak political structure in an unstable political climate.²⁴ A slightly more moderate and less pessimistic version expects the future Palestinian regime to 'replicate' other Arab regimes in view of the basic similarity in structure and orientation between both sides, rather than grow into a 'full-blown' democracy.²⁵

However popular the argument based on Arab analogy is, it still needs to be qualified. One counter-argument is advocated by William Quandt, who maintains that, in view of their mistreatment by arbitrary and undemocratic Arab regimes, the Palestinians are likely to be disposed to avoid the risks of one man rule. An extension of this argument also indicates that no matter how much the Palestinians 'abhor' the Israeli occupation, they are likely to be influenced by the atmosphere of free

press and the working of the parliamentary system in neighbouring Israel, that can eject governments that fail to deliver, and also by the democratic experiment in Jordan.²⁶ Another counter-argument that may be advanced against the Arab analogy is based on the pluralistic nature of the Palestinian community, in contrast to other Arab communities. Some aspects of this pluralism, as one Palestinian writer pointed out, include the need to balance social power and mutual interest in a society marked by familial and tribal relations, the Palestinian experience in armed struggle which opened the way for the participation of diverse groups and organizations, the balancing of power between various Palestinian political factions and the absence of a strong Palestinian central authority that has the capacity to impose its will on all Palestinian groups.²⁷ A further elaboration of this explanation could be based on the fact that, in view of their dispersion, the Palestinians have come to be exposed to various political and social currents in the societies in which they have lived. If and when they come together to live in one community, they can only do so by adopting a policy of tolerance and compromise whereby these various currents could come to terms with one another, thus rendering pluralism a necessary and legitimate characteristic of any future Palestinian polity. A further build-up of the argument against Arab analogy could be derived from the somewhat cosmopolitan nature of the Palestinian society, whereby Palestinians from various backgrounds in different parts of the world, both Arab and non-Arab, are likely to become partners in one society in a future Palestinian polity. In this sense, the Arab analogy could, in fact, be countered by the presence of an Israeli analogy on the Palestinian side in view of the similarity between the Palestinian and Jewish experience, thus raising the possibility that a future Palestinian political community may exhibit the pluralistic features of the present Israeli community. The Palestinian urge to democracy may be further facilitated by the fact, pointed out by Quandt, that many Palestinians had lived or received education abroad, often in Western countries and been accustomed to ideas of democracy,²⁸ and by implication are likely to press a future Palestinian state to adopt democratic ways of life, especially if they choose to live there or become dual citizens.

However persuasive, the counter-argument against the Arab analogy should not be overemphasized. The future Palestinian state is likely to be influenced by the prevailing political practice in the Arab world. Palestinians share the same culture as other Arab communities to the extent that culture has an impact on the authoritarian orientation of the state. Moreover, the Palestinian state is likely to be dependent for economic aid on some Arab regimes and many Palestinians have become accustomed to the authoritarian atmosphere in the Arab countries in which they have lived. In fact, this argument may even be pursued by maintaining that the Palestinian community is likely to be a microcosm of the Arab world in view of the settlement of many Palestinians in

different Arab countries where their personalities may have been moulded by the local culture there. On the basis of these arguments and counter-arguments, a balanced judgment would be to maintain that, though a future Palestinian state is unlikely to become a full democracy in complete contrast to other Arab countries, it is expected to be more democratic in nature than these Arab states.

Further pessimistic as well as optimistic projections on the authoritarian or democratic character of a future Palestinian state may be derived from Samuel Huntington's survey of democratic experiments worldwide. On the pessimistic side, some of the major obstacles to democracy which, in his view, apply to the Middle East and other Asian and African countries include the absence of past experience of democracy (although it is not considered a decisive impediment) as well as the absence or weakness of real commitment on the part of political leaders to democratic values (which is regarded as a serious obstacle). On the optimistic side, Huntington expects that the worldwide 'democratic revolution' may create an external environment conducive to democracy, although it would not generate the internal conditions necessary for democracy in a specific country.²⁹ The experience argument could be potentially optimistic for the Palestinian case. The Palestinians have not had experience of political independence in the modern period since Ottoman times and they are still in a premature state, possibly on the road to statehood, whatever level of sovereignty such statehood may entail. It is possible that with more experience in state-building and management the Palestinians may succeed pragmatically in improving their democratic practice, principally in view of the diverse nature of the Palestinian political society and the external, possibly Western, pressure that may be conducive to less authoritarian and arbitrary use of power. On the level of a personal leadership model and commitment to democratic values, one cannot completely rule out the impact of the cultural argument, as personalities are products of cultural milieu, as well as the delicate and complex situation experienced by the Palestinians at this stage, which may compel the leadership to take forceful decisions. The expected departure of Arafat (due to age and illness) may give way to a less authoritarian, less patrimonial and more compromising leadership, though, especially since the successor is not expected to have the strong political credentials, charisma and, possibly, national legitimacy that Arafat has managed to achieve over his long career as leader of the Palestinian national movement since 1969. A leadership change need not necessarily be an optimal guarantee of democratic implementation, though. As for the globalization argument, which is implied in Huntington's use of worldwide 'democratic revolution', it cannot be ignored easily. Undoubtedly, the implications of the fall of authoritarian regimes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union and the increasing cultural, economic and political impact of the West have been felt worldwide, including in the Middle Eastern countries, and may have

induced some of them to liberalize their systems. Since the Palestinian polity is likely to depend on outside aid and is expected to be keen to secure legitimacy from the international community, it may find itself under more pressure than other Arab countries to democratize in order to improve and bolster its international image.

While acknowledging the authoritarian and undemocratic tendencies within the Palestinian community, one needs to emphasize that democratic potential of any future Palestinian polity would substantially depend on the success or failure of the peace process and the ability of the Palestinian political community to make the transition from its present stage of state-in-the-making to proper statehood. If the PNA were to successfully secure a satisfactory Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories that would contribute greatly to the legitimacy, credibility and sense of internal and external security on its part as a governing institution. The prospects for such a withdrawal have improved with the transfer of power from the Likud to Labour since May 1999, but they are still dim in the light of the very complicated issues to be resolved in the Final Status negotiations, as well as the internal (Israeli and Palestinian) and external (Arab and possibly Islamic) dynamics involved in the process that impose constraints on the Palestinian and Israeli policy-makers. It is obvious from the practice of PNA rule in the West Bank and Gaza that the fierce opposition to the PNA, along with concomitant authoritarian and forceful measures by the Authority against its citizens are often directly connected with the failure to secure success in the peace negotiations with Israel. For example, the PNA's repressive measures against those who signed the statement of the twenty have been followed by a further challenging statement issued by leading Palestinian political and intellectual personalities on 23 February 2000 calling on the PNA to emulate the Lebanese organization Hizbullah in its resistance to Israel.³⁰ Although the PNA this time did not respond aggressively to the statement, it reveals the extent of internal challenge it faces and the deep sense of insecurity and lack of credibility that failure in the peace process could cause its position in the eyes of its people. This has been an important factor that has sometimes compelled the PNA to act harshly in defence.

While the present performance of the PNA cannot be discounted in any attempt to make projections about its democratic prospects in a future Palestinian state, it would be unfair to presume that a future state would be a replication of the present PNA system. An appealing argument against this pessimistic scenario may be derived from the premises of the transition theory of democracy, although this theory should not be strictly and literally applied to every case, including the Palestinian one. This theory, advocated by Dankwart Rustow, conceives of democratic development in four main phases: a stage when a national unity is being established; a preparatory phase of prolonged and inconclusive political struggle; a decision phase when a historical

movement of choosing a democratic path is taken; and a habituation phase witnessing a consolidation of democracy.³¹ In a broad sense, and despite the many difficulties, the stage of national unity among the Palestinians has been emerging and they are likely to be passing through the second stage of political struggle. It remains to be seen whether during the decision phase, when a Palestinian state is established, a commitment to a more democratic and pluralistic order will be made. However, even if such a decision is made, it is expected to encounter problems and setbacks in view of the interaction of various factors previously discussed, that would give shape collectively to the kind of political system that may emerge under Palestinian statehood. Moreover, the process of democratic building, if and when it takes off, is likely to be a long, slow and gradual process, as is the peace process itself. A fully sovereign Palestinian state (which may resolve a number of present PNA problems) is not likely to emerge immediately with the projected end of the Final Status negotiations in September 2000. Such a state would start with a substantially diminished sovereignty that may incrementally improve over time. The achievement of full sovereignty is likely to have a significant impact on the Palestinian decision to democratize and determine in what ways and to what extent it takes place.

NOTES

1. See Phillippe C. Schmitter and Terry Lynn Karl, 'What Democracy is ... And is Not', in Larry Diamond and Marc F. Plattner (eds), *The Global Resurgence of Democracy*, Baltimore & London, 1996, 2nd ed., pp.50-7.
2. Lamis Adoni, 'The Palestinian Elections: Moving Toward Democracy or One-Party Rule?', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. XXV, No. 3 (Spring 1996), p.6; and Jamil Hilal, 'The Effects of the Oslo Agreement on the Palestinian Political System', in George Giacaman and Dag Jorund Lonning (eds), *After Oslo, New Realities, Old Problems*, London and Chicago, 1998, pp.131-4.
3. Barry Rubin, *The Transformation of Palestinian Politics, From Revolution to State-Building*, Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1999, p.5.
4. Said K. Aburish, *Arafat, From Defender to Dictator*, London, 1998, p.323.
5. Rubin, *The Transformation*, pp.88, 93.
6. Ziad Abu Amr, 'The Palestinian Legislative Council: A Critical Assessment', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. XXVI, No. 4 (Summer 1997), p.91.
7. Graham Usher, 'The Politics of Internal Security: The PA's New Intelligence Services', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. XXV, No.2 (Winter 1996), pp.21-2.
8. Beverley Milton-Edwards, 'Palestinian State-Building: Police and Citizens as Test of Democracy', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (May 1998), p.106.
9. See *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. XXV, No. 1 (Autumn 1995), pp.141-7 and Vol. XXVI, No. 3 (Spring 1997), pp.146-9. See also report of the human rights activist and former member of the Legislative Council, Haidar Abd Al-Shafi in *al-Hayat* (London), 9 March 1999.
10. Khalid Amayreh, 'Domesticating Dissent', *Middle East International*, No. 597, 9 April 1999, p.22.
11. Denis J. Sullivan, 'NGOs in Palestine: Agents of Development and Foundation of Civil Society', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. XXV, No. 3 (Spring 1996), pp. 96-9; Glenn E. Robinson, 'Authoritarianism with a Palestinian Face', *Current History*, Vol. 97, No. 615 (January 1998), p.16; and Khalil Shikaki, 'The Peace Process, National

- Reconstruction and the Transition to Democracy in Palestine', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. XXV, No. 2 (Winter 1996), pp.9-14.
12. Graham Usher, 'Arafat's New Cabinet-Back Me or Sack Me', *Middle East International*, No. 581, 21 August 1998, pp.3-4.
 13. See *al-Hayat*, 13 January 2000.
 14. Text of statement in *Middle East International*, No. 614, 10 December 1999. See also *al-Hayat*, 27 and 30 November 1999 and 2, 4 and 6 December 1999; and *Middle East International*, No. 617, 28 January 2000.
 15. Rubin, *The Transformation*, p.54.
 16. Robinson, 'Authoritarianism', p.13.
 17. Rubin, *The Transformation*, pp.88-9, 91 and 101.
 18. See *Al-Hayat*, 29 and 30 November 1999.
 19. Robinson, 'Authoritarianism', pp.15, 17-18.
 20. Ziad Abu-Amr, 'The Palestinian Legislative Council', pp.93-5.
 21. For an overview of the cultural debate see the introduction in Rex Bryner, Bahgat Korany and Paul Noble (eds), *Political Liberation and Democratization in the Arab World Vol. 1, Theoretical Perspectives*, Boulder and London, pp.6-10.
 22. See David Porter, David Goldblatt, Margaret Kiloh and Paul Lewis (eds), *Democratization*, Cambridge, 1997, pp.11-13, 28-9.
 23. On this debate see Nazih Ayubi, 'Islam and Democracy', in David Porter et al, *Democratization*, pp.345-66; Samuel P. Huntington, 'Democracy's Third Wave', in Larry Diamond and Marc F. Plattner, *The Global Resurgence of Democracy*, pp.18-21; and John Esposito and James Piscatori, 'Democratization and Islam', *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 45, No. 3 (Summer 1991), pp.427-40.
 24. Amos Perlmutter, 'Arafat's Police Force', *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 73, No. 4 (July/August 1994), pp.8-11; on Huntington's conception of a praetorian polity see his *Political Order in Changing Societies*, New Haven and London, 1968, pp.79-80.
 25. Ahmad S. Khalidi, 'The Palestinians' First Excursion into Democracy', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. XXV, No. 4 (Summer 1996), p.21.
 26. See William Quandt, 'The Urge for Democracy', *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 73, No. 4 (July/August 1994), pp.2-3.
 27. Ziad Abu-Amr, 'Pluralism and the Palestinians', *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (July 1996), pp.88-9.
 28. William Quandt, 'The Urge for Democracy', p.3.
 29. Huntington, 'Democracy's Third Wave', pp.7-8 and 11-13.
 30. See *al-Hayat*, 24 February 2000.
 31. See Dankwart A. Rustow, 'Transition to Democracy: Toward a Dynamic Model', *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (April 1970), pp.353-61; and David Porter et al., *Democratization*, pp.13-18.