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The Scars of Occupation: An Eye-Witness Report

MICHAEL C. HUDSON*

Most Americans have not experienced life under enemy military occupation, yet one frequently reads in the American press that the Israeli occupation is relatively liberal and benign, as occupations go. After a month of conversations with Palestinians under Israeli occupation I am inclined to doubt the validity of such assertions. The objective evidence of Israeli intentions in the territories, which can only be described as “creeping” (if not galloping) annexation, is now ubiquitous: the building of settlements, the continuing seizure of land and the manipulation of water resources. The subjective factors, which account for the grim outlook of the Palestinians, are manifested by the sense of powerlessness and degradation that accompanies the checkpoints, the armed patrols, the military bureaucracy and the punishment for alleged resistance or political activity.

CREEPING ANNEXATION

It is one thing to read about the “thickening” of the occupation — the land seizures, new settlements, growing monopoly of water resources, etc. It is something else to see it. Greater Jerusalem and the Jordan Valley are the two areas in which Israelization is most advanced, but it is clear that under the present Likud government the main towns in the highlands of the West Bank are also receiving new attention.

The Jerusalem situation represents the occupation in its most blatant, aggressive form. It is not just that Israel unilaterally annexed a grotesquely

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gerrymandered territory far beyond the historic city limits, stretching up to the Kalandia airport in the north and down to the lands of Beit Jala and Bethlehem in the south – an illegal act which has received no international acceptance. But it is also here that the cutting edge of the occupation is most evident. At least 50,000 Israelis have moved into Arab Jerusalem since the 1967 war and in a few years will probably equal or surpass in number the some 80,000 Arab Jerusalemites.¹ The new settlers have been located in a belt of highrise apartment communities surrounding the city from the north, south and east. The new northern suburbs to the north, notably Ramot Eshkol and French Hill, appear to be fairly well populated, while parts of the huge Gilo complex to the south are fully functioning. To a visitor who had not taken the old Jerusalem-Bethlehem road since 1966 (before 1967 the only way to get from one town to the other) it was a real shock to come upon East Talpiot in 1979. One literally could not recognize the former landscape, so transformed had it been by this 3,000 unit residential complex on the southern slope of Jebel al-Mukabbir (UN Government House Hill). Incongruously nestled along the fringes of this new suburb are remnants of an Arab village.

The final link in the chain designed to seal greater Jerusalem off from the West Bank and the Arab hinterland is the Adumim urban-industrial agglomeration, now well into development along the road from Jerusalem to Jericho and Amman. Ma'ale Adumim "A" is an industrial complex (food processing, metallurgy) tucked into the parched Judean Hills just off the Amman road to the right, adjacent to an Israeli army camp. Not far away, on the other side of the road, is the site of Ma'ale Adumim "B", which will eventually constitute a small city. Interestingly, the Adumim complex is being administered, not by the Gush Emunim or the army, but by the Israeli Ministry of Housing: with its planned 5,000 housing units, this is far beyond the scale of most of the West Bank settlements. Knowledgeable Palestinian observers see Adumim as the most dangerous of all the settlements, for not only does it once again involve expropriating privately owned Arab land, it also places a crucial new obstacle in the way of the integration of Arab Jerusalem into any future Palestinian homeland. At the site dedication of Adumim "B" in August 1979, Israeli officials were quoted as saying "There will no longer be a line between what we had before the Six Day War and what we have in these days of redemption," and "We are putting the settlements all around Jerusalem so there will never be any question of whether it is part of Israel."²

¹ Ann Mosely Lesch, "Israeli Settlements in the Occupied Territories," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. VII, No. 1 (Autumn 1977), pp. 27-35.

² Quoted in Edward Cody, "Israeli Settlements: A Link to Jerusalem," *Washington Post*, August 14, 1979.

Nothing in the way of development that I have seen in Israel or the territories over the last decade (except possibly Beersheba) compares in scope and magnitude with the effort put into the Jerusalem area. The funds invested (much from overseas) must make other Israeli municipality heads envious indeed, while the Palestinians – who have no government or public institutions for major development of any kind – can only voice their deep frustrations to each other in private.

There are now around 12,000 Israelis resident in the 109 settlements on the West Bank (excluding Jerusalem), Golan Heights and the Gaza Strip; 57 of these settlements are on the West Bank alone. Driving along the main Jordan Valley road one sees neat Hebrew (only) signs every few kilometres pointing to dirt tracks that lead to the barbed-wire enclosed enclaves of prefabricated housing units. Some are kibbutzes or moshavs attached to a military encampment. There is the occasional watch tower. Again the aggregate figures are shocking – 25 to 35 percent of the West Bank is now controlled by Israelis through settlements or military zones.³ According to experts who testified in spring 1979 before the special UN commission on settlements in the occupied territories, some 126 square kilometres (49 square miles) are controlled by settlements alone on the West Bank.

The settlements themselves appear at first glance innocuous. The housing units take up relatively little space. But what is less obvious is that they control the surrounding farmlands which they have taken over from the preexisting Palestinian villages. Just as hundreds of Arab villages disappeared both before and after the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, because they had been deprived of their arable land and livelihood, so too an increasing number of villages on the West Bank appear in the process of suffering the same fate. Reliable local specialists assert that around 90 percent of the land seized is privately owned, i.e. (in terms of still-applicable Turkish-Islamic law) falling in one of the following categories: *mulk* land (to which the owners have clear title deeds), *miri* land (actively cultivated by the farmers for generations and registered as such with the land tax authorities, even though individual title deeds may not exist), and *jiftlik* land (also

³ According to the calculations of Prof. John Ruedy of Georgetown University, as reported in the *Washington Star*, October 29, 1978, Israel had wrongfully acquired around one third (160,000 hectares) of West Bank land. Qualified observers in the West Bank in early 1979 estimated 25-35 percent. Of course, particular villages were very hard hit; e.g. Beit Dajan, that lost 80 percent of its cultivable land and Beit Furik, that lost 60 percent. For details, see also Lesch, *op. cit.*, and her updated information in the *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. VIII, No. 1 (Autumn 1978), pp. 100-19. A important and more recent assessment is the Report of the UN Security Council Commission established under resolution 446 (1979) to investigate conditions in the territories S/13450, of July 14, 1979.

actively cultivated by private farmers although in Ottoman times nominally under the title of the Sultan).

The process of seizing lands has generally begun with the military fencing off a given territory without notice and giving "security" as grounds for so doing. Farmers who persist in cultivating the fenced-off land sometimes find their crops defoliated. After a time a military camp or a nahal (military-agricultural settlement) may be established, to which may be eventually added a civilian kibbutz or moshav. As a settlement grows, additional Arab lands may be required to sustain the increased population. Sometimes, the ultranationalist Gush Emunim organization will establish a settlement illegally, only to have the Military Government or the cabinet quietly acquiesce in the seizure. Arab farmers have occasionally appealed the seizures but they are almost never successful except in winning temporary injunctions against development of the site. Given the inexorable nature of this process, strong disincentives are created for the remaining farmers and their sons to remain as proprietors; and there is now a growing population of landless agricultural labourers on the West Bank.

The tranquillity of the Jordan Valley is broken only by the occasional thud of unseen Israeli warplanes on manoeuvre breaking the sound barrier. The symbols of tension are likely to be passed unnoticed by an outsider. But they are there nonetheless. Here, above Jericho, for example, is al-Auja, before the 1967 war a prosperous farming town of 10,000. Many of its inhabitants were terrorized by low-flying fighter-planes during that war to flee across the river, leaving their lands to an Israeli custodian of "absentee" property. But now many of those that remained are also being forced to leave because the ancient spring on which they depend for irrigation has dried up. The open concrete canal leading down from the spring to the fields is indeed bone dry, and one can see the banana trees beginning to wither and die. Up at the spring the Israelis have drilled a deep-bore well; a big Caterpillar engine powers the pump 24 hours a day. When the three wells near the spring were dug the farmers complained, warning that their spring would gradually dry up; but the protests went unheeded and gradually over a couple of seasons the flow decreased until quite recently it stopped altogether.⁴ The nearby Israeli settlement of Yativ has a swimming pool. One of the American voluntary organizations operating in the valley reports that as of spring 1979 the Israelis had dug some 20 deep-bore holes and were pumping an estimated 15-17 million cubic metres of water annually to irrigate the lands taken by the Israeli settlements. Worse still, the military

⁴ See also Paul Quiring, "Israeli Settlements and Palestinian Rights," *Middle East International*, October 1978.

authorities restrict the amount of water that Palestinian farmers can draw from their own wells, and they prohibit the Palestinians from digging any new wells themselves.

Drive a bit farther up into the highlands of the Valley and observe the fenced-off uncultivated tract that belonged to the farmers of Akraba and Majdal Beni Fadil; last year the Israel Defence Force defoliated it, just as it used defoliants on another village tract in 1972 and on lands of Bardala and Ain al-Baida in 1968. The chief beneficiaries of the Akraba and Majdal Beni Fadil lands are the settlements of Gitit moshav and Ma'ale Ephraim, which require them as part of the "thickening" process. Somewhat farther up the valley, where the Damiya Bridge links the West Bank to Jordan, we find a fertile area now occupied by the colony of Massuah; we are told it occupies the site of the Arab village of Ajajreh, and that the whole area supported an Arab population of 40,000 before the 1967 war, compared to the present 4,000. One old farmer, who has stuck it out near the Israeli settlement of Hamra, not only has lost most of his lands right across the road from his modest dwelling, but also is forbidden by the Military Government even to make repairs on the house itself.

The biggest area still under Palestinian cultivation is the impressive Wadi Fara' region. Here Arab farmers grow a variety of vegetables such as tomatoes, mulukhia and peppers. An effort by two American private organizations to improve the water pipeline system has been thwarted by the occupation authorities; and it is reported that in April Minister Ariel Sharon told two California consulting engineers on this project that "we will allow no Palestinian development on the West Bank."

Compounding the present oppressive situation, from the Palestinian point of view, is the trend of the occupation. Between 1967 and the summer of 1977 the Israelis founded 44 settlements on the West Bank and around Arab Jerusalem, but from June of 1977 through August of 1978 it opened 21 additional ones. More are being planned over the coming five years, the period which according to the Camp David accords would be a transitional time for developing Palestinian "autonomy." It is said that several ministries of the Israeli government have their own long-term plans. The Five-Year Plan of the World Zionist Organization is already being followed. In June the Jewish Agency released a Five-Year Plan of its own calling for the establishment of 84 new villages on the West Bank to accommodate 16,000 new Israeli families, and the addition of 11,000 families into existing settlements. In July, the co-chairman of the World Zionist Organization's Settlement Department was quoted as calling for the establishment of 16 new settlements to surround Nablus during the coming year.⁵

⁵ *Jerusalem Post*, July 26, 1979.

The geographic distribution of settlements and roads is also revealing. Most of the new settlements established under the Likud government are located in a belt along the spine of the West Bank, in the vicinity of the main towns of Jenin, Nablus, Ramallah, Bethlehem and Hebron. This placement would seem to support the objective of Prime Minister Begin that the entire West Bank land must remain under Jewish sovereignty, with a strictly limited autonomy applicable only to its Palestinian inhabitants. The Likud "belt" is now a signal, and may eventually harden into "new facts," indicating that Jews can and will settle anywhere in the territories. Complementing this new emphasis is the construction of a road grid that will further tighten Israeli control over Arab population centres which will be even further fragmented from each other than they are now. Such would seem to be the logic behind the Trans-Samaria highway and another east-west road crossing the southern sector of the West Bank.

A trip up and down the parallel "Allon" belts of settlements in the Jordan Valley and the immediate highlands suggests, however, that the Labour government's view of any eventual Arab autonomy was scarcely more liberal than that of the Likud. Gen. Yigal Allon's plan, it will be recalled, called for relinquishing the bulk of the West Bank (excluding Jerusalem) with the understanding that Israel would retain a belt of military posts and settlements along the Jordan River, so as to monitor Arab access to the West Bank. When one perceives the *width* of the Allon belt, as defined by Labour government-inspired settlements and land seizures, it is evident that the Labour government was interested in something a good deal more substantial than a mere security "tripwire." Moreover, the restrictions on Arab water usage were initiated by Labour, not Likud. Finally, it has not gone unnoticed that the ultranationalist Gush Emunim, despite its illegal activities and the handwringing criticism directed at it by relatively liberal Israelis, generally gets its way. When the army itself helped build the controversial Elon Moreh settlement near Nablus by ferrying materials in by helicopter, the message seemed to be that the commitment to seizing Arab land and water and to building settlements is not confined to an extremist fringe on the Israeli body politic. Consequently, Palestinians hold only the most pessimistic outlook about Israel's long-term intentions for the occupied territories.

SUBJECTIVE IMPACT OF THE OCCUPATION

The occupation presents two faces, one benign, the other — and I use the word carefully — terrifying. Certainly the occupied territories I lived in or visited gave the appearance of having been totally pacified and secured. The situation in Gaza for example was "normal" compared to my visit there ten

years ago at a time of continuing insurrection and high tension. The fact that water pumps and other potential economic targets in the Jordan Valley are openly exposed to sabotage is a clear enough indication that the Israelis are not expecting any, and indeed have not experienced any, either from local Palestinians or from guerrillas infiltrating from Jordan. Checkpoints are relatively few, although they do spring up immediately following the occasional bombing incident. As long as they avoid political or resistance activity most people carry on a normal life, except those who find themselves victimized by land seizures or other settlement activities, or those who get caught up in the retribution for such acts of resistance as do occur.

Many Palestinians are better off economically under the occupation — these are mainly the 50,000-70,000 day labourers who are bused into Israel proper for construction work, but also some already wealthy landowners, notables and tourist-related businessmen. Much of their income (like that of the rest of the Palestinian population) is now eaten up by Israel's runaway inflation. Some are also benefiting from remittances and donations that filter in from the Arab world, and Palestinians speak of the Muslim Brotherhood and Saudi Arabia as important sources of such funds. While the West Bank as a whole remains stagnant in development terms — not surprisingly since there is no infrastructure of government, public services or major investment institutions — one does see some new private housing in Nablus and Hebron. A group of American voluntary agencies, notably American Near East Refugee Aid (ANERA), have received private and public American funds (including a \$3 million AID allocation) to assist manufacturing and agricultural cooperatives and various educational, cultural and health projects, but these are small-scale efforts. Even these modest efforts incur serious bureaucratic obstacles from the Israeli authorities, who clearly regard the American organizations with open hostility.

I did not find any support among Palestinians in the territories for the claim that they are substantially better off under the occupation than they were (or would have been) under Jordanian rule. On the contrary, one visiting doctor inspecting the health facilities in the territories had the impression that these facilities had declined noticeably since 1967, and several Palestinians knowledgeable about educational conditions asserted that there has been a similar decline — especially qualitative — in education during the last decade.⁶ Lack of authoritative, concerned, participant government was cited as the main cause of the decline. Several people,

⁶ On educational stagnation see Fathiyya Said Nasru, *West Bank Education in Government Schools, 1967-1977* (Bir Zeit: Bir Zeit University, 1977), cited in Emile A. Nakhleh, *The West Bank and Gaza: Toward the Making of a Palestinian State* (Washington: American Enterprise Institute, 1979), pp. 54-56.

including a mayor, complained of the rise in crime and the deterioration of personal security. One Bethlehem resident remarked that it was ironic how Israel with its vaunted security apparatus had neither the interest nor the capability to control an upsurge in ordinary crime. Only when political offences were involved would the might of the occupation authorities make itself felt. The most favourable overall assessment that I heard was that the quality of life on the West Bank has remained about what it was in 1967, whereas had there been no occupation it would have advanced significantly in all sectors – just as, for example, the quality of life in Jordan has improved so dramatically over this period.

So much for the relatively benign face of the occupation. It does not take very long to discover the darker side. Deprived of political rights and fearful over possible deprivation of human rights, the Palestinians under occupation are obsessed with getting rid of the Israelis. Scarcely any occasion for conversation goes by that is not mostly devoted to the frustrations of the occupation. If the subject is not the latest land seizures it may be the story of the grocer down the street who just finished a five-year jail term as a political prisoner. Stories of recent “incidents” – such as the Israeli tear-gassing of high-school students – are told and told again. Rumours about the explosion the other night or the tight security inspections on the road to Jerusalem this morning are sifted and transmitted. One young Palestinian meets his friend whom he hasn’t seen for a long time and is told with a mirthless smile that he has been vacationing in “the government hotel.” Checkpoints may usually be perfunctory but sometimes are not; one is told, for example, of a four-hour backup on the road from Ramallah to Jerusalem just after local Palestinians made known their rejection of the Egyptian-Israeli-American “autonomy” framework: the soldiers told the waiting Arabs that since they refuse the autonomy, the soldiers refuse to let them pass. A blind Palestinian university teacher, returning from graduate study in the United States, has his special long-playing tape recorders and recorded notes confiscated when he enters at the Allenby Bridge. An entire village population is denied exit permits over the bridge because one of the villagers was among those rounded up in a security sweep. Students at Bir Zeit college regularly disappear for a few days of interrogation that often involves physical abuse. You are in an Arab car (the occupied districts have specially coloured licence plates or, in the case of Arab Jerusalem, a special numerical prefix) that stops for a few moments on a roadside inside the “Green Line” (pre-1967 Israel) or in “greater Jerusalem”; an Israeli car or bus will pull up beside you, start blowing its horn, and its occupants will shout at the Arab driver to keep moving. One hears numerous stories of the bureaucratic inefficiency and political malice of the Military Government,

especially over petitions for family reunions involving the return of an “absentee.”

These of course are the everyday occurrences, perhaps not intolerable in themselves. But they symbolize an underlying fear on the part of the Palestinian population. Fear of what? Fear of fierce retribution from the Israeli authorities for what they perceive rightly or wrongly as political or security threats. Over 11,000 Palestinians were deported between 1967 and 1978.⁷ The blowing up of houses (over 15,000 according to the Palestine Human Rights Campaign) is a formidable deterrent. The high number of political prisoners and detainees (2,300 according to the US State Department’s report on human rights; 3,227 according to Amnesty International) in a population of 1.5 million Palestinians means that the heavy-handedness of the authorities is acutely felt everywhere.

An official of the US Consulate asked me if I had any impression of how these security procedures are felt among Palestinians. I replied that judging from many casual conversations their impact as a deterrent to resistance seemed quite effective but that I could give no solid evidence for this judgment. But I speculated that any of several of my acquaintances in the Bethlehem area (one of the least troublesome to the Israelis) could probably name a half dozen people in their neighbourhood who were jailed for alleged political or security offences. Later on I decided to see if my speculation was accurate and I asked a friend how many prisoners he could name then and there. Within five minutes he had named 19 and was just warming up. “Give me an hour or two to recollect their specific names and I can recall a hundred cases,” he said.

Then there is the question of torture. Since the appearance in the West of serious and well-documented charges of brutality in the treatment of Arab detainees⁸ there has been much debate over whether these practices are “systematic” or not; and the State Department in its human rights report on the occupied territories admits that cases of “extreme physical and psychological pressures” have occurred but does not accuse Israel of employing measures as a systematic policy.* An Israeli official with whom I discussed these reports told me that Israelis do not take them seriously; “isolated

⁷ For a discussion and list of deportees, see Ann Mosely Lesch, “Israeli Deportation of Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza Strip,” *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. VIII., No. 2 (Winter 1979), pp. 101-31, and Vol. VIII, No. 3 (Spring 1979), pp. 81-112.

⁸ I refer to the report of the London *Sunday Times* Insight Team of June 19, 1977, and the human rights violations reported by the US Consulate General in Jerusalem as reported and discussed in the *Washington Post* of February 7, 1979 and subsequent issues and in the *Christian Science Monitor* of April, 4, 1979.

* See the detailed report in the “Special Feature” below, pp. 79-117 – *Ed.*

instances” of brutality may occur, but then this is inevitable under an occupation, and the lower-level prison and interrogation officials are not always up to standard. It is not my intention to enter into the debate over torture as a “systematic policy” but I would simply report that it is my strong impression that Palestinians perceive it as such. Long before the London *Sunday Times* investigation, it was universally accepted on the West Bank and Gaza that the occupier engages in brutality, abuse and torture as a regular practice. Certainly there is a widespread expectation that imprisonment involves horrors far beyond the mere punishment of serving time. For example, a confidential report prepared in cooperation with the Bethlehem Municipality in May 1979 states as follows:

Torture is now a systematic measure adopted in prisons in the occupied territories and applied to the so-called “security” detainees. Electric shocks, boiling water, inhuman beating of all parts of the body and even the genitals and testicles, hanging by the legs and hands, pulling out of finger nails and toenails, inserting sticks in the anus and exposing prisoners to the bites of bulldogs... etc., all these and other kinds of torture are applied and their victims are found everywhere....

Collective punishment is another, and a particularly effective, deterrent to resistance. A recent major case occurred in Halhul from March 15 to March 30, 1979; for 16 days a nearly total curfew was imposed on the whole town in response to a bus-stoning incident.⁹ During the March 1979 incidents at Bir Zeit university the whole village of Bir Zeit was punished. Nobody from the village of Taiyyibe near Ramallah was allowed to cross the Allenby Bridge to visit Jordan after one of the villagers was apprehended in a security sweep.

Harassment of Palestinian educational institutions is constant. In talks with administrators and professors at the three main West Bank colleges — Bir Zeit, al-Najah (in Nablus) and Bethlehem — I was told story after story of troubles with the Military Government. Friction occurs because the colleges (and high schools too) are places of intellectual freedom; and under an occupation it is virtually inevitable that students will nurture political opposition and hostility — but not because the administrators encourage it (quite the contrary). Bethlehem and Bir Zeit both have been the scene of violent clashes with the security forces, which will invade the campuses to put down student demonstrations. Bir Zeit has been particularly hard-hit. There have been extraordinary bureaucratic delays in obtaining permissions and materials connected with its building programme. Lecturers from abroad have had trouble getting and keeping work permits. Its students (and sometimes faculty members) have been continually intimidated through

⁹ The town’s ordeal is described by its mayor, Muhammad Milhem, in *MERIP Reports*, No. 80 (September 1979), pp. 22-24, in an article entitled “Israel Previews ‘Autonomy’ with Halhul Curfew.”

“interrogations.” In March 1979, after student demonstrations protesting President Carter’s visit to Israel, four students were shot by Israeli soldiers sent to break up the demonstrations.¹⁰ Most recently it was completely closed down for several months, and it was only through strong American pressure that the school was allowed to reopen at all. Such is the way schools and colleges are treated under this “liberal” occupation.

In light of Israel’s apparent intention to hold the territories and its use of threat and coercion, an outside observer might ask why there is not more resistance to such an intolerable situation. Certainly there are plenty of obvious and even vulnerable economic and military targets. Discussing the matter with a group of West Bank professional people I was told (in tones of forced patience) that for all but the most dedicated or stupid the consequences are so fearful for the individual and the hundreds or thousands of innocent compatriots who would also suffer from his act that most people have come to accept passively the occupation. Furthermore, even though the PLO is without doubt the only free, authentic expression of Palestinian will, it is too isolated from the territories to provide the degree of support of all kinds that would make massive internal resistance a risk worth taking.

A SAMPLING OF PALESTINIAN VIEWS

Without pretending to have polled a representative sample of West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza opinion, let me record nevertheless what struck me as widely shared views. I draw upon approximately 25 extended conversations with several mayors and notables usually described as conservative or moderate, and with a number of educators, lawyers and students.

How is the PLO regarded? It is impossible, despite deliberate effort on my part, to elicit (either on or off the record) any sentiment that the PLO is not the only authentic spokesman for the Palestinian people. The mayor of Gaza, Rashad Shawa, emphasized time and again the sole legitimacy of the PLO in speaking for the Palestinians. Mayor Shawa made a point of rejecting the idea, floated during the early Egypt-Israel-US autonomy talks, that Gaza might serve as a limited autonomy zone because of alleged Egyptian influence lingering from the 1948-67 period of Egyptian administration. The mayor said that he had explicitly refused such a role for Gaza and insisted that Gaza must be linked to the West Bank in any settlement. He asserted that an international corridor free from any Israeli interference must join Gaza and the West Bank through Hebron, Bethlehem or Jerusalem, so that the Palestinian entity has a commercial link to the West Bank, Jordan and

¹⁰ The events of March are described by Palestinian and faculty members of the university in the March 1979 *Bir Zeit University Bulletin*.

the Arab hinterland. The mayor insisted that there was no way to achieve effective Palestinian representation in any settlement negotiations without the PLO or Palestinians designated by the PLO. While not critical of President Sadat for having liberated Egyptian territory in Sinai, he stated that President Sadat could in no way speak for the Palestinians.

Mayor Shawa has in the past been regarded as a relative moderate, and one with good relations with Jordan. Another reputed moderate is Mayor Elias Freij of Bethlehem. But Mayor Freij wanted it made very clear that the PLO is the only authentic voice for the Palestinians in the West Bank. He said that all efforts to persuade so-called "moderates" such as himself to take an independent role in the autonomy talks would be unsuccessful. It is perhaps not irrelevant to note that Mayor Freij, like the mayor of neighbouring Beit Jala, is likely to face stiff competition from more militant nationalist and leftist candidates in the municipal elections scheduled for 1980. And in Gaza, a prominent Muslim sheikh was recently assassinated because of his alleged support for President Sadat's initiative.

An influential notable from Nablus, also labelled as a "moderate," testily rejects questions about possible differences between PLO and West Bank leaders. The PLO, he says, is the only free, and therefore authentic voice of the Palestinians. End the hated Israeli occupation and then let Palestinians both from inside and outside decide their future. But the present Egypt-Israel-US autonomy venue is totally sterile, he believes.

An elderly former member of the Jordanian senate obtains the assurance that he will not be quoted by name and goes on to say that there is much he dislikes about the PLO. But at this stage he would never criticize it publicly, for two reasons: one, that it effectively voices the deep desire of all Palestinians under occupation to be rid of the Israelis, and two, that public disputation with the PLO would be very dangerous.

The feeling among Palestinian educators, activist lawyers and students is less qualified, less equivocal: to them the PLO deserves (and receives) their enthusiastic, positive support, particularly since the Camp David and Egypt-Israel agreements. Such also are the views, reportedly, of the mayors of the main West Bank towns of Nablus, Hebron and Ramallah. Several of these professional people, however, remarked that the PLO has failed to do all that it might in the way of helping the Palestinians under occupation. Certainly the sporadic acts of terrorism engineered from outside boost Palestinian morale on the inside. But I hear strong and frequent criticism from West Bankers of the cruel and senseless nature of many of these acts. Shortly after a bomb exploded near Jaffa Gate wounding two Israeli Arab gardeners, I heard several comments to the effect that such acts are wrong and indicative of incompetence rather than power. "Why should innocent Arabs or Jews

suffer for the crimes of the Zionist government and army? ” one person asked. This is not to say, however, that Palestinians in the territories are against the use of violence in principle — although (as I have indicated) they prefer that it come from outside. Attacks against patrols, military installations, settlements or economic establishments would meet, I think, with universal approval.

Criticism was also voiced by one of these professionals to the effect that the PLO has been less effective than it might have been in supplying financial and economic aid to the West Bank. Several people referred to the decisions of the Baghdad summit to allocate massive aid to the territories; little of this has been felt so far. There was, finally, a “between-the-lines” feeling conveyed by some notables as well as professionals that the voices of Palestinians from the territories are not given enough weight in PLO decision-making. One West Banker said, for example, that the PLO in Beirut gives too much attention to the extremist organizations which lack an understanding of the realities of the occupation.

I draw three conclusions from my conversations. (1) The PLO is indeed universally accepted as the sole legitimate Palestinian voice. (2) The PLO is perceived to possess the power to punish any Palestinian in the territories who attempts to speak for the Palestinians without PLO authorization. (3) While supporting the PLO, Palestinians under occupation feel (a) that the PLO has not done as well as it should have in providing tangible support in the territories, military, economic and financial; and (b) that the West Bankers are not sufficiently represented in PLO decision-making.

How are the Egypt-Israel-US talks on Palestinian autonomy regarded? I did not come across a single Palestinian who supported the talks or who felt that anything of value would come from them. Nearly all Palestinians feel that the Israelis are planning to rule the territories forever, so they do not see even a hint of good faith on the part of the Israeli government, its signed commitments notwithstanding. They also feel that the Camp David autonomy framework is not significantly different from the Begin government formulations of December 1977, which are totally unacceptable. I could not find anybody who agreed with the arguments put forth by US officials that these talks set in motion a process which can only lead to significant benefits for the Palestinians, no matter how much the Israeli government resists them. While some West Bank leaders are aware of limited support from segments of the Israeli public, such as the Peace Now movement and informal groupings of “dovish” academics, they do not feel that either of the two main blocs, the ruling Likud and the Labour coalition, will come to interpret autonomy in an acceptable manner. Among most of the people I talked to there is resentment and anger at President Sadat’s diplomacy,

although a significant minority expressed approval for his role as an Egyptian leader and his success in winning back Egyptian territory. There is, in short, a yearning for an end of conflict, as long as minimum justice is done to the Palestinian cause.

At no time did I hear anybody call for continuing warfare against Israel or for the destruction of Israel in its pre-1967 borders. The objectives I heard expressed were for Israel's military and administrative withdrawal to the pre-1967 lines, including Jerusalem. Nobody volunteered the idea that the West Bank should revert to Jordanian rule, although when asked several people said it would be preferable to the Israelis. But almost everybody who commented on the future of the territories after a hypothetical Israeli withdrawal stated that there ought to be the closest possible relationship with Jordan, especially with regard to the movement of people, commerce and finance. Two notables from the Bethlehem-Beit Jala area asserted the importance of free access for tourists from Israeli Jerusalem in any final settlement in order to maintain the economic livelihood of these towns.

How is the United States regarded? Given the fact that most Palestinians in the territory blame the United States government for allowing Israel to maintain the occupation it is a little surprising to find such a positive reaction to the US presence there. One reason for this may be the "American connection" which thousands of Palestinians, notably those in Ramallah and al-Bireh have established through the immigration, remittances and the regular visitation of relatives now living in the US. The American private voluntary organizations also appear to have had a considerable effect in mitigating the otherwise bad impression people hold of the US. The American Friends Service Committee, ANERA and several other groups have demonstrated that even small-scale material assistance can yield significant results. The lack of cooperation — indeed the open hostility — which the Israeli government shows toward these American organizations no doubt enhances their credibility with the Palestinians. One does not sense the tension between donor and recipient that accompanies foreign assistance programmes in many countries.

On the official level too there is surprisingly good rapport. It hardly needs to be said that the US Consulate General in Jerusalem has a difficult and sensitive task. That the diplomats stationed there have been able to carry out their professional duties so effectively is very much to their credit. The main complaint about the American presence that I heard came from Mayor Shawa of Gaza, who said that the Gaza Strip, with up to a half-million Palestinians, was neglected by the private assistance organizations and also did not receive as much press or diplomatic attention as it should, compared to the West Bank. But the problem, of course, is not with the US local

presence; it is the broader question of official support for Israel and, so far, refusal to deal with the PLO. Almost everybody I talked to, while condemning this position, insisted that only the US could get the Israelis to move back. But despite the on again-off again nature of US manoeuvres, which until now have had no significant effect in slowing the Israelization of the territories, the West Bank-Gaza elite gives way to moments of almost pathetic hope and euphoria at every new positive nuance in the American diplomatic minuet. The bitterness that ensues when such manoeuvres fizzle out, however, is also intense and I daresay cumulative.

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

Based on my observations and conversations in July 1979, and comparing them with those of my periodic visits to the territories since the occupation began, I would offer the following conclusions:

(a) *The occupation is hurting more.* Not since the immediate postwar period of unrest and external guerrilla attacks on the West Bank and semi-insurgency in Gaza has the hostility been so intense. As I have indicated, part of this feeling is due to the deteriorating economic situation of Israel since 1973. Part is also due to the continuing ubiquitous and oppressive hand of the military authorities. Israeli military action in Lebanon has also created deep resentment. And certainly since the Begin government came to power, the already deep-seated suspicions of Palestinians about Israeli intentions in the territories have hardened into a firm belief that Israel will try to rule them forever.

(b) Yet at the moment, despite these feelings, *the territories are almost totally secure.* Both externally and internally the Israelis for the time being have succeeded in vitiating the Palestinian option of armed struggle. The Israeli army has gone on the offensive against Palestinians in Lebanon, and no other neighbouring Arab state has the capability to challenge it or to risk suffering the consequences of allowing Palestinian guerrilla activity to resume across its borders — especially with Egypt now committed by treaty to peace with Israel. Internally, the extremely harsh reprisals, collective punishment, good intelligence and reputation for brutality for which the Israelis are well known among the local population successfully deters all but the most determined from undertaking protest of one sort or another. But as the level of frustration mounts, new eruptions cannot be ruled out. Events of the last few months have shown that the Palestinians are not totally cowed — high school and college students and townspeople (as in Nablus) will still demonstrate occasionally. Unrest could happen again if diplomatic progress is not made. Palestinians know that their cause is gaining strength almost everywhere in the world except the United States.

(c) There appears to be a consensus among the West Bank, Arab Jerusalem and Gaza people I talked to that *the Palestinians in these territories are ready to accept and live in peace with Israel within roughly its pre-1967 borders*.¹¹ There is also a very strong insistence that the Israeli military presence and control must end. *I could find nobody who accepted either the December 1977 Begin autonomy plan or the similar autonomy plan enshrined in the Camp David accords*. These were strongly objected to as transparently fraudulent. Mr. Hikmat al-Masri, the former mayor of Nablus, was particularly scathing in his denunciation of the formula that “the Palestinians should participate in the determination of their future,” and he insisted that genuine self-determination and sovereignty over the land were essential. Nobody could think of any influential West Bank or Gaza personality who would be willing to participate in the autonomy transition process unless Israel changed its views on eventual Palestinian self-determination.

(d) *The question of a future link with Jordan did not elicit such unambiguous responses*. On the one hand, nearly everyone stipulated that the territories in the post-occupation period be closely and easily linked with Jordan in terms of transportation, commerce and communication. On the other hand, no enthusiasm was expressed for a Hashemite return. But some people did not rule out the idea of a federal solution along the lines of King Hussein’s United Arab Kingdom proposal. Any such acceptance, however, would be contingent on prior PLO approval. Whether West Bank agreement (much less PLO) could be obtained for an Israeli-Jordanian condominium over the territories with local self-rule for the Palestinians, as has been proposed,¹² strikes me as most unlikely for several reasons, the most important of which is that such a scheme would retain the main existing Jewish urban centres and settlements in the territories under Israeli rule. For if there is one other thing about which there seems to be strong consensus among Palestinians it is that the *existing settlements and seized lands must revert to the Arabs*. Proposals that envision a prohibition of *additional* settlements as a great concession to the Palestinians or even a solution to the settlement issue misunderstand the hostility which the extensive existing settlements arouse.

(e) If the impressions reported here are correct, what implications do they pose for the future course or solution of the conflict? *For the PLO*, they constitute an endorsement both of its legitimacy and its disciplinary capability vis-à-vis Palestinians under occupation; they also indicate some

¹¹ This is also the impression of Nakhleh, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

¹² See Daniel J. Elazar, “The Camp David Framework for Peace: A Shift Toward Shared Rule” (Washington: American Enterprise Institute, 1979) pp. 12-15.

important failures in creating linkages. *For Egypt*, they indicate basic disapproval of President Sadat's course and unwillingness to be part of a process whose best conceivable outcome is perceived as unsatisfactory. *For Israel* they suggest that the 12-year occupation has been a failure, insofar as it was intended to win Palestinian hearts and minds to acceptance of a Greater Israel. While posing no serious security problem, the occupation will continue to require the Israeli army to play a colonial role, will continue to require Israel to violate basic human and political rights, as well as international conventions limiting the activity of an occupying power, will continue to pose moral problems for Israel as a democratic state, and will continue to isolate Israel in the world, even including the United States.

For the United States, they offer both problems and possibilities. The problem is that Israeli determination to hold the territories by one means or another and Palestinian determination for self-determination are not only contradictory trends; they also appear to feed upon one another. Even as its military fortunes have declined the PLO continues to gain influence, not only with Palestinians but in the Arab world and beyond. Israel seems to rely increasingly on its own military strength to accomplish what its political and diplomatic efforts have failed to do, namely crush the organization that speaks for the Palestinians. The United States, for the time being, has placed its hopes on the Egypt-Israel autonomy talks as the best way to solve this problem. But it is hard to foresee much progress unless and until the PLO or its representatives have become involved. That the US realizes this truth is evident from the Andrew Young affair; but the will to take Middle East steps necessary for American interests, as well as for justice, is not quite strong enough to risk the domestic controversy that would surely result from taking them. Two positive conditions are now present, however.

One is the growing disarray in Israeli political circles over domestic economic conditions. The *Jerusalem Post*, I am told, only inadequately mirrors the intense cleavages which the Israeli body politic is now experiencing but even its pages reveal the seriousness of Israel's internal situation. This domestic dry rot may weaken the government's leverage in foreign policy and in particular make it increasingly vulnerable to US persuasion on the Palestinian issue. The obvious differences between the agreement and treaty which Mr. Begin signed, on the one hand, and his subsequent "interpretation" of these commitments on the other, draw anguished dissent from his own camp, which sees him as having given away too much. Many other Israelis with Labour and leftist affinities also criticize Begin, but rather for his refusal to consider even a minimalist conception of genuine autonomy for Palestinians. The Israeli political elite is so undisciplined and preoccupied with petty rivalries that the United States now has greater

opportunities to exert “creative pressure.” At the same time, however, one cannot ignore the possibility that this same economic chaos and political squabbling could also provide a favourable climate for military adventurism.

The other favourable condition is the moderation of the PLO position. The 1973 Arab-Israeli war and the continuing Lebanese civil war have made it impossible for the PLO not to accept the tutelage of the Arab states, nearly all of which have given up as unrealistic the idea of continued armed struggle against an Israel shrunk back to roughly its pre-1967 borders. President Sadat’s withdrawal of Egypt from any form of military struggle confirms the necessity of relegating the recovery of Jaffa and Haifa to the category of “dreams,” as Chairman Arafat had already indicated in his 1974 United Nations address. It is unlikely, especially under present circumstances (notably Israel’s war of attrition against the PLO in Lebanon), that the PLO will make the unequivocal concessions now demanded by the US simply to win US recognition of the PLO, but there have been sufficient indications over the past five years, both from the PLO and the relevant Arab states, that a settlement leading finally to Arab acceptance of Israel is very much in the cards.