

denied and on what their families could not provide? How can the mothers of these children nourish them when they have nothing left to give them but black milk? What can their fathers do when they are in jail or cannot earn enough money to feed their families?

Despite the existence of a Palestinian women's movement in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, women in Gaza today need to be understood not by the degree of their feminist consciousness or by the socio-political agendas they espouse, but by the degree to which they are still able to imagine themselves. While social liberation is critical, it is not immediately relevant, not in Gaza, not right now. The issue is far more primal, far more gnawing. For now, it is not just a question of preserving dignity or defying humiliation within the home or outside of it. It is a question of whether a home exists at all, and if not, whether it can be created and preserved. Somehow women in Gaza must be helped to return to themselves; if not, there will be nothing left to liberate.

## 7

## *Gaza: New Dynamics of Civic Disintegration\**

**I**N LATE MARCH 1993, IN response to some of the highest levels of violence since the uprising began, which left 28 Palestinians and 15 Israelis dead in that month alone, Prime Minister Rabin sealed off the West Bank and Gaza Strip, barring 120,000 Palestinians from their jobs inside the Green Line, and announced that Israel would have to become far less dependent on Palestinian labor in the future. While these actions are not without precedent, they often follow attacks against Jews within Israel proper, attacks which momentarily sear the political status quo, and which are almost always committed by Palestinians from the Gaza Strip, themselves the object of uninterrupted abuse.

Gaza and its people have long been identified with the violent side of Arab anti-Zionism, and the last few months have proven no exception. Yet, the violence associated with the Gaza Strip, particularly since the start of the uprising, has always been tolerable to Israelis as long as it was confined to the territory itself. Somehow, Gaza would be dealt with: Arab workers would continue to fill their jobs in Israel, and everything would return to "normal."

The conditions of life in the Gaza Strip, which allowed and sustained this "business as usual" mindset among Israelis are rapidly changing. Gaza is a very different place today from what it was just one year ago, let alone eight years ago when I first began working there. Old rules and traditional expectations no longer apply. New dynamics now

\* Originally published in the *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Volume 22, Number 4, Summer 1993, pp. 20-31.

characterize life inside the territory, dynamics that threaten to destroy not only the uprising in its most productive forms, but certain aspects of society itself. The most obvious change is the greater lawlessness and higher scale of violence committed by Arabs against Jews and by Jews against Arabs on both sides of the Green Line, a recent trend, which is expected only to grow worse if prospects for a political resolution continue to dim. (Consistent attacks on army units by Hamas activists are as new as the use of anti-tank missiles against civilian homes by the Israeli military.) Less apparent but more ominous is the increasing disablement and approaching breakdown of civil society in Gaza, a product of widening societal divisions and internal fragmentation never before seen inside the territory.

### A Changing Context

Before elaborating on the adverse changes taking place in the Gaza Strip, it is necessary to understand something of the context that produced them. In Gaza, this context is undeniably and primarily economic. In the five years since the Intifada began, the GNP of the Gaza Strip is estimated to have fallen by 30–50 per cent. But although the uprising imposed considerable economic burdens, it was the Gulf War that dealt the local economy its greatest—some would say final—blow. The impact of the war was devastating for the Palestinian economy as a whole, but particularly for the more impoverished economy of the Gaza Strip where such external sources of revenue constituted at least 50 per cent of GNP. In April 1991, the loss of remittances and other direct aid to the West Bank and Gaza from the Gulf countries coupled with the loss of exports already amounted to \$350 million, not including the costs of loss of work inside Israel since early 1991. Losses to the PLO in the form of direct aid from Gulf sources, furthermore, have been put at \$480 million, part of which would have been funneled into the Occupied Territories. At one time, in fact, Saudi Arabia's contributions to the PLO were equivalent to 10 per cent of the GDP of the West Bank and Gaza combined.<sup>1</sup>

The steady closure of the Israeli market to Palestinian labor has proved extremely damaging for the Gaza economy, given the inordinate dependence of its labor force on employment inside Israel. Prior to the crisis in the Gulf, between 45,000 and 50,000 Gazans, supporting

close to 250,000 people, were working in Israel, this figure itself representing a decline from over 70,000 before the uprising. In the last two years, only 25,000–30,000 workers from Gaza entered Israel daily, which represented a loss of at least 20,000 jobs that were not created domestically. (Of course, the situation deteriorated even further with the March closure.) Unemployment soared to at least 40 per cent in the Gaza Strip, personal income fell dramatically, and savings were increasingly exhausted. In the fall of 1992, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) in Gaza advertised twelve positions and received over 11,000 applications.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, unemployment levels in the Gaza Strip and West Bank are expected to increase even further in 1993 since the construction sector in Israel, the largest sectoral employer of Palestinian labor, is expected to contract significantly. Finally, the two-week curfew imposed on the Gaza Strip after the December 1992 deportations is estimated to have cost the economy \$1,810,000 per day.<sup>3</sup>

One indicator of the economic changes taking place inside Gaza is the number of families who have required food assistance in the last two years so as not to go hungry. By June 1991, the UNRWA, whose sole responsibility is to the refugee community, was feeding 120,000 families in the Gaza Strip and 165,000 families in the West Bank, both refugee and non-refugee. The number of families receiving food aid since the Gulf War is all the more startling when compared with those families receiving food aid prior to the uprising and just prior to the Gulf War itself: 7,471 in 1986, 9,137 in 1988, and 9,838 in June 1990.<sup>4</sup> Thus, between June 1990 and June 1991, the number of families in the Gaza Strip receiving food assistance from the UNRWA increased from 9,838 to 120,000, or elevenfold.

Since the Gulf crisis, the situation in Gaza has become critical. Hunger is a growing problem, especially among children, and malnourishment is sometimes visible as one walks along Gaza's streets. Faces appear hollow and lifeless. Teachers in UNRWA schools report that the majority of their students eat only one meal per day and that meal is often no more than bread with some crushed pepper or thyme added for flavor.<sup>5</sup> Cheese, once a staple of the local diet, is now too expensive for most people, and meat has vanished from the tables of all but the very rich. Doctors are treating more cases of malnourishment and diseases related to malnourishment among young children than at any point

since the occupation began. To make matters worse, the closure of the Occupied Territories in March caused food prices to plummet. Despite this, purchases of basic foodstuffs have declined by more than 50 per cent. The closure cost the economy of both territories approximately \$2.5 million per day. (As a result of these changes and an economic structure that was underdeveloped and weak to begin with, the formal sector of the economy has declined and the informal and unregulated sector has grown quite rapidly.)

The immense economic pressures imposed upon the Gaza Strip become even more acute in light of Gaza's extremely high population growth rate of 4 per cent per annum. Last year, the refugee community alone, which comprises 73 per cent of the total population, grew at a rate of 7.3 per cent, giving the territory one of the highest population densities in the world. In 1992, according to conservative estimates, density levels exceeded 9,300 people per square mile when measured in terms of lands available for use by the Arab population. Density levels among the Jewish settler community in the Gaza Strip, by contrast, averaged 115 people per square mile of available land.

The combination of severe economic erosion, gross insecurity, rapidly deteriorating living conditions and continued political inaction has produced a state of extreme psychological exhaustion among the people. People almost uniformly spoke of the Intifada in the past tense, particularly when referring to its ability to bring meaningful change at the political level and structural change at the economic level. The deportation of 415 Palestinians, an action that Gazans view as the first of future, large-scale population transfers, reinforced popular perceptions of the Intifada's political demise and their final abandonment by the world community. The political slogans that once catalyzed the population into unquestioned collective action are now beyond the capacity or the willingness of the people to enforce. Within this context, local attitudes toward the Middle East peace talks were not only dismissive but outwardly hostile. The profound sense of hopelessness among people is only equalled if not exceeded by a sense of utter humiliation, despair and betrayal.

Another manifestation of this psychological exhaustion is a change that under other circumstances would have been hailed as positive: a relaxation in the strict dress codes for women that characterized life in the Gaza Strip from the earliest days of the uprising. While most

women continue to dress conservatively, the author noted on a visit in January 1993 that a growing minority is no longer wearing the *hijab*, or head cover. This would have been unthinkable just a short time ago: indeed, the author once had stones thrown at her for not covering her head in public. Young adult women were also seen in jeans—unheard of in Gaza—and one was seen wearing black lace leggings under a short skirt.

One reason for this change is that the Hamas activists who vigorously enforced these codes in the past have turned their attention from internal social reform to military attacks against the Israeli Army. In their struggle for leadership of the Islamic movement in Gaza and indeed for leadership of the nationalist movement, Hamas also recognized the political costs of insulting women for wearing nail polish in public (an incident once witnessed by the author) at a time when the husbands and brothers of these women were losing their livelihood and ability to feed their families.

But above and beyond Hamas's change in tactics, such political symbols as the *hijab* no longer seem important. Quite simply, people no longer see the point. As one individual put it, "The price of our struggle is now too high, especially since we have very little to show for it except greater suffering." Gaza is without leaders. People grieve the loss of their local leadership and feel misled by those in Tunis [where Arafat presided over a Palestinian government in exile]. There is, in Gaza, a profound sense of finality, of having nowhere left to go and nowhere else to look.

The goals of the Intifada—ending the occupation through non-violent means, creating a Palestinian state in the territories, decreasing economic dependency on Israel, and reordering society—are now considered unattainable in the short term and, many believe, in the long term as well. The psychological effect is best characterized as a kind of collective self-withdrawal. Unable to achieve what is now regarded *only* in the abstract, political factions in Gaza have begun to fight over control of those few remaining resources that are perceived to exist, resources which are primarily institutional. Virulent factional rivalries are replacing directed collective effort at many levels; internal fragmentation and the unmaking of civil society are the tragic result.

## Internal Fragmentation and the Waning of Civil Society

### *The Fight Over Institutions*

The internal fractures taking root in the Gaza Strip are characterized by changes at a variety of levels, but none more pronounced than the institutional. Institutions are perhaps the only remaining resource in Gaza with any semblance of power or influence within the community, and as such have become the new political battleground. Institutions across a variety of sectors have been affected: health and educational organizations, professional associations, trade unions and a variety of other organized social groups. Two main trends have emerged: scrambling for control over existing institutions, and competition over the creation of new ones.

Acquiring control over established institutions is increasingly achieved through intimidation and coercion. There are already many examples of how a given faction will approach the head of an institution and demand that certain of its members be hired. Refusal to do so has sometimes resulted in personal threats to the organizational head and his or her family, as well as property damage to the targeted institution. In other cases, local elections of officers and board members have been fixed either through intimidation or bribery. The director of one prominent and highly respected health institution in Gaza, who asked not to be identified, was approached by a political faction, which demanded that he hire several of its members. Threats were used against him and his family, and he gave in. As a result, he is now forced to pay salaries for a number of untrained, unproductive individuals, depleting funds needed for the delivery of the services he is there to provide.

The director of an educational training institute, a personal friend of the author, was similarly approached but refused to be coerced. He told of constant threats against himself and his family, and consistent violations of his institution in the form of physical trespasses by factional members. He was not certain how much longer he could withstand the pressure stating, "It is one thing to fight the occupier, it is quite another to fight your own people." Like seven other nationalist figures interviewed, he said he would like to leave the Gaza Strip if only he could find a way.

A senior official at the UNRWA in Gaza further reported that he had been hoping to devolve control over the UNRWA hospital in the

Bureij refugee camp to local authorities, but decided not to do so "because there is no longer any group left which represents the interests of the community as a whole."<sup>6</sup> He similarly stated that despite the availability of funds for the development of several UNRWA youth centers, once an important focus of social activity in the Gaza Strip, these centers have ceased to be supported because of the factional infighting that surrounds them. Another very visible demonstration of how factionalism has retarded community development concerns the Gaza municipality, which has all but ceased to function as a result of internecine rivalries and budget cuts. For the first time ever, sewage can be seen running down the streets of Rimal, Gaza City's wealthiest neighborhood, and garbage is now a prominent feature of the urban landscape. The sense of physical decay is pervasive. The March closure intensified the factional struggle over institutions since the desperation to find employment was that much greater.

Competition over the establishment of new institutions has become particularly intense in the Gaza Strip. There has been a veritable mushrooming of institutions with no apparent purpose other than a political one. Permission must be obtained from Tunis for each institution established, which has only fanned the factional fires. Increasingly, institutions are set up as political entities and only afterward are their practical purposes considered. Once formed, each institution tries to funnel as much money as possible through itself, thereby decreasing the possibilities for cooperation that emerged in the first two years of the uprising. Funds are solicited not only from the PLO and its factional leaders, but from an unprecedented number of foreign donors now working in the Occupied Territories. Indeed, the increasing availability of foreign monies, made possible by the initiation of the Middle East peace talks, has intensified factional rivalries and the scramble to establish a local power base through greater institutional control.

These dynamics bespeak objectives and outcomes that are very damaging for the community and the future development of civil society in particular. Objectives are shifting from building Palestinian society to fighting over what is left of it. As institutions become increasingly aligned with individual factions, their decisions become motivated by political rather than professional considerations. Controlling resources has become more important than how those resources are used.

Moreover, privileges are created that will not be easily relinquished, especially in an environment of escalating poverty. The result is a severe lack of coordination among institutions and no assigning of priorities to needs according to any commonly defined criteria. In the absence of an effective leadership and authority structure, one group is pitted against another, disorder increasingly prevails, and political interests are being pursued at the cost of some of the Intifada's greatest achievements: community cohesion, societal introspection and personal self-criticism, a leadership versed in the ways of gradualism and negotiation, inter-group coordination, expanding roles for women, new approaches to economic development, improved production capabilities and service delivery, organized planning at the grass-roots level, and the perceived need for standards, rigor and accountability. The creation of *structures*, once a prominent feature of the uprising, is steadily giving way to the creation of *constituencies* in institutional guise.

### *The Role of Foreign Assistance*

Increasingly, institutions and individuals involved in political and economic life are finding it difficult to remain nonaligned. In a less direct way, this applies to a growing number of foreign donors as well. With the start of the peace talks, development assistance for the West Bank and Gaza grew significantly, particularly from the European Economic Community (EEC). At present there are 120 foreign private voluntary organizations (PVOs) working in the Occupied Territories with more money at their disposal than ever before.

Perhaps ironically, foreign assistance, which is nominally intended to strengthen Palestinian society, is, in its own way, contributing to the divisions slowly undermining it. Prior to 1991, at least, foreign assistance agencies carefully avoided working with politically active groups, or any organization known to be aligned with a given political faction. Now, in an approach that constitutes a major change in orientation, more and more foreign agencies are concentrating *only* on those groups that are politically active. When asked why this is so, funders explain that if monies are to be expended and projects implemented in the present environment of the Occupied Territories, there is no alternative but to work with political groupings, the only indigenous entities with the kind of power needed to get project work

done. One aid official went so far as to admit that in order to implement his program, he has sometimes had to choose between political work and practical work, and in the process has had to give funds to all factions so as not to alienate any of them. This, of course, does little to eliminate the problems associated with political factionalism and much to aggravate them.

In this regard, the official Israeli attitude has also changed quite dramatically. Whereas in the recent past, the military authorities would never have approved any cooperation between politically active Palestinian institutions and foreign donors, such collaboration is now supported. There appear to be two reasons for this. First, the many internal fissures created and reinforced by greater inter-group fighting seriously weaken popular cohesion, making it easier for the occupier to rule a rebellious population. Second and perhaps most important, given the very desperate economic situation inside the Gaza Strip, the more foreign assistance made available, the better.

The configuration of actors and objectives that emerges is quite troubling, particularly with regard to the promotion of economic development in areas as complex as the Gaza Strip and West Bank. For a growing number of Palestinian organizations, for example, the aim is to acquire as much control as possible over foreign monies in the competition for local power, and to exclude other indigenous groups in the process. For foreign donors and their implementing agencies, the objective is to gain access to the growing pie of funds now available and to spend them as quickly as possible in order to obtain more, often without regard to the true long-term development needs of the area. For the Israeli authorities, the goal is to promote the creation of jobs in the short term in order to alleviate severe economic problems and temporarily appease a hostile population. They, too, remain completely oblivious and obstructive of long-term developmental requirements.

The approach to development work is dangerously myopic. The much heralded construction of a \$20 million UNRWA hospital in Khan Younis, for example, is expected to generate many urgently needed jobs in Gaza. The project is being funded by the EEC and received relatively quick approval from the authorities. Yet, aside from the problems that may arise from factional competition over who will be employed by the project, some UNRWA officials admit that they do not know who will staff the hospital once it is completed, given the acute shortage of

doctors and nurses in the Gaza Strip. This is only one of many expected problems, another being funding for recurrent costs.

### *The Growing West Bank–Gaza Chasm*

Another aspect of the tearing-apart of Palestinian society is the reemerging animosity and psychological divide between the populations of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Historically, West Bankers have always looked down upon Gazans as their poor and backward cousins. This condescension was deeply felt in Gaza, and the source of considerable friction between both areas throughout the occupation. During the early years of the Intifada, these differences were submerged, but in light of changing economic and political conditions that have left Gaza far weaker, more impoverished and more oppressed, old differences have reemerged with a vengeance. West Bankers do not conceal the fact that they regard the Gaza Strip as their protectorate, and this offends Gazans greatly. Indeed, whatever their factional affiliation, Gazans uniformly see themselves as oppressed by their West Bank counterparts. These feelings are in part based on very real problems tied to the discriminatory allocation of resources and to who will control them.

Foreign assistance enters the Gaza Strip through Jerusalem, where economic and financial decisions affecting the Strip are usually made. Given their weaker experience with institutional development, Gazans have had and continue to have comparatively limited input into decisions affecting their community and its unique problems—problems West Bankers have made little effort to understand. Gazans not only resent the unwillingness of Jerusalem to cede full control over allocated resources, but are consistently frustrated by the inequitable distribution of those resources given Gaza's more extreme needs. Among development practitioners in the Strip, one hears constant and derogatory references to the "Jerusalem Triangle," an area consisting of Jerusalem, Ramallah and Beit Hanina, where power is seen to be concentrated.

One sad and troubling example of existing tensions was the closure of the Gaza branch of an Arab research institution this past winter. This research institution, headquartered in East Jerusalem, opened a branch in Gaza City in 1990. Several months ago, the Gaza office applied

to the military government for a permit that would have allowed it to be legally registered as a branch of the parent institution, thereby enabling it to receive funds directly. Upon learning of this application, the Jerusalem office telephoned the military governor of the Gaza Strip asking him to refuse the permit. The governor, who subsequently told officials of the Gaza branch that he never before received such a request from a Palestinian organization, denied the permit, and the Gaza office has been closed ever since.<sup>7</sup>

### *The Traumatization of the Young*

Perhaps the most telling and frightening indicator of Gaza's growing fragmentation and imminent breakdown is the traumatization of its youth. Close to 70 per cent of the Gaza Strip population is 25 years of age and younger, and have known nothing but occupation. Just under 50 per cent are 14 years or less, and have spent their formative years during the uprising. The children of Gaza are psychologically damaged, some beyond repair; others, while scarred, are more resilient. All are affected. The death of a child, a brother or sister is no longer an extraordinary event; injured and maimed children are increasingly common as well. Gaza is a society devoid of childhood. Children have left the home and the classroom, two critical sources of socialization, and the impact has been devastating. A local attorney, who is also an advisor to the Palestinian delegation to the peace talks, conducted a series of interviews with children between the ages of 9 and 15. Their answers to his questions reveal not only the loss of youth, but suggest the high price Palestinian society will be forced to pay because of it.

One question asked of ten 9-year-old boys and girls was, "Do you know what a cinema is?" Only one child, a boy, knew the answer, and described a cinema as "a big room with a big television in it." Thirty 15-year-old boys were asked, "What does authority mean?" All answered that "authority means the enemy." When told, "But authority can mean your teacher as well," several of them replied, "You mean our teacher is a collaborator?" "Do you have authority at home?" was another question. "Yes," they replied, "the authorities have entered our home many times."

Children in the Gaza Strip are increasingly incapable of conceptualizing authority in traditional terms since parents and teachers, unable

to protect the young from constant abuse and threat, have ceased to exist as authority figures. Authority is now the enemy and it is inherently evil. Law and order do not exist in Gaza, in concept or in practice, and therefore children have no boundaries and no markers for distinguishing good behavior from bad. Children are fearful in Gaza, but they are also feared.

How will such children—an entire generation—be resocialized, particularly when their identity has been based on what they have been denied? How will such children be made ready to redress the problems of a waning civil society, for example, when they themselves have contributed to its demise? How can they rebuild their society when they have no real understanding of what it is that needs repair? This is *the* most critical problem facing Palestinian society into the future, and as far as Gaza is concerned, the future is already knocking at the front door.

### *The Shifting Position of Hamas*

If there is a group that has benefited, at least in the short term, from the widening schisms and factional hegemonies within Gazan society, it is the Islamic Resistance Movement or Hamas. The success of Hamas in this regard has far less to do with its ideological or political appeal, which is arguably quite limited in Gaza,<sup>8</sup> than with its singular ability to act and *be seen* as a counter-hegemonic force, and as the group most able to provide critically needed services and organize community activities.

Hamas runs the best social service network in the Gaza Strip. It has been instrumental in the formation of “account committees” or “*zakat* committees” to which all Muslims are supposed to donate 7 per cent of their income. These monies are in turn disbursed to the poor and needy. Unlike other political factions in the Strip, Hamas clearly understands that under present conditions influence on the ground is first gained through social work, then through religious work, and only in the end through political work. Structured and well-organized, Hamas is trusted by the poor (Gaza’s overwhelming majority) to deliver on its promises, and is perceived to be far less corrupt and subject to patronage than its secular, nationalist counterparts, especially Fateh. Indeed, it is not only Palestinians who regard Hamas in this way, but a growing

number of foreign assistance providers as well. Some senior officials at the UNRWA in Gaza acknowledged that Hamas is the only faction they trust to distribute UNRWA food donations to the people.

There are two groups which appear to be the focus of Hamas’s social and economic activities: the youth and the merchant class. At a time when other political factions have given up working with Gaza’s many youth clubs, Hamas remains active and is attempting to build a power base from within these clubs and within other youth-centered organizations, a very farsighted strategy. Similarly, Hamas is increasingly working with local merchants. Many commercial connections are made in the mosques, which Hamas totally controls; at the time of this research, the organization was considering the initiation of a loan program for small businesses. Indeed, the financial strength of Hamas has grown in both relative and absolute terms over the last three to four years. While funding to other factions has decreased with the precipitous drop in direct aid to the PLO, funding to Hamas has not. According to local sources, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia have contributed \$30 million since the Gulf War, and Iran, a new donor, has given \$13 million.<sup>9</sup> However, it is not clear whether these funds come from the governments themselves or from private sources. The secret of Hamas’s growing appeal, however, lies primarily in the fact that, unlike other political factions, it understands the importance of *effective* institutions. And it is this understanding that is allowing the movement slowly but steadily to build a core constituency among various sectors of Gazan society.

### **The Future**

A friend of the author, reflecting on the upsurge in Arab violence against Jews, lamented, “What is happening to us that we can do such viscerally violent things?” The answer to her question requires a kind of reflection of which people in the Gaza Strip are rapidly becoming incapable. Time is running out in Gaza. For some, it has already run out.

Perhaps the costliest mistake that Israel, the United States and other actors involved in the Middle East peace process could make is to assume that desperation of the kind found in Gaza will in some not-too-distant future bring appeasement, that Palestinians will reach a

breaking point and finally relent. They will not. In the absence of a viable solution, there will be greater violence and greater insecurity.

The gravity of the current situation demands not just an immediate response but a meaningful one. Whatever its form, the answer must involve a major change in the status quo. In the interim, political and security arrangements must be found that would allow the Israeli Army to withdraw, an absolute precondition, and the Palestinians to establish a governing authority with real power. Anything short of this will only fuel the dynamics of disintegration currently underway in the Gaza Strip.

If the Middle East peace talks are to have any hope of success, they must be considered credible by all the actors involved. Despite early optimism, Palestinians in the Gaza Strip consider the talks not just unproductive, but counterproductive insofar as they create the illusion of hope when in fact none exists. Gazans, for the most part, were against returning to the talks in April 1993 because Palestinian participation in their eyes only served to legitimize an illegitimate process. If the peace talks are to regain their credibility and achieve a modicum of success, a fundamental rethinking of their terms of reference is needed; the present terms have not only forced Palestinians into a weak position comparatively, but have confined them to this weakened position absolutely. A critical component is, of course, the role of the United States, which, to say the least, is not seen as sincere or fair. If change is to come, it will only be with the as yet unrealized full participation of the United States.

The escalating violence between Arab and Jew has led to calls inside Israel for ending Israeli rule over the Gaza Strip, for disposing of the Strip once and for all, independent of any comprehensive solution for the Occupied Territories as a whole. Under present conditions, nothing would be more damaging or destructive for Palestinians in Gaza (and, by extension, for their counterparts in the West Bank, and for Jews in Israel). Dumping the Gaza Strip as a quick, final-step solution (in any case highly unlikely) is certainly not the answer; relinquishing control over the Gaza Strip as the first stage in a comprehensive, multistage process of withdrawal and state formation might be. Indeed, addressed in this way, policies first implemented in the much smaller Gaza Strip could establish important precedents such as the withdrawal of the army, the provision of appropriate security arrangements, the

dismantling of Israeli settlements or their conversion to Palestinian use, and the institutionalization of an indigenous governing structure. Such possibilities, however, become more theoretical and more unlikely each day.

The situation in Gaza is grim. The light at the end of the tunnel, which many once claimed to see, is no longer visible. The greatest danger facing the Gaza Strip is not explosion, but implosion. If that happens, nothing will be visible but smoke.