

The Gaza Strip: A Primer

An Intelligence Assessment

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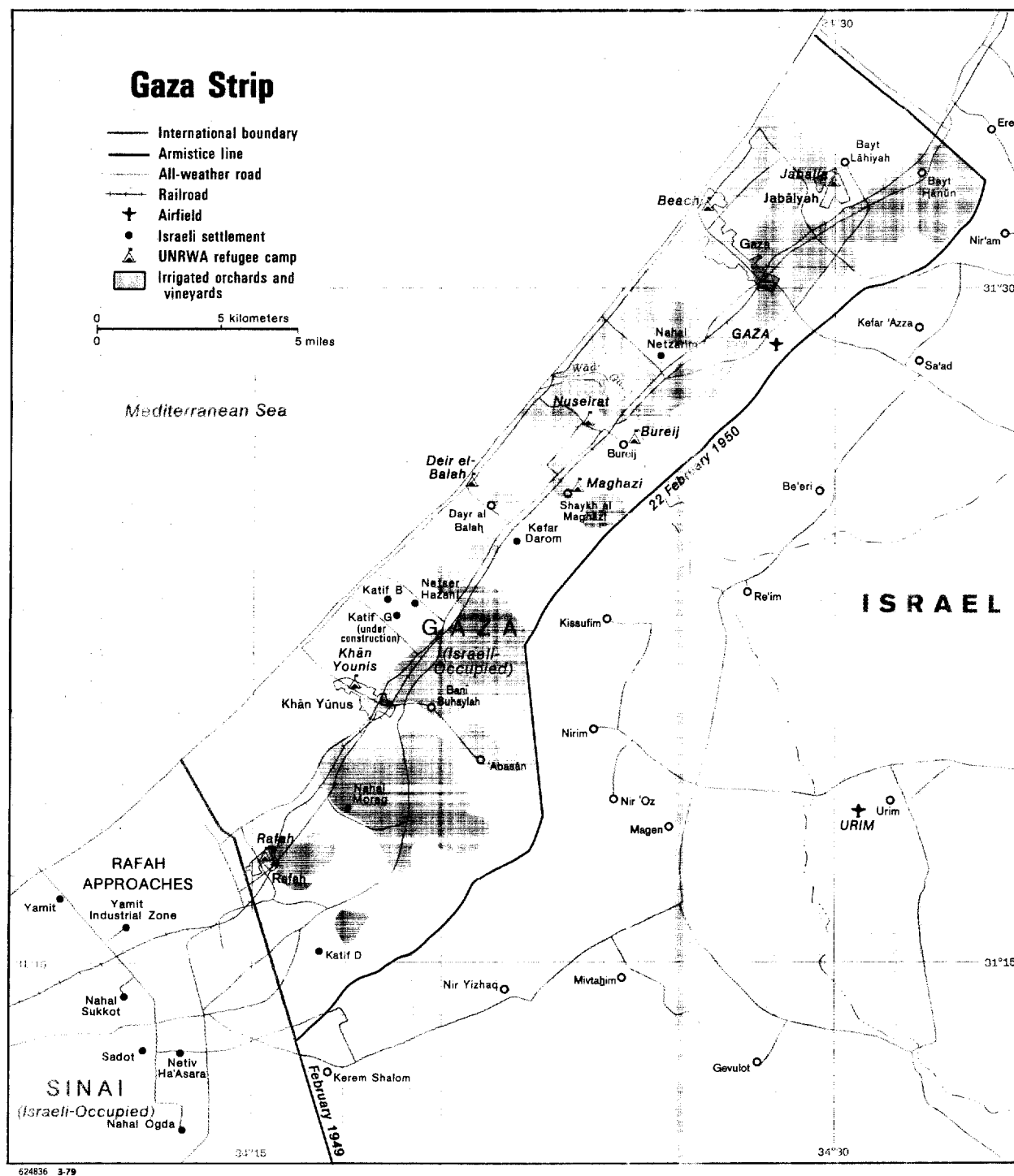
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The Gaza Strip:**A Primer****Summary**

While the Israeli-Egyptian peace negotiations have tended to address Gaza and the West Bank together, the two areas are quite different. For example, an estimated 80 percent of Gaza's more than 400,000 residents are Palestinian refugees—or their offspring—and about 44 percent of the West Bank's 700,000 residents are refugees. Gaza is also a political anomaly. Once a district of Palestine, the area has since 1948 been a questionable spoil of war detached from any larger entity. Today Israel administers Gaza, but does not regard it in the same emotional or historical light as it does the West Bank. Nevertheless, Israel, for security reasons, believes it must retain a military presence in Gaza for the indefinite future. Egypt advances no claim to sovereignty over Gaza, yet it considers Gaza its responsibility because of its former role as administrator of the territory.

President Sadat's search for creditable Palestinian residents of the West Bank and Gaza to participate in negotiations to establish a local self-governing entity has so far been unsuccessful. The traditional Gazan elite—led by members of the Shawwa clan—is tempted by the offer of autonomy, but it is shackled by refugee support for the Palestine Liberation Organization, which opposes the accords. Political dynamics in Gaza are essentially a struggle between these two groups. The PLO hardliners so far have the upper hand on the question of negotiations by reason of their numbers and their ability to intimidate opponents.

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The Gaza Strip: A Primer (U)

President Sadat talks of negotiating a *comprehensive* settlement with Israel, even if King Husayn of Jordan "does not accept his responsibility." Sadat's meaning is vague, but he presumably intends, at least in part, to see that a local self-governing entity is established in Gaza, where he can legitimately claim to play a role. Success will depend on Sadat's finding local Arabs willing to participate in the negotiations. [REDACTED]

No individuals who have a credible political base in Gaza have so far come forward. We believe, however, that there are Gazan politicians who are tempted to do so. It is, therefore, possible that Sadat will be able to proceed with negotiations for the autonomy of Gaza, offering the results as a model for what might be achieved on the West Bank. This paper is intended to serve both as a primer on the Gaza Strip and as an assessment of its political dynamics, in anticipation of negotiations to resolve its status. [REDACTED]

History

Before 15 May 1948 the Gaza district of Palestine comprised the entire southern half of the country and, as a part of Palestine, was administered by the United Kingdom under a mandate from the League of Nations. On 15 May 1948 the British mandate was terminated and the Arab-Israeli war began. Egyptian forces entered Gaza city, which became the headquarters of the Egyptian expeditionary force in Palestine. The area of Egyptian control was reduced by the fighting to a narrow strip of coastal territory 25 miles long that became known as the Gaza Strip. Its borders were demarcated in the Egyptian-Israeli armistice of 24 February 1950; its southwestern limit was the prewar boundary between Egypt and Palestine. [REDACTED]

During the 1948 fighting, the Strip became a haven for Palestinian refugees. Egypt did not annex the territory after the armistice, but administered it through governors whose rule is remembered as harsh. [REDACTED]

Between 1949 and 1956 there was a gradual escalation of violence between inhabitants of Gaza and the neighboring Israelis. Israel temporarily occupied the area during the 1956 war, but relinquished control to Egypt in March 1957 under US and UN pressure. [REDACTED]

Anti-Israeli activity accelerated in the Strip in the mid-1960s with the formation of the Palestine Liberation Organization. The Palestine Liberation Army, Fatah, and the forerunner of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine were all active in mobilizing the population against Israel up to and during the 1967 war. After the Israelis occupied the Strip in 1967, these groups went underground and used the refugee camps as bases for attacks on the occupation forces. Israel crushed the guerrillas in 1971 and rooted out the PLO organization. Armed resistance has since mostly ceased in the Gaza Strip. [REDACTED]

Israel regards the Gaza Strip as an anomaly. In its view it has neither the emotional and historical associations of the West Bank nor is it part of Egypt. But because of its proximity to Israel's populous coastal plain, Israeli leaders strongly believe they must retain some measure of control over the area to prevent it from again becoming a staging base for Palestinian terrorist attacks. [REDACTED]

Egypt presently considers Gaza its responsibility until Gaza achieves self-determination as part of an independent Palestinian state or as a self-governing entity. Cairo does not include annexation of the Strip among the options available to Egypt, in part because of the large refugee population in Gaza. [REDACTED]

Jordan, which took control of and ultimately annexed the West Bank portion of Palestine after the 1948 war, maintains economic links with Gaza, but advances no claims of sovereignty. [REDACTED]

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Geography

The Gaza Strip is a narrow rectangle of land along the Mediterranean Sea between the Sinai Peninsula and the Israeli border. Only about 25 miles long and 4 to 8 miles wide, Gaza's area of 145 square miles is slightly more than twice the size of Washington, D.C. Gaza city is 40 miles by road from Tel Aviv, 62 miles from Jerusalem, and about 240 miles from Cairo. [REDACTED]

The topography is characterized by sand beaches along a straight shoreline, sand dunes and sparse vegetation in the west, and sandstone ridges in the east. Alluvial soil is found inland, which supports citrus plantations and field crops; agriculture is the major economic activity. The small areas of loess soil in the eastern part are the most productive; the soil in the south tends to be saline and more sandy. Coastal areas are covered with sand dunes, though there are some pockets of soil that retain moisture and are cultivable. Water supply is precarious; it is dependent on wells tapping underground aquifers fed by rainfall seepage. Average annual rainfall is about 14 inches. [REDACTED]

Gaza has no known commercially exploitable natural resources and no natural harbor. [REDACTED]

Human Resources

The Gaza Strip, with about 2,000 persons per square mile according to a 1967 census, is among the more densely populated areas of the world. By comparison, the population density of Bangladesh is about 1,400 persons per square mile. [REDACTED]

Gaza's population is estimated to be over 400,000 and growing at an estimated annual rate of 3 percent. The exact growth rate is obscured by the migration of Palestinians to the West Bank and other Arab states. [REDACTED]

It is a young population, with nearly half the people under 15 years of age. It contains more females than males, especially in the 20-to-30 age group. Gazan towns—Gaza city (1967 population, 87,793), Khan Yunis (1967 population, 29,522), and Rafah (1967

population, 10,812)—have become artificial urban centers in that they are dense residential areas for native and refugee populations who work elsewhere. [REDACTED]

Principal population movements were the influx of Palestinian refugees between 1948 and 1949 and a much smaller exit of these refugees from Gaza since 1967. Present outward movements consist largely of workers commuting daily to jobs in Israel and the West Bank and the temporary migration of young males to study in Arab universities or take jobs in other Arab countries. Over 95 percent of Gazans are Arab and Muslim. [REDACTED]

The influx of refugees raised the population from 72,000 in 1946 to 280,000 in 1949; the natural increase of the 1948 refugee population is largely responsible for the area's current population of more than 400,000, of whom the refugees comprise over 80 percent. About 60 percent of the refugees continue to live in the eight camps administered by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). The camp refugees, especially, remain a distinct social and political element that has not been absorbed into the surrounding communities, regarding themselves as temporarily separated from their homeland. [REDACTED]

Israeli Presence

There are between 500 and 600 Israelis in the Gaza Strip. They are associated with the military government, security, or the six Israeli settlements. A new settlement was recently established in the southern tip of Gaza. Israeli settlements are located near main traffic arteries and interspersed at regular intervals between major towns. [REDACTED]

The emphasis in Israeli settlement planning since the 1967 war has been on the Jordan Valley and Jerusalem. Settlement activity in the Rafah approaches along the northeastern Sinai coast and in Gaza began about 1971, after armed resistance in the Strip had been crushed. [REDACTED]

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25X1 All Israeli settlements in the occupied territories are administered by the Israeli Defense Force under martial law. Gaza settlements are of two types—the nahal and the moshav. Nahals are paramilitary settlements established by the Nahal (Fighting Pioneer Youth Corps) of the IDF. They are normally converted to civilian status after a few years. Two Gaza nahals, Netzarim and Morag, are exceptions to this rule. [redacted]

25X1 A moshav is a farming community in which each settler has a separate home and works his own piece of land leased from the state. Produce is marketed jointly. There are two moshavs in the Gaza Strip and another under construction, all affiliated with the National Religious Party of Israel. [redacted]

Social Factors and Welfare

25X1 Set against the refugee population is a traditional Gaza social structure—politically conservative, landowning, and with economic links to Israel and Jordan. The Shawwa clan stands above the others in economic and political influence. Its wealth rests on ownership of large portions of Gaza's arable land and control of the citrus export business. The Shawwa clan numbers about 5,000. Its titular head and wealthiest member is 71-year-old Rashid Shawwa. As mayor of Gaza city, he augments the clan's economic power with control of political patronage. [redacted]

25X1 The religious makeup of the Gaza population is overwhelmingly Muslim. The Christians (fewer than 4,000) are mostly Greek Orthodox. The Greek Orthodox community consists largely of educated professionals; it is quite prominent in the Gazan court system. A small Roman Catholic community of 250 consists mostly of poor refugees from northern Palestine. The Baptists, supported by foreign funds, manage a major hospital, although the local Baptist community is small. [redacted]

25X1 Medical care and education are adequate and provided by UNRWA to the refugees and by Israel and private charitable groups to both refugees and native Gazans. Educational levels are higher in Gaza than in the West

Bank and slightly higher among refugees in Gaza than nonrefugees. UNRWA provides free education to male and female refugee children through the ninth grade. About 50 percent of all Gazans have had five or more years of schooling; 17 percent have 11 or more years of schooling. Each year several hundred students attend vocational schools operated by UNRWA or by Israel. Of the 10,000 Palestinian students studying at Egyptian universities in 1977, 9,000 were from Gaza. The Egyptian curriculum is used in Gaza, and access to Egyptian universities is an important factor in sustaining Egyptian influence in Gaza. [redacted]

Local health conditions are typical of those in a developing society—high fertility and mortality rates, and poor sanitation. UNRWA and WHO maintain good health conditions in the UNRWA refugee camps. Food appears to be available in sufficient quantity and quality. [redacted]

The Economic Setting

Gaza is basically a commercial center, with some agricultural activity and a few small industrial plants. Surrounded by the wastes of the Sinai and the Negev, Gaza has a poor location as a transportation crossroads. At present, the economy is almost totally dependent on labor, trade, transportation, and power ties to the Israeli economy. [redacted]

Gaza's economy has grown rapidly in the past decade. Per capita annual income is estimated at \$500 to \$700. (Jordan's is near \$500 and Egypt's around \$300.) Growth of real gross national product since 1968 has averaged an impressive 13 percent annually.¹ [redacted]

The rise of the standard of living in Gaza is less a product of economic development than a derivative of full employment and worker remittances from abroad. Full employment became possible after 1968 when Israel allowed Gaza's surplus labor to work in Israel, mostly as unskilled day laborers in the construction and agricultural sectors. About half of the employed labor force works in Israel—mostly as unskilled day laborers in the construction and agricultural sector.

¹ GNP measures total output of an economy, all goods produced and all services rendered. GDP, by contrast, excludes income earned abroad by residents of a territory—a particularly important factor in the case of the Gaza Strip—an overseas investment income. [redacted]

25X1 Worker earnings from Israel—roughly \$100 to 150 million annually—account for perhaps 40 percent of GNP. In 1978, per capita GNP surpassed \$700, well above the average for less developed countries. []

25X1 Such unemployment as does exist in Gaza is centered, ironically, among the better educated, because the demand in Israel is for cheap, unskilled labor. []

Trade Patterns

25X1 During the 1948 war Gaza was cut off from its natural hinterland, which became part of Israel. Economic links were then forged with Egypt, which at that time administered the territory. After the 1967 Israeli occupation of Gaza, economic ties again shifted. The old links to Egypt were reduced, and a gradual integration of Gaza's economy with that of Israel began. Gaza became a source of cheap labor and a protected market for Israeli manufactured goods. []

25X1 Israel has also become a market for Gazan agricultural exports. Exports to Israel have jumped threefold since 1974. About 60 percent of all exports now go to Israel, including products such as wicker furniture and soft drinks that would be difficult to market elsewhere. Arab restrictions on trade with companies that invest in Israel have encouraged a few international firms to locate in Gaza. These companies produce largely for the Israeli market. Some exports, primarily citrus and other agricultural products, are trucked to Jordan for reexport to Iran and other countries in the Middle East. []

25X1 On the import side, Gaza is almost totally dependent on Israel. Although this is due largely to Israeli controls, the poor port facilities in Gaza would make trade with other areas difficult in any case. In addition, in contrast to its Arab neighbors, Israel produces a wide range of manufactured goods demanded by the Gazans. []

25X1 Gaza's communication, transport, and power systems are now tied to the Israeli systems. Differences remain in the areas of tax and finance. []

25X1 Jordan is economically important to Gaza because it is the funnel through which Gaza markets its citrus crop in the Arab world. []

Gaza's inflation rate—25 to 30 percent annually—is somewhat lower than that experienced by Israel. Most of the inflation is attributable to the economic links that have evolved with Israel. Most goods and services are purchased from Israel, and higher wage rates in Israel have forced up wages in Gaza. []

25X1 Agriculture is Gaza's most important economic sector, accounting for 26 percent of employment, 28 percent of the gross domestic product, and about 90 percent of all export earnings. Industry is mostly restricted to traditional crafts, small workshops, and assembly operations for Israeli manufacturers. []

Political Dynamics

25X1 Gaza is administered by an Israeli military governor assisted by 130 civilian technical personnel and 150 Israeli Defense Force personnel who supervise a local police force of several hundred. []

25X1 Gaza has no elected officials—the last election was in 1964—and organized political activity is banned. Local government is provided by Arab mayors in four municipalities and seven villages, each assisted by a council. Mayors and councilmen are appointed by the Israeli governor. []

25X1 The governor meets regularly with about 30 Gazan notables, the mayors, and the heads of the city councils. Israel allows Gazan officials some leeway in local matters and patronage power in return for a degree of cooperation. The officials are wary of appearing openly to be doing Israel's bidding because Gazans tolerate but do not accept Israeli rule. []

25X1 Because political organizations are banned, most political activity takes place in ostensibly nonpolitical societies. The Benevolent Society for the Welfare of Gaza Strip Inhabitants is probably the most important of these because it is run by the Shawwa family and represents the interests of the conservative traditional elite. []

25X1 Rashid Shawwa, Mayor of Gaza city, is the most prominent member of the Shawwa clan. He acts as Jordan's unofficial representative in Gaza. He derives considerable political leverage from his control of

25X1 permits for shipping goods to Jordan and of the Jordanian passports and identity papers that are necessary to travel from Israel or the occupied territories. Shawwa was first appointed mayor by Israel in 1971, but was dismissed in 1972. He was reappointed in 1975. [redacted]

Shawwa's health reportedly has grown more delicate during the past year. He has not groomed a successor, and there does not at present appear to be a strong leadership figure waiting in the wings in the Shawwa or other major clans, the Gaza civil administration, the religious establishment, or the refugee community. Rashid Shawwa's departure in such circumstances would thus, at least in the short run, probably lead to an unraveling of political power in Gaza and some fragmentation of the region's moderate leadership. [redacted]

25X1 The mayor is a pragmatist who clearly recognizes that he is a bit player in a high stakes game in the Middle East. He has so far managed to walk a narrow line between the conflicting demands of the Israeli occupation and his constituents, mostly by cultivating an improved image with the PLO. [redacted]

25X1 The mayor's economic interests—and those of his clan and other traditionalist backers—are built on the export of citrus products, mostly to Jordan, with lesser exports to Israel and Europe. In past years, Shawwa has expressed support for a federation of Gaza and the West Bank with Jordan. He has said that a resolution of the Palestinian question must include an internationally guaranteed corridor between Gaza and the West Bank. He looks to Egypt only for trade and education and not for political links. Shawwa has indicated he would accept, as an interim step, Palestinian self-rule under the supervision of the United Nations or the United States for a period of four to five years to prove that a small Palestinian state represents no threat to Israel. [redacted]

Shawwa and his supporters must be very tempted to join Egypt and Israel in negotiating autonomy for Gaza. Participation would entail great personal and political risk if the PLO opposed, but it would also offer Shawwa the prospect of preserving his clan's power at the expense of younger, more radical political rivals whose base is in the refugee community. The Mayor's final position is likely to be determined by his reading of the attitude of King Husayn, the PLO leadership, and the Saudis. The pro-PLO and antiautonomy forces in Gaza are the dominant voice at present, in part because of their tactics of intimidation. [redacted]

Shawwa and the "Gaza First" Option

In the wake of President Carter's breakthrough on a treaty this month, Shawwa has publicly rejected the idea of holding autonomy negotiations first in Gaza, claiming that this could spark serious divisions among Palestinian leaders. He has stressed that the Israeli plan for autonomy does not go far enough in the direction of Palestinian self-determination. [redacted]

Pro-PLO Sentiment

A major consideration for Rashid Shawwa must be the attitude of the Palestinian refugees (over 300,000) in Gaza. Most are pro-PLO, and it is doubtful that an effective governing body could be formed without their cooperation. Pro-PLO Gazans tend to repeat publicly the hardline PLO position opposing Camp David, but we suspect some are concerned about being left behind by the peace process. [REDACTED]

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The first prerequisite Shawwa has attached to his own participation in a Gaza autonomous regime is that it must have "real substance," including in probable order of importance:

- Arab control over Gaza water sources and state lands.
- A moratorium on new Israeli settlements.
- An Egyptian liaison office and security force.
- A more effective Arab-controlled Gaza police force than the area's current ragtag outfit.
- Arab control of the Gaza civil administration.
- An end to the Israeli veto on Gazan development projects. [REDACTED]

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The exact strength of pro-PLO sentiment in Gaza is difficult to measure. Israel destroyed the formal PLO organization in the camps during its crackdown in 1971, and it is not likely to allow a reestablishment as long as Israel has a political role in the territory. Some covert organization may still be present. [REDACTED]

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The PLO viewpoint today is often expressed through the Red Crescent Society, the Muslim counterpart of the Red Cross. The society is led by two native Gazans who were former members of the PLO Supreme Council of Gaza. Dr. Haydar Abd al-Shafi and Ibrahim Abu Sitah. [REDACTED]

Abd al-Shafi is president of the Red Crescent and on the board of trustees for Bir Zeit University, the only four-year university on the West Bank and a center of PLO support. Abd al-Shafi is a longtime political rival of Rashid Shawwa. He severed his official connection with the PLO in the early 1970s in order to avoid being deported from Gaza by the Israelis. [REDACTED]

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In addition, Shawwa wants Egypt and Israel to appear to impose autonomy in Gaza. By this line of reasoning, the two countries would conclude their negotiations over the powers of the self-governing authority and then declare their intention to implement the arrangements with or without the participation of Shawwa and other major Gazan leaders. [REDACTED]

Abu Sitah is another longtime PLO official and a former member of the Executive Committee of the Palestine National Congress. Israel linked him to bombings in 1969 and deported him from Gaza. He remains active in Gazan affairs and is believed to have been allowed to return to Gaza. [REDACTED]

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Shawwa would argue with the PLO that he joined the autonomous regime in order to prevent a takeover by nonentities or Israeli collaborators. [REDACTED]

Other sources of pro-PLO sentiment in Gaza are Zuhair el-Rayyes, a lawyer and editor of the pro-PLO Jerusalem daily, *al-Fajr*, and Fayyez abu Rahme, head of the Gazan bar association. El Rayyes is a friend of Rahme—[REDACTED] a Communist—and a close collaborator of al-Shafi. El Rayyes' family reportedly controlled Gazan politics during the Egyptian occupation when many of the Shawwa family were imprisoned. [REDACTED]

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Pro-Egyptian Sentiment

Pro-Egyptian opinion in Gaza is much less strong than pro-PLO opinion. It is fostered by Gazan access to Egyptian universities and by an overriding desire to end the Israeli occupation, which translates into support for Sadat's peace policies. Shawwa clan leaders and some mayors support Sadat's peace initiative, though political realities preclude their publicly taking that position. Sheik Hashim al-Khazeidar, the Imam of Gaza, is Sadat's most outspoken supporter, and he led a delegation to Cairo following Sadat's trip to Jerusalem. Rashid Shawwa refused to participate unless the PLO approved. They did not and instead accused Khazeidar of being an "Israeli stooge." Israel has indeed boosted Khazeidar—they appointed him Imam—and he has little standing in Gazan politics. [REDACTED]

UNRWA

The local Arab administrators of the UNRWA program, who are relatively free of both Israeli influence and that of the traditional power structure, constitute another political force in Gaza. The UNRWA group's importance would probably increase if Gaza were faced with the practical problems of self-government because UNRWA has the experience and machinery to administer the area. [REDACTED]

Local UNRWA officials are drawn almost exclusively from among the refugees. They preside over a multimillion-dollar operation that is in constant touch with the population through the administration of schools and hospitals; control of housing, food, and vocational training; and the dispensation of considerable patronage. It is the most thoroughly organized, largest, and best funded administrative structure in the Strip. [REDACTED]

UNRWA was established in December 1949 by the United Nations General Assembly to assist persons in the Gaza area, West Bank, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria who were displaced by the Arab-Israeli conflict. Field work began in May 1950. The agency serves all eligible refugees whether or not they live in the camps. UNRWA services are supplied directly to individuals, not through the governing authority. [REDACTED]

US Presence

The United States has no official presence in Gaza, but it is active in providing aid through the UN and various private relief agencies. US assistance for the West Bank and Gaza began in fiscal year 1975 under the Middle East Special Requirements Fund, established after the 1973 war. Funding for West Bank and Gaza development projects has in recent years been set at \$3 million. [REDACTED]

The aid program is a bilateral US-Arab effort, and assistance is channeled through US voluntary agencies, not the Israeli Government. The principal agencies involved are the Catholic Relief Services and the American Near East Refugee Aid. [REDACTED]

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