

Palestinian National Authority

Palestinian National Authority, (PNA), interim body created to administer Palestinian-populated areas of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The PNA shares power with and is subordinate to the Israeli government, which seized the West Bank and Gaza Strip in the Six-Day War of 1967. The PNA was established as a result of the 1993 Oslo peace agreement signed by Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), providing for incremental Israeli withdrawal from most of the West Bank and Gaza Strip and limited Palestinian self-rule in these areas. A nominated PNA took office in Gaza, the principal city in the Gaza Strip, shortly after Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and the West Bank city of Jericho in May 1994. Further withdrawals in 1995 and 1997 extended the PNA's jurisdiction to additional Palestinian areas of the West Bank. A 1998 accord mandated more Israeli withdrawals, but Israel froze the implementation of the accord after one small withdrawal. In the PNA's first popular legislative and executive elections, held in January 1996, PLO chairman Yasir Arafat was chosen as president. Under the 1993 peace agreement the PNA was to govern for a five-year period until May 1999. At that time, Israeli-Palestinian negotiations regarding the final status of the Palestinian areas, including the possible establishment of a permanent government, were to be completed. However, stalls in the peace process have delayed final-status talks.

The duties of government in the West Bank and Gaza Strip are divided between Israel and the PNA. Israel maintains nearly complete control over the foreign affairs of the territories. Israel also controls Jewish settlements and military installations, as well as security and travel between Palestinian-populated areas in the rural parts of the West Bank. While the PNA handles security in the Gaza Strip and in cities of the West Bank, security for most other Palestinian areas in the West Bank falls under the joint control of Israel and the PNA. Under the terms of the 1998 accord, the PNA opened the Gaza International Airport in November 1998; Israel maintains considerable control over the airport's security. The PNA has nearly complete authority over most civil matters in Palestinian areas, including levying taxes, regulating business, and providing education, health care, and social services. The PNA also represents Palestinians in negotiations with Israel regarding further Israeli withdrawals from the West Bank and the final status of the Palestinian areas. In this role, the PNA works alongside the PLO.

The PNA is governed by an executive and legislative branch. The Executive Authority is led by a president (preferred term of the Palestinians), or head (preferred term of the Israelis), and is composed of several ministries. These include ministries for security, local government, justice, finance, trade, labour, information, telecommunications, health, housing, education, sports, and religion. Some of the operations of the ministries are supplemented by semi-governmental bodies, such as the Palestine Council for Development and Reconstruction, which channels foreign aid to Palestinians. Minimal funding—much of it allocated to security—has severely limited the functions of the Executive Authority. For this and other reasons, the primary function of the executive branch has been the conducting of negotiations with Israel.

The legislative branch of the PNA, called the Palestinian Council, is made up of 88 members elected by Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and West Bank. The council was first elected in January 1996 and met for the first time in March 1996 in Gaza. The council is responsible for generating legislation but thus far has been overshadowed by the executive branch; it has yet to gain a significant role in Palestinian affairs.

Although the offices of the president and the Palestinian Council are located in Gaza, many of its other offices and facilities are scattered throughout the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. This diffusion is due in part to Gaza's lack of adequate facilities; it is also, however, a reflection of the Palestinians' hope that they may eventually use East Jerusalem, which Israel controls, as their capital. The agreements that established the PNA in 1993 forbid placing the Palestinian capital in Jerusalem.

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