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HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE TO THE PALESTINIANS:  
AN ASSESSMENT OF OPTIONS AND AMERICAN POLICY

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ABSTRACT

American humanitarian aid policy in Lebanon is an ad hoc response to the situation. Long-term policies are undefined or vague. Short-term policies are aimed only at providing assistance to meet immediate needs. Most important, humanitarian assistance is not seen as part of the comprehensive strategy for reducing tension and creating conditions supportive of a long-term solution. This report explains why current policies and actions may lead to a reinstatement of the very conditions and problems that led to the recent Israeli invasion of Lebanon and explores options for providing aid in such a way that it contributes to development of interim conditions that can support long-term peace objectives.

BACKGROUND

At the time the fighting broke out, a majority of the Palestinians lived in refugee camps scattered throughout Lebanon. In the aftermath of the fighting, many of these camps were severely damaged; in some cases, large sections and even entire camps were bulldozed by the Israeli Army. Several camps, however, have remain unscathed and received only minor damages, and large numbers of Palestinians still occupy these settlements.

As the disengagement agreement neared, questions arose as to what would happen to the Palestinians displaced or made homeless by the fighting. Understandably the Israelis were reluctant to permit any type of humanitarian assistance that would see the camps rebuilt as armed settlements. Several proposals were made including:

1. Forcibly evacuating all the camps and re-establishing new camps in other, more secure locations;
2. Forcibly evacuating all camps and creating a series of mini-camps, scattered throughout the country, that could be more easily controlled;
3. Bulldozing the existing camps and recreating refugee tent camps until other solutions could be developed.

Each of these proposals is controversial and, in the end, it must be the Lebanese Government that decides which path to choose. There is no doubt, however, that American aid and support can play a major role in determining how and where the Palestinians are shel-

tered. This in turn can have a major impact on the development of long-term solutions in the area.

#### INITIAL AMERICAN POLICY

As diplomats moved closer to a cease-fire in West Beirut, American humanitarian policy for the Palestinians began to be formulated. In the early stages, numerous assessments by American personnel pointed out that the Palestinian refugees were receiving massive amounts of aid from around the world, and it was therefore felt that American aid should be focused on meeting those needs which were not being met by the international community. Primary efforts were focused on seeking a disengagement between Israeli and Palestinian forces, and planning for humanitarian assistance took a necessarily secondary role. Preliminary plans were generally guarded and were designed to be as non-controversial as possible. Thus, by the end of the fighting, American policy regarding the homeless Palestinians and the refugee camps was to provide tents to the United Nations Relief & Works Agency (UNRWA), to provide temporary shelter, and to provide financial assistance and materials through voluntary agencies so that the immediate personal needs of the refugees (e.g., food, clothing, blankets) could be met. There was much concern that emergency supplies be delivered as quickly as feasible so that refugees and displaced persons could be sheltered and supplied before the onset of the winter months. The approach chosen by the U.S. Government was:

1. To provide only basic material assistance (e.g., tents, blankets, etc.) to the refugees;
2. To operate indirectly by providing assistance to the humanitarian agencies, and not to establish an operational arm of the U.S. AID Mission to Lebanon;
3. To avoid direct participation in the planning and/or resettlement of refugees in the refugee camps.

While personal needs can be met by this approach, the primary problem is that the basic element -- the refugee camp itself -- has been virtually ignored. An ad hoc approach to planning and reconstruction of these camps will mean that the camps will probably re-emerge along the same lines and in the same pattern that existed just prior to the Israeli invasion. Only a few people have studied the evolution of the Palestinian camps and in general these people are not participating in reconstruction or relief efforts. Furthermore, organizations such as UNRWA do not have trained professionals experienced in refugee camp planning on their staffs. Neither do the voluntary agencies. Thus many past mistakes will be repeated and few of the lessons learned will be incorporated in the design and con-

struction of new settlements for the refugees.

While material assistance can meet certain personal comfort needs, it will contribute nothing to either intermediate or long-term solutions to the Palestinian situation. Furthermore, the lack of understanding about how to plan a refugee camp, and how to establish a physical basis for control and security, can lead to the evolution of the camp in such a way that it promotes secrecy and seclusion, provides cover for clandestine operations, and breeds the very conditions that support extremist organizations.

#### DEFINING HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE OBJECTIVES

In order to provide a framework for examining the options available, humanitarian objectives must be identified and set according to a logical sequence of time. Without having formally stated them, the following appear to be U.S. objectives vis-a-vis the Palestinian camps in Lebanon.

1. To reduce tensions;
2. To meet the basic needs of the refugees;
3. To remove the camps as the site of conflict between Palestinians and Israelis.

In essence, these are short-term objectives and generally can be met through various approaches. More important to consider are additional objectives which might contribute to other peace-keeping goals. For example, an intermediate objective should be to create an interim situation that will support a long-term solution. Long-term objectives should be to create conditions that will promote integration of as many Palestinians as possible into the Lebanese economy and social fabric, and to create settlements that will not breed the hatreds and conditions that have given rise to terrorist organizations. The long-term objectives are extremely important to consider. If the camps are not well-planned and control is not maintained throughout their evolution, they will once again become armed camps, closed to outsiders. If adequate living conditions, jobs and security are not provided, discontent which can be turned into support for terrorist actions will quickly re-manifest itself.

The most practical reason for well-built and viable settlements, however, is in regard to long-term solutions that are being considered. If the territorial objectives of the Palestinians are realized, a major problem will be the number of Palestinians that may "return"; quite simply, there is not enough land to support all the Palestinians that are now stateless. Some degree of assimilation must be achieved in order to reduce the population burden on a new

state. As refugees, the Palestinians have little future. It is difficult to develop businesses, to acquire land, or to attain prominent positions in business or commerce. Citizenship in a Palestinian state will, of course, alleviate many of these restrictions, whether or not they go to a new state, and many objections to Palestinian settlement in Lebanon could be overcome. For example, as Palestinian citizens they would be foreign nationals and could not play a part in the electoral equation of Christians versus Muslims. Nonetheless, it would be advantageous for the new state if some degree of assimilation of Palestinians could be attained. If the camps are open, near employment centers, Palestinians can have access to jobs and markets in the Lebanese economy. The stronger that these ties are and the less hostility that surrounds these ties, the less likely these people are to uproot themselves and move to a new state. Furthermore, Palestinians remaining in Lebanon, engaged in business and commerce, will be a major source of financial support to the new state. Those who do decide to relocate will become the cornerstone of the new economy.

Long-term objectives such as these can only be met if the Palestinian camps are designed to evolve as open communities or settlements with occupants participating in the Lebanese economy, rather than being isolated communities, sheltered and controlled by force and obliged to turn inward and become isolated from their Lebanese surroundings.

If these objectives are accepted as desirable, at least from the point of view of American policy, we can consider whether or not the current activities in regard to Palestinian camps are supporting or preventing their achievement.

#### OPTIONS UNDER CONSIDERATION

At the present time, three courses of action regarding the camps are being considered.

Option #1: To rebuild the camps. Under this course of action, proposed by several humanitarian organizations, the Palestinians would be provided materials so that they could rebuild their settlements on the former sites. Tents have been distributed to provide shelter to those families that have lost their homes and, as soon as materials are available, it is proposed that they be provided under a variety of schemes to the Palestinians. For the most part, this approach is not acceptable to the Israelis who, understandably, fear that the camps will quickly once again become closed armed bases for terrorist organizations.

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Option #2: To bulldoze the existing camps and then rebuild on the same sites. Some clearance has already been carried out by both the Israelis and the Lebanese Government. Understandably, this policy is not acceptable to the Palestinians and has created much resentment and bitterness toward both the Israelis and the new government.

Option #3: To relocate the Palestinians into new camps. There are three variations of this proposal. The first is to establish two or three large camps in sparsely-populated regions of Lebanon that could be controlled by a permanent police force. This option, proposed by the Israelis in the early stages of the disengagement, has virtually no practical chance of being implemented. The international outcry and stigma that would be attached to such a move would be unacceptable for both the Israelis and the Lebanese Government and virtually no humanitarian organization that supported such a move would be free from criticism. If such a large camp were to be established, authorities would very quickly lose control and would be faced with military actions against the camps within a very short period of time.

The second relocation proposal is to develop a series of scattered settlements limited to a moderate size that could be generally self-supporting adjacent to urban areas (outside Beirut) or placed where occupants could easily participate in a neighboring urban economy. Of all the relocation schemes, this appears to be the most practical.

At one time, Israeli officials proposed that a series of mini-camps be established throughout the country, adjacent to or surrounded by settlements sympathetic to the new government. In effect, this creates permanent dispersed minorities and uses the surrounding majority to maintain control. This is an approach similar to that used by the Israelis to isolate and control Arab settlements within their own borders. Proponents argue that the smaller settlements will make it much easier for the government to control the Palestinians and that, in the long run, a great deal of assimilation might be achieved. Other than the obvious security problems that such a scheme would present in today's hostile environment, such a plan is impractical principally on the basis that land tenure problems are too intricate to allow the rapid land acquisition such a move would require, and it is doubtful that the government is strong enough politically to undertake such a land acquisition program at the present time or would be able to guarantee security to the Palestinians.

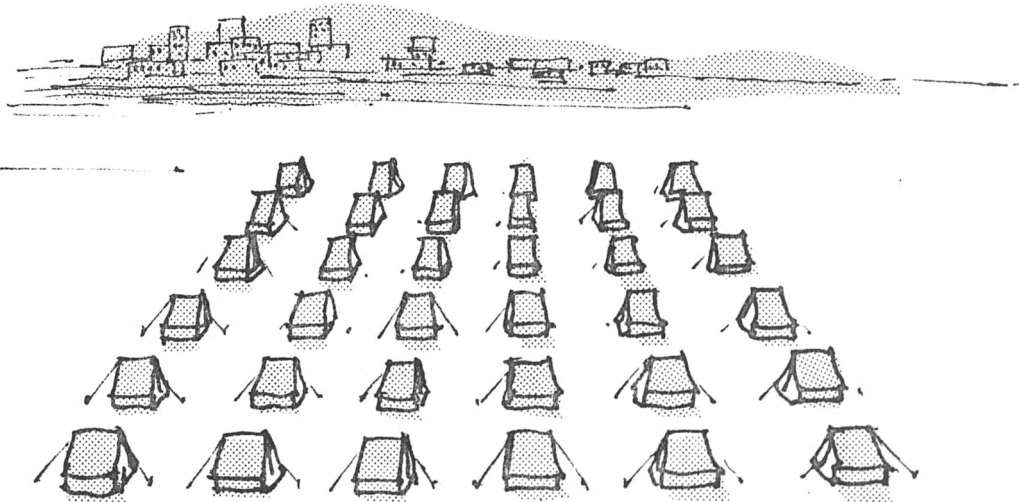
What then is the best option for American policy to support? To make that choice, it is necessary to understand more about the Palestinian camps, how they evolved and were organized as armed settlements.

EVOLUTION OF A PALESTINIAN "CAMP" AND IMPLICATIONS FOR SETTLEMENT PLANNING

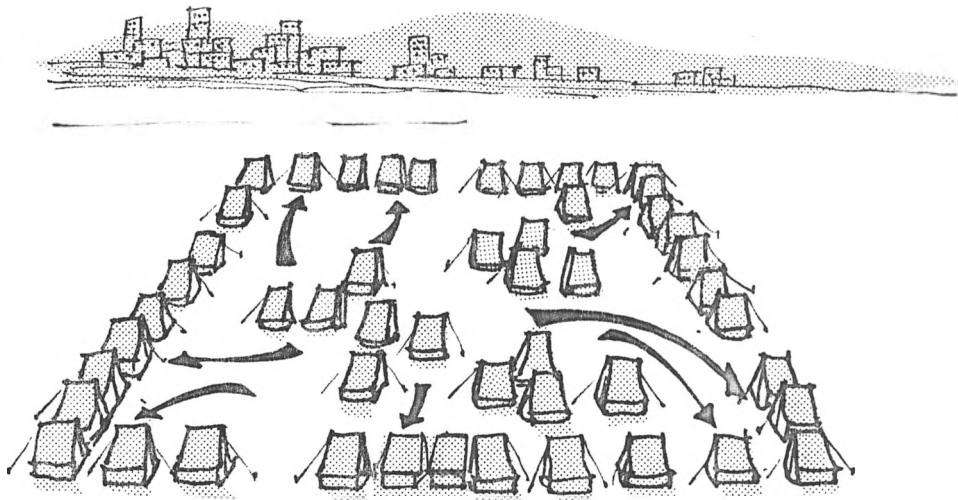
The popular image of a refugee camp is a settlement composed of tents and barracks with a few relief agencies dispensing supplies and medicines. Such an image could not be further from reality. The camps are no longer "camps" in the sense of temporary settlements; in fact, many are more like subdivisions of urban areas. Many permanent two- and three-story buildings have been erected and, while in some camps many people still reside in makeshift buildings, a large percentage of the Palestinians have managed to erect buildings made of slip-form concrete, reinforced concrete block and stone masonry.

To an outsider, these camps appear to be haphazard and laid out in an ad hoc manner. On closer inspection, however, a trained observer will see that the outer rings of buildings are made of reinforced concrete and form the walls of a fortress. The interior of the camp consists of a maze of streets which are designed to confuse the outsider and lead to many blind alleys, switchbacks and false exits. The Palestinians in the camp know which buildings are shortcuts from one part of the camp to the other, and it is possible for a resident to cross the camp area in a matter of minutes, while an outsider may take 30-45 minutes to find his way.

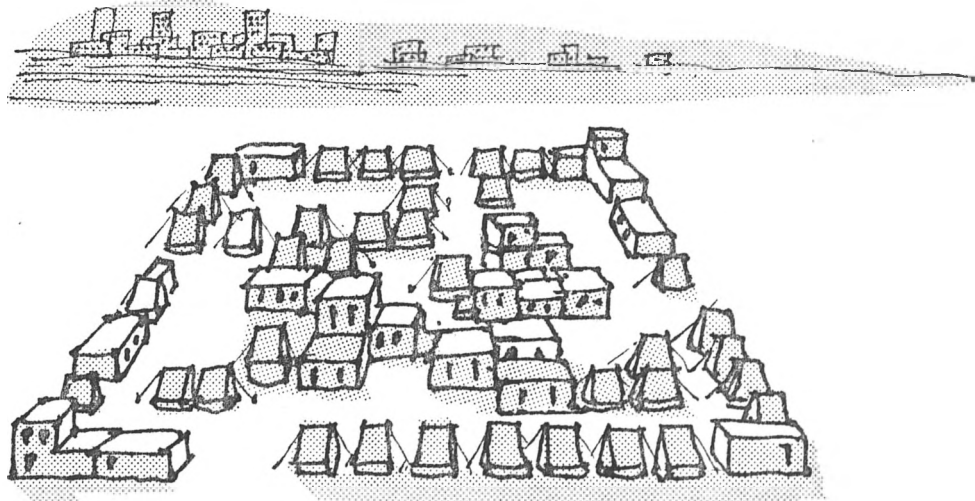
The PLO has been able to develop the camps in this manner because few outsiders or relief officials have recognized what is happening until it is too late (due to a high turnover in personnel), nor have they devised any means of exercising control over this process. What is even more amazing is that they started out as orderly tent camps. The process follows this pattern. First, tents are laid out in a grid by a relief agency. The grid usually remains until camp routines are established and refugees and relief workers get to know one another.



After several months, refugees begin to feel isolated by the grid and start to move their tents into more accommodating relationships with family or friends. Refugee leaders use this general realignment to cover their own moves and encourage their followers to move their tents from the camp's inner sections into line with the tents at the outer edge, thus gradually forming a dense outer ring around the camp.



The siting of tents in effect establishes tenure of land. These tents, which are unsuitable for long-term occupation, are gradually replaced by the refugees with more solid structures. Refugee leaders normally allow the inner section to develop first; when that area is secure, the outer ring of tents is quickly replaced with permanent structures.

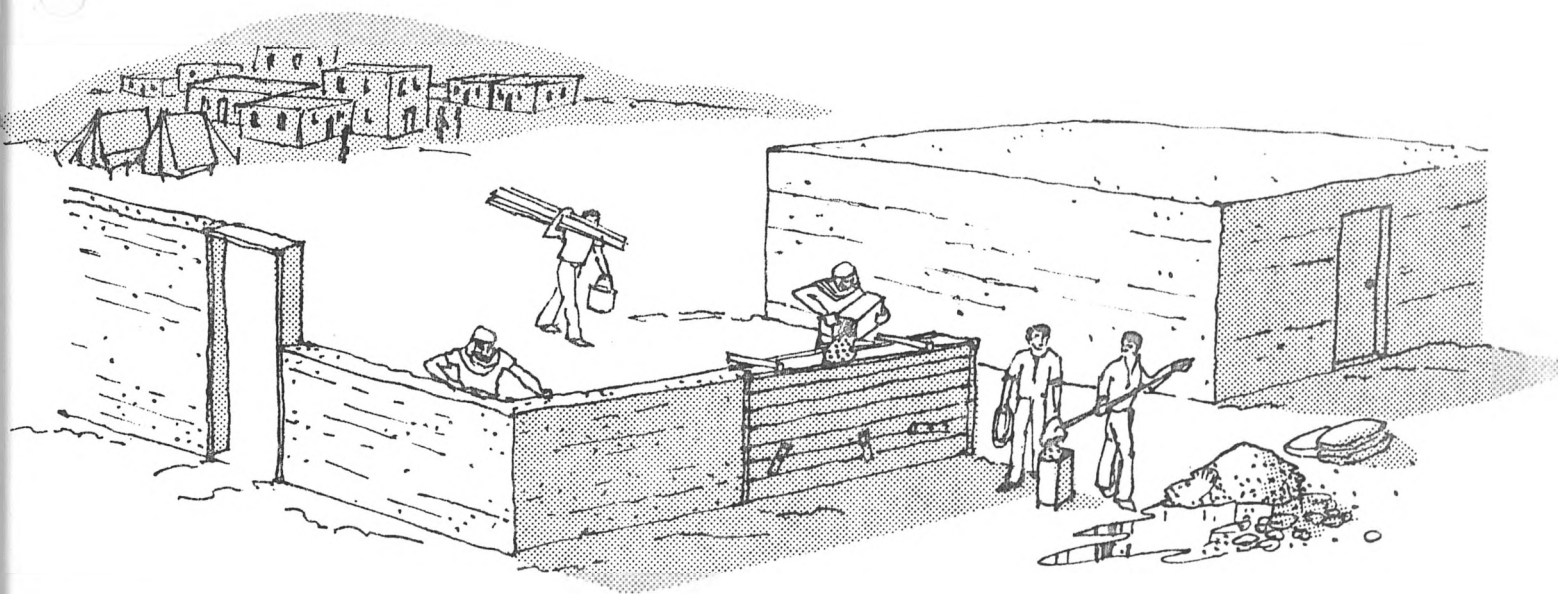




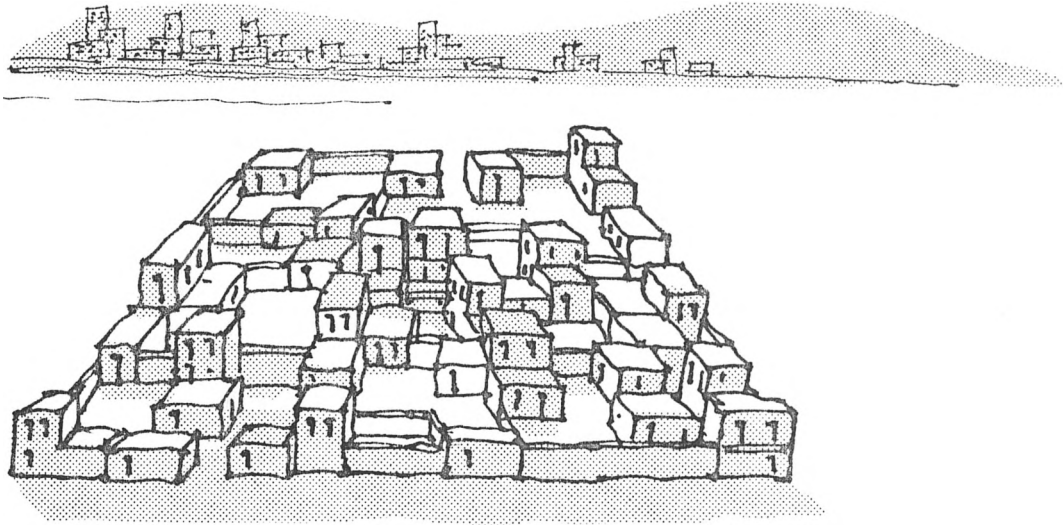
At this point, the relief agencies will normally begin to install water and other services to the camp. This serves to legitimize the pattern of the camp established by the refugee leadership.

In the final step, the remaining tents on the outer perimeter are replaced with permanent structures and dividing walls are erected between the houses to close the camp and define the pattern of streets, paths and alleyways. Dummy houses are placed in key locations so that they can be used as safe houses or for rapid transit of the camp, if necessary.

Rapid construction of permanent buildings is possible because of the types of building systems used. Stone masonry, concrete block and slip-form concrete structures are the most prevalent systems in use in Lebanon, and the skills and resources are available in good supply. Slip-form concrete construction, a technique where wet concrete is poured into a wooden form, is a particularly fast building method, and strong houses and walls can be erected in only a few days.



As soon as the walls are complete, the camp is closed to outsiders and a fortress has been established.



These camps are more like small cities or subdivisions. Small businesses, shops and stores have been established to serve the needs of the people in the settlements, and not a small number provide goods and services to surrounding communities. The Palestinians are very industrious and many have established a fairly good standard of living. It is these people that the bulldozing and resettlement plans would most affect, and this group of Palestinians can be expected to vigorously oppose any plans to move them.

The appearance of prosperity in many of the camps, however, can be misleading. While many people are prosperous, the fact remains that the camps are still overcrowded. Many houses shelter large families; even before the fighting, almost all the buildings housed extended families under the same roof. Since the fighting, those camp buildings that have survived are even more overcrowded.

For policy planners, the following course should be considered. First, refugees living in large, well-built houses should be permitted to remain where they are. These persons are likely to have contacts outside the camps and to be able not only to fend for themselves but to actively participate in the Lebanese economy. In all likelihood, these people have more vested interest in a peaceful environment and are not likely to be active participants in any

terrorist organizations. In short, they are already partially assimilated and should thus not be dislodged.

Second, the fact that so many buildings are permanent structures is an indication that the Palestinians will not accept a return to tents and that any type of shelter that is provided must be more than temporary dwellings. Otherwise, the Palestinians will quickly erect semi-permanent buildings with solid walls, using the building systems described earlier.

Third, the overcrowding and density of the camps may provide reasonable justification for relocating a substantial number of Palestinians to new settlements and, if decent housing and jobs are offered in the new settlements, some degree of voluntary relocation may be possible.

Fourth, the need to establish settlements that build on, rather than restrict, the self-reliance of the refugees can clearly be seen. Simply from a practical point of view, a settlement that allows the Palestinians to freely participate in economic activities means that international support can be greatly reduced. Any attempts to create settlements that take away from the refugees' self-reliance will do more to breed discontent than any other single factor.

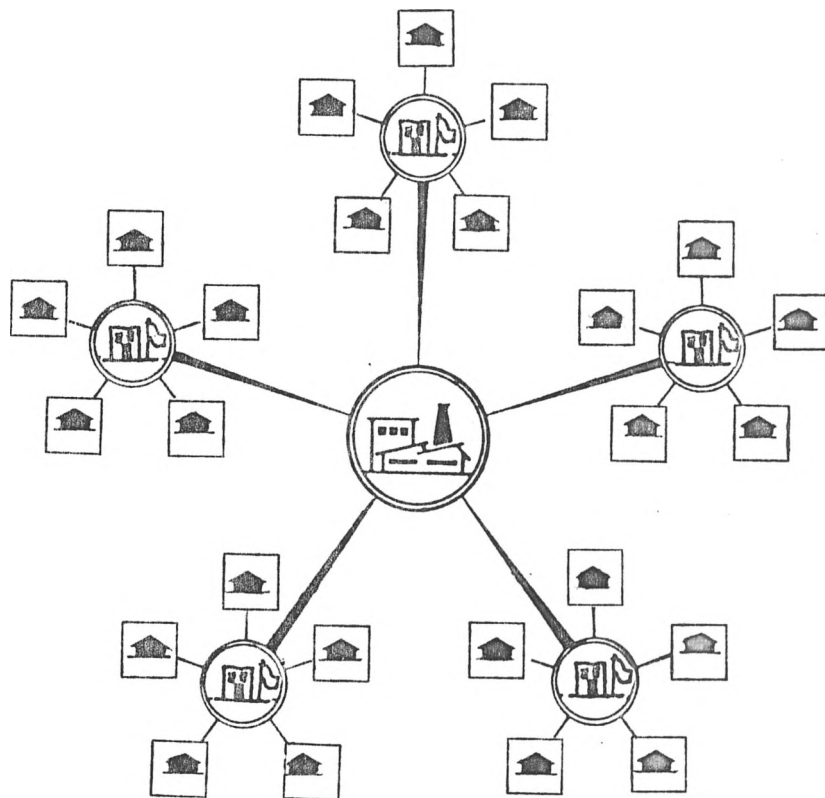
Finally it should be obvious from the Palestinians' proven skill at establishing their own control of a settlement and turning the communities into armed fortresses that any plans for building new camps must be carefully designed to ensure that the proper authorities maintain control during all phases of a settlement's development and growth.

#### A RECOMMENDED APPROACH FOR PALESTINIAN SETTLEMENTS

Given the above conditions and the political constraints that currently exist, no single approach could be selected that would effectively meet the needs of both the Palestinians and the Lebanese. Thus a multi-pronged approach is required. The following is a suggested way in which the objectives postulated earlier might be achieved. The approach consists of three elements:

1. the establishment of new settlements;
2. the replanning and limited reconstruction of camps that were bulldozed; and
3. the reconstruction of existing camps according to standards designed to permit control.

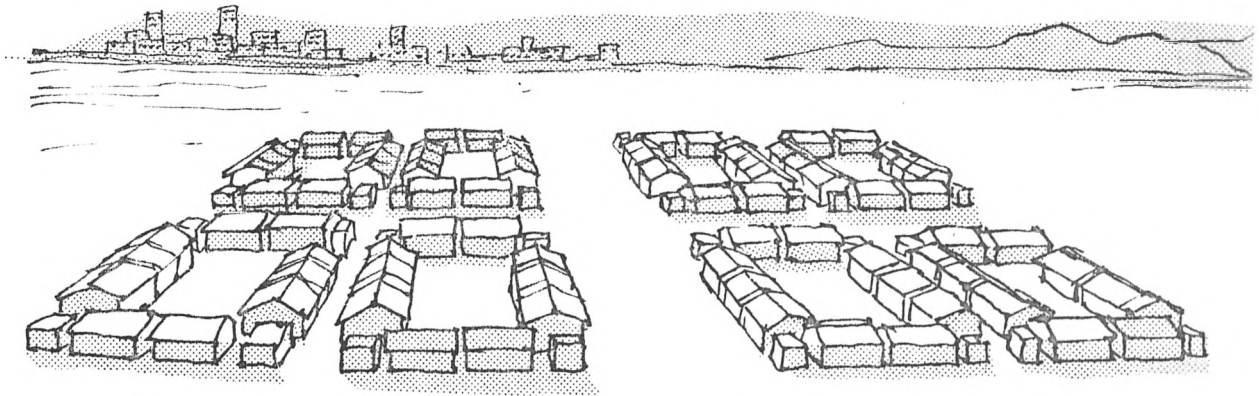
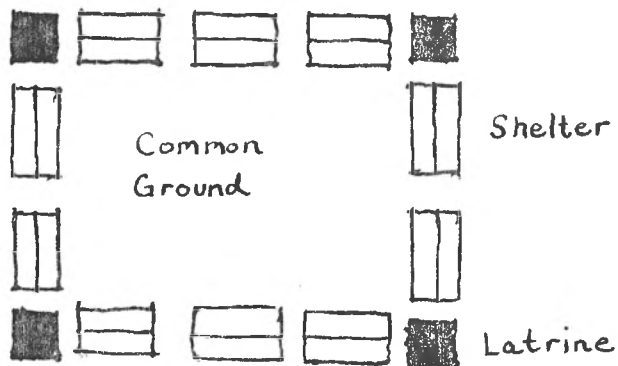
The most important element of this approach is the establishment of new settlements. The establishment of moderate-sized new communities in secure and safe areas should be a top priority. Some of these settlements can be urban subdivisions, but the majority should be located in secure areas away from major population centers. Small camps or settlements should be grouped together in a region to form clusters that can evolve as mutually-supportive units grouped around a central administrative and economic center. The regional concept is illustrated below.



The settlements should be provided with a wide variety of small business and economic endeavors so that they will draw persons into the camp from existing refugee centers. To avoid controversial land acquisition, land should be leased rather than purchased or taken by eminent domain.

A conceptual plan for the individual settlements is illustrated below. Basically, it is built in a series of "community units", with each unit comprising between six and ten structures built so that they face inward to a common ground. Community units are clustered together to form "groups" and the groups in turn form larger "sections". A great deal of density can be achieved in this manner, at

the same time keeping sufficient space open between the groups both for fire breaks and for patrolling the camps.



This arrangement has two advantages. First, from a humanitarian point of view, it reduces the isolation often felt by refugees when houses are placed in a grid. Second, and more important from the point of view of control, everyone in the section can see what everyone else is doing and can note the goings and comings. Therefore it is much more difficult for clandestine organizations to operate without someone knowing what is happening in each and every community unit. This arrangement was tried with great success in the Kampuchean refugee camps in Thailand.

The shelters for this scheme should be made of durable lightweight panel construction such as asbestos wallboard with a metal roof. The buildings can be single- or multi-family, but each family living area must have facilities for cooking indoors and heating the house. (The traditional Lebanese stove meets both these needs.)

The reason for using a more permanent building is that it cannot be moved and thus holds the camp layout in place. By placing the buildings close together in the groups and prohibiting fences and dividing walls, further development of the camp and subversion of the camp plan into a fortress is extremely difficult.

The final element of the package is installation of the water and sanitation systems. If these are installed when the camp goes up, it further restricts any change of the site plan and further establishes the layout as designed.

Such a plan would, first, create a settlement that, by design, facilitates control. Second, it reduces the chance that the settlement will evolve into an armed community. Third, it reduces the ability of clandestine groups to operate freely and unseen. Fourth, it promotes positive interaction between families and helps them cope with their restrained environment. Finally and most important, it establishes a community which supports both the intermediate and long-term objectives outlined earlier. The settlement is not permanent; therefore it is more acceptable as an interim locale for both the refugees and the Lebanese.

A safe, controlled and humanely-designed settlement can do much to reduce the tension within a camp and slow the re-emergence of terrorist organizations. While even the most humane camp cannot prevent a people's aspirations for a national homeland, a supportive environment will not encourage the overt hostility which terrorist organizations must have in order to gain support from the average refugee. Contrast the settlement described above to the bitterness that refugees will feel living in tents without basic sanitation during the cold winter months.

The second element of the recommended approach is the replanning and reconstruction of the camps that have been bulldozed. The reason that it is imperative to rebuild some form of settlement on the site of the existing camps is that the Palestinians already have a degree of tenure on this land and many have jobs or job contacts which are vital to re-establishing their Palestinian links to the Lebanese economy. This is not to say that the camps need to be restored to their former level of density; indeed the policy should be to actively encourage as many people as possible to voluntarily relocate to the new settlements mentioned above.

Reconstruction of the former camps can be carried out in much the same way as the new settlements, using settlement planning techniques that will help attain the same security objectives as in the new communities.

In those camps which sustained little damage, the primary objectives should be to reduce the density of the camps to a manageable level and to restrict construction that would lead to the re-establishment of the camps as fortresses. Again, voluntary relocation to the new settlements should be encouraged, and strict security and building control should be established by the authorities.

#### SUMMARY

By following the approach outlined above, it may be possible to attain to a great extent many of the objectives identified earlier in the report. To do this, however, will require a greater degree of commitment on the part of the humanitarian agencies and especially the U.S. Government. Furthermore, the haphazard planning of refugee settlements usually carried out by the humanitarian agencies cannot be permitted. Rather, a balanced and professional approach must be taken under the guidance of professional planners experienced in the design and construction of refugee camps. Failure to make this commitment and to acquire the proper technical assistance will lead to re-establishment of the camps along their previous lines of development, and they can be expected to become trouble spots in the future. Conversely, if the measures suggested are taken, it is believed that the camps themselves can to a large extent be removed as a source of contention and an obstacle to a future settlement.