

The Palestinian Strategic Report  
2014 – 2015  
Ch.6



# Jerusalem and the Holy Sites

**2014 – 2015**



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# Jerusalem and the Holy Sites<sup>1</sup>

## *Introduction*

Over one decade, Israel has done what it did not dare do during the first four decades of its occupation of Jerusalem. For despite its demolition of the Moroccan Quarter in 1967 and parts of the Khanqah al-Fakhriyya in 1969, and despite its causing systematic destruction in the vicinity of the Umayyad palaces, over those four decades, Israel was still in the demolition phase in the vicinity of *al-Aqsa* Mosque and had not entered the construction and building phase. Even when it did enter this phase in 1996, it started with a series of arches, the height of which did not exceed that of a single floor. However, the fifth decade of occupation witnessed the start of the construction of structures close to the mosque; some of which are no more than 20 meters away from its walls, and some with a height of four floors. This phase is about to take its complete and final form in a celebration that Israel plans on the fiftieth anniversary of its occupation of the city's eastern part.

## *First: Islamic and Christian Holy Sites*

### **1. *Al-Aqsa* Mosque**

#### **a. Developments in the Political, Religious and Legal Stances Towards *al-Aqsa* Mosque**

The believers in the idea of building the “temple” on the site of *al-Aqsa* Mosque constituted a small bloc within the national-religious Zionist movement. Yet considering that this movement has been on the opposition benches for decades, before and after the founding of the state, those “temple societies” have developed marginal weight and political influence.

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<sup>1</sup> This study is the approved English translation of the Jerusalem and the Holy Sites, which is the first section of chapter six of *The Palestinian Strategic Report 2014–2015*, edited by Dr. Mohsen Mohammad Saleh. The Arabic version of this report was released in 2016, and the draft of this section of this chapter was written by Ziad Bhies.

The idea of building the “temple” has witnessed a slow, steady rise; its supporters formed their first movement during the 1980s. In 2003, they forced a decision that allowed Jews to enter *al-Aqsa* Mosque; then in 2005, they forced another decision that allowed them to enter in groups “in non-Muslim prayer time.” Thus, they have effected a fundamental amendment to the rules of accessing *al-Aqsa* Mosque, revealing a gradual agenda, commensurate with the steady growth of their capabilities, which then had a ceiling of temporal division of the mosque.<sup>2</sup> And with a further push, in 2003 this movement was able to get two of its members elected to the Knesset. Its bloc grew to three members of Knesset (MKs) in the 2006 elections, seven in 2009, 13 in 2013 and 13 again in the 2015 elections.<sup>3</sup> Thus, they began to have representation in more influential coalitions, such as the Jewish Home Party (*HaBayit HaYehudi*), and later the Likud. This led to their participation in the third Benjamin Netanyahu government, formed in 2013, with two ministers holding four ministerial portfolios, in addition to five deputy ministers, posts that are symbolic in nature.

The Knesset elections of March 2015 and the subsequent government formed in May 2015 witnessed a new rise of the “temple” associations at the governmental level, as they got eight of the 32 ministerial portfolios, including those of Justice, Agriculture and Rural Development, Education, Tourism, Interior Security, Culture and Sport, Construction and Housing, Diaspora Affairs, Immigrant Absorption, and Jerusalem Affairs. Thus, they gained a quarter of this government’s portfolios and a seat in the Israel’s Security Cabinet occupied by the Minister of Justice Ayelet Shaked. This gave them the biggest political clout they had enjoyed since Israel’s inception.

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<sup>2</sup> For more information on the legal track, see Hisham Ya‘qoub et al., *‘Ain ‘ala al-Aqsa: Taqirir Tawthiqi Yarsud al-I’tida’at ‘ala al-Masjid al-Aqsa fi al-Fatrah bayna 1/8/2014–1/8/2015* (Eye on al-Aqsa: Documentary Report Monitoring Aggressions on al-Aqsa Mosque During the Period 1/8/2014–1/8/2015), Ninth Report (Beirut: Al Quds International Institution, 2015), pp. 59–60.

<sup>3</sup> Members of this bloc were identified according to their ideological positions and political conduct concerning al-Aqsa Mosque. They do not introduce themselves as an intact group, however, they behave as one. They form a trans-party bloc. Such identification became easier and clearer when there were public discussions in the Knesset Internal Affairs Committee concerning the cancelation of Jordan’s sovereignty over *al-Aqsa* Mosque, starting February 2014.

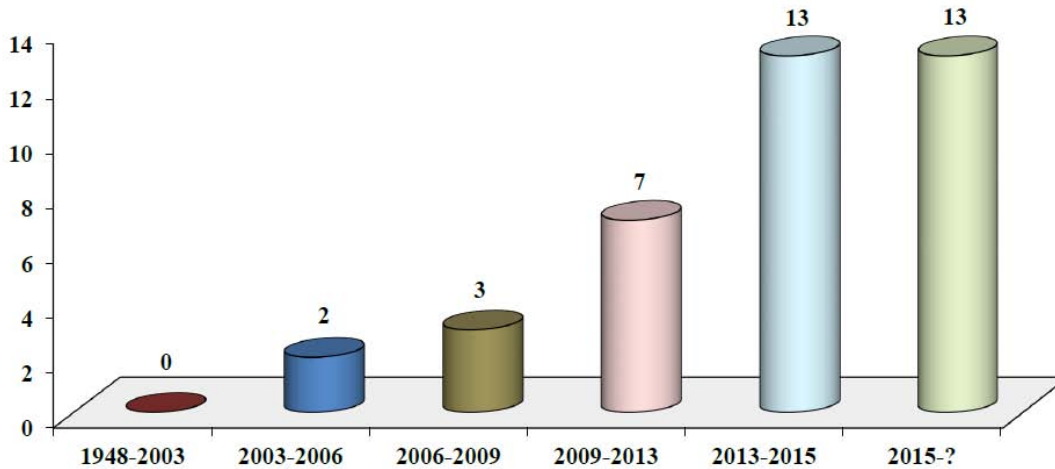
For more on the Israeli government formation, see site of The Knesset, [http://www.knesset.gov.il/govt/eng/GovtByNumber\\_eng.asp](http://www.knesset.gov.il/govt/eng/GovtByNumber_eng.asp)



**Table 1/6: Developments in the Representation of the “Temple” Associations in the Israeli Knesset**

Period	Knesset	Number of MKs	% of Knesset seats
1948–2003	1–15	0	0
2003–2006	16	2	1.7
2006–2009	17	3	2.5
2009–2013	18	7	5.8
2013–2015	19	13	10.8
2015 (Current Knesset)	20	13	10.8

**Developments in the Representation of the “Temple” Associations in the Israeli Knesset**



Proceeding from this historic path and the new leap that came about with the formation of Netanyahu's fourth cabinet in May 2015, the following can be concluded:

1. The gradual political rise of the idea of building a "temple" in place of *al-Aqsa* Mosque and over its entire area came in the context of a greater social and political trend, which can be seen as a general shift to the right. This explains the gap between the theoretical support that the idea enjoys in opinion polls and the limited number of those who actually answer the call to storm the mosque, which does not exceed tens in any incursion. It can be said that the idea of the "temple" finds those who embrace it; however, those who believe it is a priority remain few in number.
2. From its formation, the Netanyahu government was expected to take the struggle over *al-Aqsa* Mosque farther, regardless of security diagnoses, and take the temporal and spatial partition agenda into practice, using various available means; the government will not easily abandon this agenda or back down from it.
3. It seems that the popular trend of the "temple" associations is effective and ongoing; from 2002 until 2015, they were able to make progress in each election, whether at Knesset level or later at that of the government. This progress is likely to develop further, albeit at a slower pace because it has already reached advanced levels, as long as the shift to the right continues.

There is an upward trend in power and influence that has political effects no less important than its effects on the grounds, which is the growing buildup in the capabilities of the "temple" associations that have become larger and more numerous, and joined the "Coalition of the Temple Movements" formed in 2013.<sup>4</sup> This coalition holds an annual conference to discuss progress towards achieving the common agenda of its members.<sup>5</sup> In view of this progress, these associations divide

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<sup>4</sup> See Mohsen Mohammad Saleh (ed.), *The Palestinian Strategic Report 2012–2013* (Beirut: al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies and Consultations, 2015), p. 271.

<sup>5</sup> The assassination attempt by Mu'taz Hijazi of Rabbi Yehuda Glick, one of the most prominent leaders of this coalition, was on 29/10/2014, while Glick was returning from an annual conference of the Coalition of the "Temple" Movements.



roles and specialties among themselves; as they seem to be, to a great extent, in agreement as to the space that each must fill in order to achieve their common goal.

Today, the Ir David Foundation assumes the responsibility for the rehabilitation and development of the southern excavations of *al-Aqsa* Mosque and opening the site for visitors. As for Ateret Cohanim, it undertakes the task of acquiring the maximum possible amount of real estate in the vicinity of the mosque. It also participates in financing the excavations in its western part, along with the Western Wall Heritage Foundation, the basic governmental part of this group. The Temple Institute takes on the responsibility of promoting the idea of the “temple” in Israeli society and in global Zionist circles at the level of culture and public information. As for the HaLiba movement, it concentrates its efforts on calling for the “right of Jews” to pray in *al-Aqsa* Mosque, and to enter it at any time. Some of these associations have reached unprecedented levels of financial and administrative capabilities; thus Ir David Foundation has begun paying the accumulated debts of Israel’s state corporations; as on 2/3/2014, the Israeli court upheld an agreement whereby the management of the excavations in the southwestern corner of *al-Aqsa* Mosque would be turned over to Ir David Foundation, in exchange for its paying the debt owed by East Jerusalem Development Company, an Israeli government-owned company that used to operate the site.<sup>6</sup> As for the Ateret Cohanim organization, it has expanded its capabilities, which allowed it to operate on multiple fronts within two years. It acquired part of the central post office building, some properties in ‘Aqabat al-Khalidiya, and more than 47 residential units in Batn al-Hawa neighborhood in Silwan. It also funded works of rehabilitation and inauguration of the excavations underway in the western side of *al-Aqsa* Mosque.

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<sup>6</sup> Site of al-Aqsa Association for Waqf and Heritage, 2/3/2014, <http://bit.ly/1TyVz7I>

**Table 2/6: The Most Prominent “Temple” Associations<sup>7</sup>**

<b>Associations</b>	<b>Nature</b>	<b>Scope of Work</b>
Western Wall Heritage Foundation	Governmental	Rehabilitation and development of the excavations on the western side of <i>al-Aqsa</i> Mosque/opening Judaization centers in the same vicinity.
Ir David Foundation	Non-governmental (NG)/partial government funding	Seeking to build the City of David in the location of the Silwan neighborhoods near <i>al-Aqsa</i> Mosque, rehabilitation and development of the excavations on the south side of <i>al-Aqsa</i> , opening Judaization centers in the same vicinity.
Ateret Cohanim	NG	Reacquisition of all that was owned or rented by Jews of real estate in and around Jerusalem’s Old City before 1948, contributing to the rehabilitation and development of excavations, opening Judaization centers in the Old City and its vicinity.
The Temple Institute	NG/ partial government funding	Promoting the idea of removing <i>al-Aqsa</i> Mosque and building the “temple” on cultural and cognitive levels, organizing touristic and informational tours, completing the conceptions and preparations for building the “temple.”
Temple Mount Heritage Foundation	NG	Its tasks are similar to those of the Temple Institute.
Temple Mount and Land of Israel Faithful Movement	NG	Endeavor to lay the cornerstone of the “temple,” drawing detailed engineering and devotional concepts of the “temple”’s construction.
The Haliba movement	NG	Working to secure the “right to enter” <i>al-Aqsa</i> Mosque at all times for Jews, the freedom to walk around it and perform their devotional rituals in it, and turn the temporal and spatial division into an Israeli popular demand.
Women for the Temple	NG	Sister movement and a branch of Haliba. Active in the women’s sector, particularly in religious-nationalist circles.
Students for Temple Mount	NG	Sister movement and a branch of Haliba. Active in student circles, tries to establish branches in all Hebrew universities.
Yishai Association	NG	The most recent of these associations, focuses on targeting the eastern squares of <i>al-Aqsa</i> Mosque, and seeks to build a Jewish synagogue in them.

<sup>7</sup> Based on the observation of the author during the period 2006–2016, and by studying the literature of these movements published on their websites.





At the legal level, the “temple” associations continued to profit from their legal activities to modify the rules of entry to the mosque; benefiting from having one of their own, Miri Regev (a representative of the “temple” associations in the Knesset) at the head of the Knesset Internal Affairs and Environment Committee. During its deliberations in March 2014, this committee decided to form a subcommittee headed by MK David Tsur, to discuss “facilitating the entry of Jews into *al-Aqsa*.” Following numerous meetings and visits, the Tsur’s subcommittee made recommendations to preserve the status quo by keeping the administration of *al-Aqsa* Mosque in the hands of the Islamic Endowments (waqf), closing access to Muslims in case of rioting and facilitating Jewish incursions on Saturdays. It also recommended opening dialogue with Jordan to enhance the power of what it called “moderate elements.”<sup>8</sup> Miri Regev foresaw the commission’s recommendations by proposing a bill to divide *al-Aqsa*, reminiscent of the conditions in place at the Ibrahimi mosque, and to punish all who impede the entry of Jews, even by “raising their voice.”<sup>9</sup> And although the bill was not debated in a general session, its recommendations were put into effect, particularly with regard to imposing punishment for merely shouting *Allahu Akbar* (God is [the] Greatest) at Jewish incursions.

At the religious level, the series of operations that took place in Jerusalem shortly before the start of the Jerusalem *Intifadah*, especially the assassination attempt on the life of a prominent rabbi in the “temple” organizations, Yehuda Glick, at the hands of Mu‘taz Hijazi on 29/10/2014, caused real shock in religious circles. Thus the official chief rabbinate, the Ashkenazi and the Sephardic, reiterated their stand of refusing the entry of Jews into *al-Aqsa* Mosque (for reasons related to ritual purity) twice: on 7/11/2014,<sup>10</sup> and 23/10/2015.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Hisham Ya‘qoub et al, *‘Ain ‘ala al-Aqsa: Taqrir Tawthiqi Yarsud al-I’tida’at ‘ala al-Masjid al-Aqsa fi al-Fatrah bayna 1/8/2013–1/8/2014* (Eye on al-Aqsa: Documentary Report Monitoring Aggressions on al-Aqsa Mosque During the Period 1/8/2012–1/8/2013), Eighth Report (Beirut: Al Quds International Institution, 2014), p. 43.

<sup>9</sup> *Raialyoum* newspaper, London, 12/5/2014.

<sup>10</sup> Hisham Ya‘qoub et al, *‘Ain ‘ala al-Aqsa: Taqrir Tawthiqi Yarsud al-I’tida’at ‘ala al-Masjid al-Aqsa fi al-Fatrah bayna 1/8/2014–1/8/2015*, pp. 62–63.

<sup>11</sup> Site of Arabi21, 23/10/2015.

## **b. Excavations and Constructions Under *al-Aqsa* Mosque and in Its Vicinity**

### **Excavations**

Since 2012, the number of excavations has reached 47, and there is no indication that this has changed, in spite of the insistence of Arab and Palestinian press sources on headlining their news about the excavations by using the word “disclosure” of new excavations. In fact, all the sites that have been rehabilitated, opened and advertised during 2014–2015 were previously recognized, but their status has changed from being excavations under construction and rehabilitation, to becoming open to visitors for multiple purposes. The following are the most prominent excavations that were opened to the public during the period covered by this report:

1. Behind Our Wall Hall (*Ahar Kotlenu*): is located on the site formerly known as “the diggings of Hammam al-Ayn”, as it became clear that the work of unloading rubble and dirt from inside Hammam al-Ayn Synagogue was in preparation for the opening and fortifying of this big hall. It was originally an arched Mamluk hall, above which Hammam al-Ayn and the surrounding real estate were built. A report was published about it on 16/7/2015, estimating its area to be 400 square meters.<sup>12</sup> Israeli sources indicate that the hall will be used as an educational center to address the genealogy of the Jewish nation and their heritage. The cost of its rehabilitation was \$20 million,<sup>13</sup> entirely funded by the Ukrainian Jewish billionaire Zvi Hirsch Bogolyubov.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> See detailed report in: The Israeli Occupation Plans to Build an Underground Large Jewish Synagogue West of al-Aqsa Mosque, site of QPress, <http://bit.ly/1WQ0AxS> (in Arabic); and for more on the history of revealing this excavation, al-Aqsa Association for Waqf and Heritage, 16/11/2014, <http://bit.ly/1YeleGT>

<sup>13</sup> US Dollar.

<sup>14</sup> *The Jerusalem Post* newspaper, 1/6/2014, <http://www.jpost.com/International/14th-century-grand-hall-discovered-underneath-the-Kotel-Tunnels-355027>  
And Hirsch is known by the media as Gennadiy Bogolyubov, who is living in London and is considered one of the richest Ukrainians.



## Behind Our Wall Hall as published by QPress



2. The center “From Jerusalem to Jerusalem”: was opened in the excavations of the western side of *al-Aqsa* Mosque; it is accessed through a bridge on the northern side of Western Wall Plaza. A visitor entering the center will face a hall of Islamic architectural style; inside it there is a room equipped with tens of computers and iPads, where the visitor can choose a track of Jewish history in Jerusalem according to the biblical narrative, through their Diaspora then their return once again.<sup>15</sup>

### **Constructions in the Vicinity of the Mosque<sup>16</sup>**

These constructions have witnessed a marked increase in activity; for it seems that the “temple” associations are taking advantage of their political clout and growing financial capabilities to change the landscape above ground in the vicinity of *al-Aqsa* Mosque, in a manner that complements the ongoing work under the ground, and the ongoing attempts to partition the mosque itself. In 2012–2013, there were additions to Jerusalem’s Old City Project “Kedem Yerushalayim” that included the plan to build Strauss House, Beit Haliba (Heb. Core House), the third prayer plaza for egalitarian services proposed by Natan Sharansky, and the Kedem

<sup>15</sup> Site of Daily 48, 23/6/2015, <http://daily48.com/?mod=articles&ID=1199724#.VtXCfUCJeSo>

<sup>16</sup> The researcher of this chapter would like to thank Researcher Hanady Qawasmeh for her valuable assistance in editing the Hebrew–Arabic translation, and for explaining the meaning and connotation of the names of the Judaization centers listed in this part, in addition to explaining the reason for choosing them.

Center. All these projects are going forward in the stages of planning, approval and implementation, with the following variations in their progress:

1. The Strauss House: its blueprints were approved in 2010; while work on it began on 6/2/2013 by demolishing newly-built stone archways.<sup>17</sup> This was in preparation for the establishment of an expansion of three floors to the adjacent Mamluk building, and adding a fifth floor to the building itself. The expansion is now complete; as public baths in it were inaugurated on 9/2/2015<sup>18</sup> and a police station was opened on 19/5/2015,<sup>19</sup> and only additions to the original Mamluk building remain.

### **Strauss House Building from Outside After Its Completion**



2. Spring House:<sup>20</sup> is a visitors' center being built above a block of relics that the excavations in Wadi Hilweh in Silwan have revealed. Its construction site has an area of 1,200 square meters, in addition to facilities that are expected to increase the area to 5,000 square meters; it is used as an entrance to active excavations. On 18/2/2014, the Jerusalem municipality handed notifications to the area's residents (on whose land the project's facilities will be built) to submit their objections to the

<sup>17</sup> Mohsen Mohammad Saleh, *The Palestinian Strategic Report 2012–2013*, p. 273.

<sup>18</sup> Al-Aqsa Association for Waqf and Heritage, 9/2/2015, <http://bit.ly/1UGRrI4>

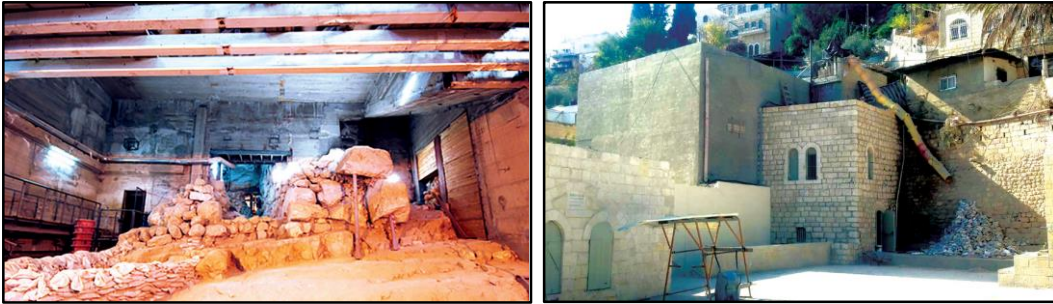
<sup>19</sup> Al-Aqsa Association for Waqf and Heritage, 19/5/2015, <http://bit.ly/1NmzfBV>

<sup>20</sup> Spring here is a water source, for the center was built over the excavations which are near spring of the spring of Silwan (Ayn Silwan).



project within 60 days, in preparation for its implementation. Noting that Ir David Foundation, which is in charge of the site, made good progress toward its completion;<sup>21</sup> while al-Aqsa Association for Waqf and Heritage announced that the “Spring Castle Tunnel” accessible from this site was officially open.<sup>22</sup>

### **Spring House From the Inside and Its Completed Parts From the Outside**



3. Tiferet Yisrael Synagogue:<sup>23</sup> talk began about rebuilding this Synagogue in 2010, in the wake of the inauguration of the Hurva Synagogue, and in the context of a policy of reconstructing historic synagogues in Jerusalem’s Old City that tries to give the impression that there was an old Jewish presence there, and that the Arab armies destroyed it in the war of 1948. This applies to the Hurva Synagogue, Tiferet Yisrael Synagogue, and to some extent, Ohel Yitzhak (Tent of Isaac) Synagogue, which was opened above the Hammam al-Ayn endowments (Waqf), facing the Chain Gate.

As was the case with the Hurva Synagogue, political considerations continued to make the plan of this synagogue teeter between cautious progress and suspension; in fear of anticipated popular Palestinian reactions as well as external pressures. However, it seems that the political ascent of the “temple” associations has given momentum to going forward with this plan. Thus, on 29/11/2012, the Jerusalem municipality announced its approval of the Synagogue’s plan; pointing out that it will consist of three levels and a dome, on 275 square meters of constructed space, with a height of 23m.<sup>24</sup> There will be land annexed to it to be used for utilities. The Israeli Minister of Housing and Construction, Uri Ariel, one of the “temple”

<sup>21</sup> Site of Wadi Hilweh Information Center, 18/2/2014, <http://silwanic.net/?p=46961>

<sup>22</sup> Al-Aqsa Association for Waqf and Heritage, 2/4/2014, <http://bit.ly/24D7oli>

<sup>23</sup> Tiferet Yisrael means the Glory of Israel.

<sup>24</sup> Site of Arutz Sheva 7 (Israel National News), <http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/162656#.VthAjUCJeSo>



associations' symbols, laid the foundation stone of this synagogue on 27/5/2014, in a ceremony attended by other leaders of this movement, such as Deputy Minister of Religious Services Eli Ben-Dahan, Founder and Head of the Temple Institute Rabbi Yisrael Ariel, and Jerusalem Mayor Nir Barkat.<sup>25</sup>

### **The Remains of the Tiferet Yisrael Synagogue, Which was Built in 1872 and Demolished in 1948**



4. Beit Haliba (Core House):<sup>26</sup> at the time of writing, this is the largest declared Judaization building in the vicinity of Western Wall Plaza. It was initially planned to be four stories high, but the Jerusalem District Planning and Construction Committee asked for the plan to be modified; in order to absorb Palestinian anger towards it. It discussed the modified alternatives that reduce its height to two floors (of 4.7m each) and its construction area to 2,800 square meters. And despite Netanyahu's announcement on 12/10/2015 that work had ceased on this project, among a bundle of measures aimed at absorbing the Jerusalem *Intifadah* at its outset,<sup>27</sup> the district committee approved the plan on 30/11/2015,<sup>28</sup> indicating that the steps to grant license to the building were still going ahead on schedule.

<sup>25</sup> Al-Aqsa Association for Waqf and Heritage, 27/5/2014, <http://bit.ly/21H41rH>

<sup>26</sup> HaLiba means the core. It is the movement calling for the freedom of prayer in *al-Aqsa* Mosque, and in establishing the largest Judaization center in its vicinity. It means that the "temple" is the core of the promise of the "Land of Israel," and that it is the core of the Jewish heritage in that land.

<sup>27</sup> Al-Aqsa Association for Waqf and Heritage, 12/10/2015, <http://bit.ly/1OhITRd>

<sup>28</sup> QPress, 1/12/2015, <http://www.qpress.ps/9677-2/>



Despite the fact that this building carries the name of the movement headed by Rabbi Yehuda Glick (Haliba), which advocates freedom of worship at *al-Aqsa* Mosque for Jews, this building will be built and managed by the Western Wall Heritage Foundation to be a center for education and guidance. It features a hall for historical exhibits and a tourist center for promoting the “Western Wall heritage,” in other words, it promotes the idea of the “temple.”

### **The Lateral Section of the Approved Beit Haliba Plan**



5. Kedem Center:<sup>29</sup> This center represents an extension of Beit Haliba in the direction of Silwan. It stands on a land with an area of 5,420 square meters, known as “Givati parking lot,” which was expropriated from its owners in 2003 to be used as the main entrance for the development and rehabilitation of the excavations in Wadi Hilweh. Its initial blueprint was that of a four-story building with a total construction area of 16,032 square meters, making it the largest planned Judaization landmark so far in the vicinity of *al-Aqsa* Mosque from all four sides.<sup>30</sup>

As had happened with Beit Haliba, the Jerusalem District Planning and Construction Committee tried to give this scheme legitimacy by seeming to accept people’s views and objections; after the approval of the original scheme on 4/4/2014,<sup>31</sup> it accepted the appeals of residents and left-wing associations on

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<sup>29</sup> Kedem means old and ancient, and Ir David Foundation considers the center the “City of David.” Therefore, name means that it is the center of ancient times.

<sup>30</sup> Al-Aqsa Association for Waqf and Heritage, <http://bit.ly/1Yem46H>

<sup>31</sup> Al-Aqsa Association for Waqf and Heritage, 4/4/2014, <http://bit.ly/24AbxtM>

7/6/2015. The National Planning and Building Appeals Committee demanded the reconsidering of the scheme and that changes be made to its blueprint, which provides that the center's roofline will sit below the Old City walls, and that it will not be higher than Wadi Hilweh Street (which is above it) by more than one floor.<sup>32</sup> The Israeli planning committees adopted the scheme in its altered form on 23/3/2016.

### **An Artist's Image of the Altered Scheme of the Kedem Center**



6. “The Upper Plaza” at the Western Wall (known as the Sharansky Plan): of all the projects aimed at changing Jerusalem’s landmarks, this scheme is the closest to *al-Aqsa* Mosque. Through it, the occupation authorities intend to build an extension to the Jewish prayer area in front of the Western Wall, which extends from the Morocco Gate to the end of the southwest corner of the mosque. It is to be elevated above the level of the northern plazas by a number of arcades and would be reached

<sup>32</sup> Wadi Hilweh Information Center, 7/6/2015, <http://silwanic.net/?p=59117>

It should be noted here the tendency of the Palestinian media to exaggerate any step taken by the Israeli planning committees towards the major Judaization projects, such as the Kedem Center and Core House, and present it as great achievements. While these are mere changes that affect the form and not the essence, made to allow them to pass within the ceilings politically acceptable to the government; yet they may not appeal to the Temple Societies that aspire for more. This trial was repeated in the cases of Strauss House, Core House, Kedem Center and Spring House; all of which, in the end, were executed or are on their way to be executed, with slight alterations in the form. For example, see: site of Albyader, 8/6/2015, <http://www.albyader.net/mod=Articles&fullid=13147>; and site of Alray - Palestinian Media Agency, <http://bit.ly/272faqY>.

In spite of the fact that the content of the news itself says that what has happened is an alteration and not a rejection of the plan.





by climbing a stone staircase, based on the biblical imagination of how the area was. This project came out into the open in the context of what was called the “legal struggle” of non-Orthodox Jewish groups who demanded a space of their own for co-ed prayer services, where men and women pray side by side; for the traditional rabbinates impose gender segregation in prayer at Western Wall Plaza; and for its part, the state imposes heavy fines on those who violate this rule.

Netanyahu charged Natan Sharansky, chairman of the Jewish Agency for Israel, with the task of finding a solution to this dispute. On 30/4/2013, Sharansky suggested building new prayer plazas as a “creative solution” to this problem. It seems that the Israeli government wanted to give prominence to this scheme, but in a context that gave it justification, since it is the gravest plan and the closest to *al-Aqsa* Mosque. On 30/1/2016, the Israeli government approved the plan despite objections from the religious orthodox ministers who voted against it,<sup>33</sup> which helped reduce significantly the attention given to this scheme and its gravity. If its implementation proceeds as planned, it will have serious implications for the Moroccan Hill issue. As, according to this plan, a 900 square meters wooden or stone courtyard<sup>34</sup> will be erected above the Moroccan Hill and the adjacent Umayyad palaces area, which can be reached by climbing large steps and terraces.

It seems that the Jerusalem municipality is trying to speed up work on the Judaization centers in the vicinity of *al-Aqsa* Mosque and throughout Jerusalem, so that it would be inaugurated as part of the “50th anniversary of Jerusalem’s reunification celebration.” It is Israel’s celebration of completing its occupation of the city that it intends, as announced, to organize. This means that there will be major political impetus for completing these centers; perhaps also to start new projects during the next two years. If the Jerusalem municipality succeeds in that endeavor, the overall cityscape of Jerusalem, and its Old City in particular, will see the greatest change it has undergone for over a decade. For when previously an onlooker would barely see any landmark that alluded to a Jewish identity or historical or religious Jewish presence in the Old City, its skyline will feature a number of landmarks in which Jewish presence is thrust into view.

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<sup>33</sup> *Haaretz* newspaper, 31/1/2016, <http://www.haaretz.com/jewish/.premium-1.700530>

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

## The Moroccan Hill Issue

The Moroccan Hill arose from the demolition of the Moroccan Quarter to its north and the Khanqah al-Fakhriyya to its south. What remained standing is the corridor that connects the Moroccans' Gate (*Bab al-Magharibah*) in the city's wall to the Morocco Gate situated above it in the wall of the mosque. And although it is a corridor that rests on Mamluk and Ayyubid arches, getting covered with dirt earned it the name of "Moroccan Hill." In 2003, Israeli authorities installed iron umbrellas above the hill, the Jews' main entrance for their incursions into *al-Aqsa* Mosque; and they poured concrete foundations for them. This archeological structure could not withstand this added load and it collapsed under the weight of the snow, during the storm that hit Jerusalem on 15/2/2004. The Jerusalem municipality closed the site to visitors and fenced its periphery. Then on 20/4/2005, they replaced it with a wooden ramp, extending from the Western Wall Plaza to the Morocco Gate.

On 6/2/2007, the Jerusalem municipality began demolition works on the hill using heavy machinery, with the aim to wipe it out of existence and open the lower gate leading to al-Buraq Mosque, a small structure to the southwest of *al-Aqsa*. This was done according to a plan named "Kedem Yerushalayim," which was prepared by the Jerusalem City Engineer. But following successive popular and official protests, the Israeli authorities stopped the demolition works with the heavy machinery. On 28/11/2011, they tried to raze the hill to the ground, arguing that the temporary wooden ramp was flammable; but they were forced to retreat under pressure from great popular movements in Egypt and Jordan in the environment of the Arab revolutions prevalent then which resulted in official pressure from these countries to stop the scheme.<sup>35</sup> However, starting May 2012, the Israeli authorities resumed the demolition works on the hill, but with axes and hoes.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> For more on the Mughrabi Hill case and its developments, see Mohsen Mohammad Saleh (ed.), *The Palestinian Strategic Report 2011/12* (Beirut: al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies and Consultations, 2013), pp. 290–293.

<sup>36</sup> For more on the Mughrabi Hill case and its developments during 2012–2013, see Mohsen Mohammad Saleh, *The Palestinian Strategic Report 2012–2013*, p. 276.



On 12/8/2014, Israel tried to erect a new additional wooden ramp over the remnants of the Mamluk arches on the Mughrabi Road.<sup>37</sup> But on 3/9/2014, “at the request of Jordan,” the Israeli government ordered the removal of the new structure, explaining that the party responsible for its construction had no authority to do so, and did not coordinate with the Prime Minister’s office.<sup>38</sup> However, on 25/6/2015, press sources spotted the setting up of a wooden addition, forty meters long, connecting the Moroccans’ Gate in the city’s wall to the beginning of the bridge built in 2005.<sup>39</sup> This expansion still exists, enabling an increase in the numbers of Jews who storm *al-Aqsa* Mosque through the Morocco Gate.

### **c. Jewish Presence Inside the Mosque and Interference in Its Administration**

#### **Systematic Escalation of Jews’ Demands Regarding Their Entry into the Mosque**

During 2014, three key figures led the Jewish incursion movement into *al-Aqsa* Mosque: Housing and Construction Minister Uri Ariel, former Deputy Speaker of the Knesset Rabbi Moshe Feiglin, and Leader of the Haliba movement Rabbi Yehuda Glick. The three of them worked, jointly with other leaders of the “temple” associations, on escalating to unprecedented levels the idea of Jews storming *al-Aqsa* Mosque. Thus, the two rabbis established semi-weekly incursions that mobilized the associations’ followers year round. However, they were unable to raise the number of intruders to more than 200 in any incursion. The security presence of Israeli forces remained more prevalent than the civil presence of the Jewish intruders. They tried to enter areas the sanctity of which was never violated by incursions; thus Moshe Feiglin tried to enter the Dome of the Rock shrine on 7/4/2014.<sup>40</sup> While Housing and Construction Minister Uri Ariel was able to maintain a frequent presence, benefiting from the security afforded to him to enable his companions to perform Jewish rituals in the mosque, a matter that used to be forbidden. It was noticeable that he and his companions insisted on walking around the eastern courtyards of the mosque and rubbing themselves with the swept debris

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<sup>37</sup> Al-Aqsa Association for Waqf and Heritage, 12/8/2014, <http://bit.ly/1TNh33v>

<sup>38</sup> *Alghad* newspaper, Amman, 4/9/2014.

<sup>39</sup> Daily 48, 25/6/2015, <http://daily48.com/?mod=articles&ID=1199800#.VthrT0CJeSo>

<sup>40</sup> Site of Arabs 48, 7/4/2014, <http://www.arabs48.com/?mod=articles&ID=106914>

stacked in it, as though it was holy dust that has religious significance for Jews. This debris gathers from opening the giant portals of the Marwani prayer area.

In short, and without describing the details of each incursion, the clear goal sought by the incursion movement is to achieve progress in quality and quantity in terms of the numbers of incursions, those participating in them, the places they reach, and the rituals they perform. All of these are in the context of a rolling strategy that considers temporal division a short-term goal; but it does not stop there, it paves the way for the next step, which is the spatial division, by trying to focus on two points in the mosque, the eastern courtyards and the southwest ones. In the year 2015, Rabbis Feiglin and Glick did not continue in their roles, as the assassination attempt on Yehuda Glick caused him to be absent starting on 29/10/2014, and he did not storm *al-Aqsa* Mosque again until 2/3/2016. As for Moshe Feiglin, elections kept him absent from March 2015, in addition to his failure to win an advanced position in the primaries of the Likud Party. The role of Minister Uri Ariel continued even as he retained his ministerial position in the government formed following the 2015 elections.

Upon examining the documentation that has been available since 2005, and published by Al Quds International Institution in its annual report entitled Eye on al-Aqsa, trends in the escalation of the incursions have become clear. They can now be predicted, anticipated, and prepared for by popular organized movements and media pressure. These seasons are synchronous with the peak of three main Jewish festivals: “Passover,” the three weeks commemorating the destruction of the Holy “temple,” the season of the Jewish New Year (*Rosh Hashanah*), and then the Feast of Tabernacles (*Sukkot*). This means that the recurring escalation seasons are in March or April of the A.D. calendar year, July or August, and September or October, relative to the changes in the Hebrew calendar. It has also been noted that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu takes advantage of the naturally quiet period that occurs between October and March of the following year due to the spacing between Jewish holidays. This spacing gives leverage to the “temple” associations in their incursions and allows Netanyahu to declare that he is reining in these incursions and that Israel is committed to the status quo; and thus he absorbs Palestinian, Arab and Muslim rage. This matter was repeated over three years,



starting in 2013; while he also repeatedly declared, at the end of the festive seasons in October 2014 and October 2015, that he was barring Knesset members from entering *al-Aqsa* Mosque.<sup>41</sup>

### **Continued Restrictions on the Entry of Worshipers**

Limiting Muslims' access to *al-Aqsa* Mosque is a central prerequisite for achieving the temporal division of the mosque; it has become a declared objective of the Israeli government, clear in its behavior and in statements made by its ministers who belong to the "temple" associations. During 2014, in conjunction with the public outrage that followed the kidnapping and burning of the child Muhammad Abu Khdeir, and the GS war that took place after that incident, Israeli forces imposed strict measures around the mosque and in Jerusalem's Old City. They were able, for the first time, to face the influx of worshipers and limit their numbers in the mosque to levels unseen in Ramadan since the occupation began; as in the first week of Ramadan, the number of worshippers did not exceed 10 thousand.<sup>42</sup> A report by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs-occupied Palestinian territories (OCHA-oPt) has documented the number of arrivals to *al-Aqsa* Mosque from outside the city; this number was 545 thousand in 2013 and it fell to 45 thousand in 2014, meaning that the mosque's visitors in 2014 constituted 8% of those who visited the previous year.<sup>43</sup>

Members of the *Murabitat* (Muslim female defenders of their land) took upon themselves the task of defending *al-Aqsa* Mosque around the clock; in return, Israel formed a special female police unit to prosecute, attack and torture them. This unit started its activities on 5/5/2015.<sup>44</sup> Starting in September 2015, Israel started to apply more stringent entrance procedures on women than on men. They announced on 10/8/2015 what was called a "black list" that contained the names

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<sup>41</sup> On 1/11/2014, Netanyahu urged members of Knesset (MKs) to show "responsibility and restraint vis-à-vis the Temple Mount." Whereas, on 8/10/2015, he issued a decision banning both Jew and Arab MKs from entering *al-Aqsa* Mosque. Thus, he was trying to control the mosque's entrance even when Arab MKs are concerned, which is a step forward for the temporal division agenda.

<sup>42</sup> Al-Aqsa Association for Waqf and Heritage, 4/7/2014, <http://bit.ly/1VQ9f4t>

<sup>43</sup> United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs-occupied Palestinian territories (OCHA-oPt), *Fragmented Lives: Humanitarian Overview 2014*, March 2015, p. 15, [https://www.ochaopt.org/documents/annual\\_humanitarian\\_overview\\_2014\\_english\\_final.pdf](https://www.ochaopt.org/documents/annual_humanitarian_overview_2014_english_final.pdf)

<sup>44</sup> *Al-Sharq* newspaper, Doha, 6/5/2015.

of about 100 Palestinian women barred from entering the mosque; this list has become known as the “golden list.” The ban remains in effect at the time of writing of this report (March 2016). On 7/10/2015, the Israeli authorities took advantage of the beginnings of the Jerusalem *Intifadah* to erect an electronic gate on the road leading to the Chain Gate in the western wall of *al-Aqsa* Mosque.<sup>45</sup>

### **The Attempt to Execute the Temporal Partition and Prepare for the Spatial One**

The tension around *al-Aqsa* Mosque reached its peak on 13–15/9/2015; the Israeli government apparently saw, given regional and local conditions, a favorable opportunity to impose the temporal division and start preparing for the spatial one. Thus, it declared a final closure of the mosque to Muslim worshipers and its opening to Jews; on the grounds that the mosque was open to the followers of each of the two religions in their respective events and closed to the followers of the other. Jerusalemite youth anticipated this declaration by remaining in the Qibli Mosque. On the morning of 13/9/2015, Israeli forces stormed *al-Aqsa* Mosque, throwing sound and smoke bombs. The courtyard adjacent to the mosque southward caught fire, the historical gypsum windows broke as well as their glass, and the carpets of the Qibli mosque caught fire. Occupation forces attacked the Murabitat on the gates, while Netanyahu declared the Mercy Cemetery, east of *al-Aqsa* Mosque, closed to burials; in a deliberate message to announce that the temporal division had become a *fait accompli*. He was also paving the way to the idea of giving the eastern courtyards to the Jews and opening the Mercy Gate, sealed with a cement slab, to make it their gateway to the mosque from outside the Old City through the Mercy Cemetery; this was the scheme that had already been unveiled on 11/10/2013.<sup>46</sup> Two weeks later, Netanyahu repeated the attempt (on 27–30/9/2015) in a warped reading of the balance of powers and of his ability to pass such a resolution in the current environment. This became a direct cause of the expansion of the resistance toward what became known as the Jerusalem *Intifadah*; in addition to other accumulated reasons that paved the way for it, forcing Netanyahu to present a scene of retreat

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<sup>45</sup> *Al-Quds*, 8/10/2015.

<sup>46</sup> For more on this plan, see Mohsen Mohammad Saleh, *The Palestinian Strategic Report 2012–2013*, p. 270.



from the temporal division that remains a fundamental objective of his government, in anticipation of another favorable opportunity.

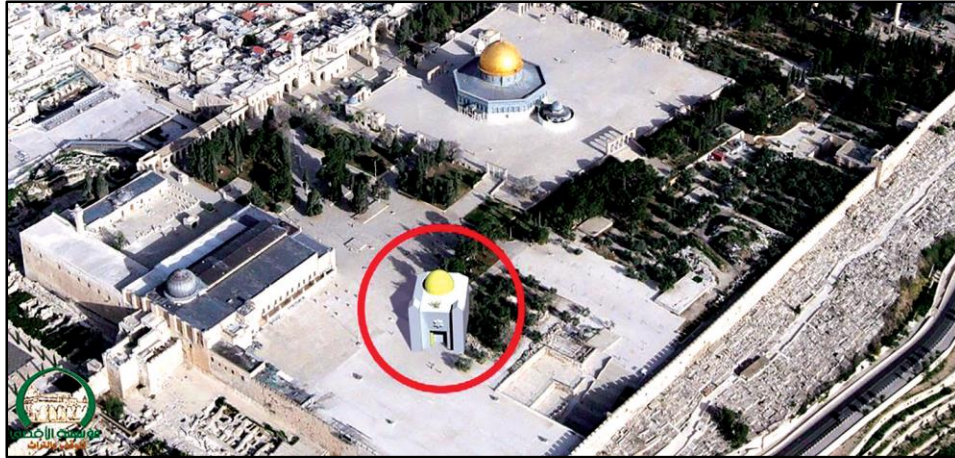
The partition attempt was preceded and accompanied by systematic measures aimed at breaking the back of the *Ribat* (Defense of Islamic land) movement as the main obstacle standing in its way. Thus, Israeli forces announced on 3/9/2014 a ban on al-Aqsa Revival Foundation (*Imarat al-Aqsa*), the former sponsor of al-Murabitat movement. Then on 13/1/2015, they announced a ban on the following societies: Al-Aqsa Heroes, Muslim Women for al-Aqsa, and al-Fajr for Culture and Literature, founded by the Islamic movement to take over the sponsorship of the *Ribat* movement. On 9/9/2015, they went further and banned the *Ribat* movement; and on 17/11/2015, it was the turn of the Islamic Movement to be banned in its entirety to stop its role in protecting the human shield around *al-Aqsa* Mosque. These moves led to confusion in the *Ribat* movement and decline in the number of its male and female participants and in its efficacy. It can be said that *al-Aqsa* Mosque is facing today the real possibility of temporal division passage and its imposition as a *fait accompli*. This was the case at the end of 2010, before the emergence of the *Murabitat* movement that constituted a protective new ring around it. This means that the protection of the mosque today needs a creative and effective alternative that can face the looming challenge.

A new development worth noting has been the emergence of the Amutat Yishai organization that has devoted itself to the application of spatial division; on the grounds that imposing temporal division is a matter of time in the eyes of the “temple” associations. On 13/1/2015, this association tried to register *al-Aqsa* courtyards as an Israeli public property<sup>47</sup> in preparation for designing plans for their development and construction. Upon its founding in August 2013, Yishai published an initial concept for the construction of a synagogue in the mosque’s eastern courtyards; then on 30/3/2014, it sent a letter to the Prime Minister demanding the construction of a synagogue in the southwest part of the mosque.

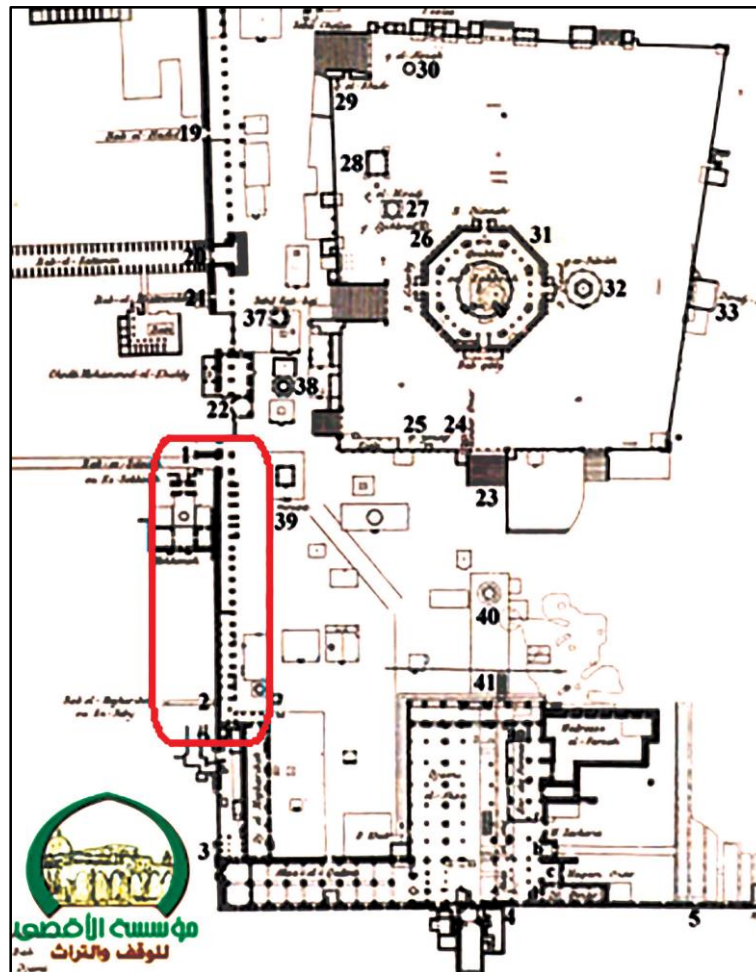
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<sup>47</sup> Site of Aljazeera.net, 14/1/2015, <http://bit.ly/1ZpM1jP>

**Amutat Yishai Organization Initial Concept for Building a Synagogue in the Eastern Courtyards of al-Aqsa Mosque**



**Scheme Attached to the Letter Sent to the Israeli Prime Minister by the Amutat Yishai Organization Demanding the Establishment of a Synagogue Southwest of the Mosque**





## **2. Jerusalem's Islamic Holy Sites**

By their nature, cemeteries extend over large open spaces, tempting the occupation to grab more land. Their locations in Jerusalem add to their importance. Thus, the Mamilla Cemetery forms the basin linking the Jewish center of west Jerusalem and the Old City to the east; while the Mercy and Yusufiyah Cemeteries form the eastern extension of Lion's Gate, the Old City's main gate to the east.

### **a. The Mamilla Cemetery**

Over a long period of time, the Mamilla Cemetery was subjected to gradual chipping away at its land that spared less than one tenth of its area. During 2014, the project Center for Human Dignity–Museum of Tolerance Jerusalem (MOTJ) that was being built on this cemetery's lands by the US based Simon Wiesenthal Center, advanced from planning and approval to the initial stages of implementation. On 22/1/2014, al-Aqsa Association for Waqf and Heritage documented the start of laying massive concrete bases for the museum; while the center announced on 17/4/2014 the launch of a recreation park project on part of the cemetery's remaining land. Furthermore, the Israeli coffee chain, Landwer Café, announced its plan to open a branch on the cemetery's grounds, which it inaugurated on 2/8/2015.

### **b. The Cemeteries in the East of Jerusalem's Old City**

Unlike the Mamilla Cemetery, Israel is trying to keep the Mercy and Yusufiyah cemeteries from expanding without actually chipping away at their lands, even though it had announced that it had plans to that effect, such as the plan of Kedem Yerushalayim. On 22/9/2014, Israeli authorities demolished 20 graves in the Martyrs' Cemetery, which is part of the Yusufiyah Cemetery grounds, claiming that they were placed within confiscated land; while on 16/8/2015, it confiscated a plot of seven donums (seven thousand square meters) adjacent to the Mercy Cemetery, to prevent its expansion in that direction.

### **3. Jerusalem's Christian Holy Sites**

#### **a. The Wall in the Vicinity of the Cremisan Monastery**

The issue of the Cremisan came about when the Israeli army published the final path of the Separation Wall on its website on 30/4/2007, which showed its intention to build a special wall around the Etzion settlement bloc, west of Bethlehem, to annex it to Jerusalem. It also showed that it plans to annex the territories of the Cremisan Valley, situated between Beit Jala and Walaja to Jerusalem; in such a way that the Salesian Monastery will be on the Bethlehem side of the Wall, while the Salesian women's Monastery, its school, and the agricultural lands of the monastery and local residents, will be isolated on the side annexed to Jerusalem. On 13/10/2011, the Beit Jala municipality received an order from the head of the Israeli Central Command to the effect that 373 donums (373 thousand square meters) in the Cremisan Valley would be confiscated to by the Wall, along the announced track. So the municipality, the monastery and the local citizens affected by the order went to court hoping to stop the construction of the wall in their region. The army refused to cancel the construction of the Wall or to alter its course. On 4/2/2014, the court asked the army to clarify the reason for its refusal to modify the track of the Wall. On 4/8/2014, it ruled that the army must offer an alternative path that would keep the monastery, the nuns' order, the school, and the houses of local Palestinians on the side annexed to Bethlehem. On 4/9/2014, the army presented a modified plan within these conditions, in addition to opening agricultural gates for the area's residents and the monks, in the direction of the land that is to be annexed to Jerusalem that will most likely not be of benefit to them. On 29/1/2016, the Israeli Supreme Court ruled to reject all appeals, paving the way to the army to start work on the Wall on the designated site, causing the monastery to lose its geographical connection to its land located behind the wall.<sup>48</sup>

It is noteworthy that most of the moves to postpone the construction of the wall and to try to alter its path were undertaken by the Beit Jala municipality and the

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<sup>48</sup> The Applied Research Institute-Jerusalem (ARIJ) & Land Research Center (LRC), "Continuation of Israel's Policy of Land Expropriation": The Israeli Court Grants "Israel's Defense Ministry" the Green Light to Build the Segregation Wall on Lands of Cremisan, Project for Monitoring Israeli Occupation Activities (POICA), 11/2/2016, <http://www.poica.org/details.php?Article=9008>



affected citizens. And with the exception of a “Statement by the Assembly of Catholic Ordinaries in the Holy Land on Cremisan” issued on 5/12/2014, calling on the international community to take immediate action to protect the lands of the Cremisan valley, no media or public activity was initiated directly by the monastery or the Salesian Order to prevent the loss that the monastery will suffer.<sup>49</sup>

### **b. Attacks on Churches and Monasteries**

The years 2012–2013 witnessed three attacks that included arson and writing offensive graffiti on the walls of churches and monasteries in Jerusalem. The years 2014–2015 witnessed the same number of attacks; thus on 5/5/2014, statements hostile to Christianity were “daubed on an outer column of Office of the Assembly of Bishops at the Notre Dame Center in East Jerusalem.” On 9/6/2014, some religious Jews expelled monks and Christian worshippers from the “Last Supper” hall in Mount Zion. And on 26/2/2015, “a fire broke out in a Greek Orthodox seminary for the study of Christianity next to Jaffa Gate in Jerusalem.”

### **c. Selling Beit El Baraka Presbyterian Church Compound in Bethlehem**

On 11/6/2015, the Arab MK Basel Ghattas addressed a protest letter to the Swedish ambassador<sup>50</sup> after Israeli settlers resumed the refurbishment of the compound that used to be Beit El Baraka Presbyterian Church. 20 years ago, it was turned into a hotel, but this business venture failed; it was later put up for sale. This church compound is made up of eight buildings, including a large central structure and several smaller ones, in addition to a piece of land that has an area of 38 donums (38 thousand square meters). It is located in the vicinity of the Aroub refugee camp between Hebron and Bethlehem in the West Bank; and the buyers intend to turn it into a residential area and make it part of the Gush Etzion settlement. In the details that were published later, a Swedish company, Scandinavian Seamen Holy Land Enterprises, presented itself to the American Presbyterian Church as a company affiliated with a Swedish Presbyterian Church group. It offered to buy Beit El Baraka Church and its land, which were put up for sale after going through a financial crisis and announced its dissolution. After the transaction was concluded,

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<sup>49</sup> Society of St. Yves, “The Last Nail in Bethlehem’s Coffin: The Annexation Wall in Cremisan,” August 2015, Annex 6, p. 78.

<sup>50</sup> Arabs 48, 11/6/2015, <http://bit.ly/1rzDWOR>

the assets of the Swedish company were diverted to an institution sponsored by the Jewish American Irving Moskowitz.<sup>51</sup>

The church was built in the 1940s by an American missionary and the buildings attached to it were used as a hospital where chest diseases and tuberculosis were treated. On 6/1/2016, the Israeli Defense Minister, Moshe Ya'alon, officially announced final approval of the annexation of Beit El Baraka's land and buildings to the Gush Etzion bloc.<sup>52</sup>

Reverend George 'Awad, Pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Palestine, had declared on 26/6/2015 that his church rejected this transaction and that it had nothing to do with this sale. He called on the Palestinian people to support him in reclaiming these properties.<sup>53</sup> Despite what Rev. 'Awad has declared, he did not deny that the sale had already been made by the Presbyterian Church in the United States; and that, faced with the lure of money, the church did not adequately investigate the identity of the buyer of a property this size and of such sensitivity, and it did not consult with the church in Palestine or with its pastor. This reminds us of past experiences with Greek clergy and their numerous deals to sell the properties of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate in Jerusalem; and the failure of the Italian clergy of the Salesian Order to defend the lands of the Cremisan Monastery in the face of the Wall. It is also reminiscent of the chronic Palestinian dilemma regarding the role of foreign clerics, who control the fates of huge church properties on important and critical sites; and who dispose of them as they please with disregard for the interest of their parishioners who are waging a struggle over land and their very existence with the occupier to whom these churches sell their lands. This matter again raises the need to adopt a unified national strategy regarding church properties that does not allow dealing with them as if they were a purely internal matter that belongs to each of these churches, and does not allow a limited class of foreign clergy to be solely in charge of their Palestinian parishes and their vast tracts of land.

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<sup>51</sup> *Haaretz*, 22/5/2015, <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-1.657700>; and *Haaretz*, 27/5/2015, <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-1.658344>

<sup>52</sup> Quds Press International News Agency, London, 6/1/2016, <http://www.qudspress.com/index.php?page=show&id=14212>

<sup>53</sup> Site of Sonara.net, 26/6/2015, <http://bit.ly/272gcDf>



## The Main Building of the Beit El Baraka Church Sold to Settlers



### 4. Islamic and Christian Holy Sites in the Rest of Palestine

In past years, this title used to refer to an annual report issued by the Solidarity Foundation for Human Rights, based in Nablus. On 25/2/2014, this foundation suffered a mass arrest campaign that included almost all of its employees, and its website is no longer available on the internet. Al-Aqsa Association for Waqf and Heritage offered an alternative count of violations against the holy sites in Palestine, with the exception of the attacks on *al-Aqsa* Mosque, their report for 2014 presented the following results:

**Table 3/6: Violations of Holy Sites in Historic Palestine for 2014<sup>54</sup>**

Violations not during war		Violations during GS war	
Attacks on mosques	30	Mosques completely destroyed	73
Attacks on Islamic graves	21	Mosques partially destroyed	197
Attacks on Christian holy sites	6	Churches completely destroyed	0
Miscellaneous attacks	29	Churches partially destroyed	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>271</b>

<sup>54</sup> Al-Aqsa Association for Waqf and Heritage, 1/1/2015, <http://bit.ly/1Yeni1z>

Al-Aqsa Association for Waqf and Heritage was not able to issue a report on the violations of holy sites for the year 2015, as on 17/11/2015, it was outlawed along with the rest of the Islamic movement institutions operating in the 1948 occupied territories.

The project of monitoring Israeli Colonization Activities in the Palestinian Territories has documented 226 attacks carried out by settlers in 2014, on mosques, churches and monasteries, including those on *al-Aqsa* Mosque; while in 2015 there were 265 such attacks.

### ***Second: Jerusalem's Population***

Estimates indicate that the number of East Jerusalem residents reached 324 thousands at the end of 2015. Israel has continued with its policy of turning Jerusalem into a city of expulsion for its Palestinian population, confiscating and demolishing Jerusalemites' homes and isolating their neighborhoods. In 2014–2015, settlers controlled 54 residential apartments and two plots of land, all of which used to be owned by Palestinians. Of these, 53 apartments were in the Silwan neighborhood, gathered in two main blocks: Wadi Hilweh neighborhood in which Ir David Foundation seized 32 apartments and two plots of land, and the Batn al-Hawa neighborhood in the middle, in which the far-right settlement organization Ateret Cohanim seized 21 apartments.

Moreover, the hotbeds of confrontation continued with the Ateret Cohanim, which is trying to grab a number of properties in Jerusalem's Old City. The most prominent confrontation was over the property of Nora Ghaith in 'Aqabat al-Khalidiyya, the property of al-Sidawi family and those of another group of families in 'Aqabat al-Saraya. These properties witnessed takeover attempts by settlers and judicial progress in their favor, which until March 2016, did not reach the stage of evacuation.

Israeli authorities demolished 96 properties in 2014, and 98 in 2015, thus returning to the peak levels of demolition that started in 2000; for the average rate of demolition did not come close to these numbers except at the peak of *al-Aqsa Intifadah* in 2003. Thus, the total number of homes demolished in the period



2000–2015 came to 1,085 homes, blighting the lives of 5,637 Jerusalemites.<sup>55</sup> The following table shows the evolution in demolition operations during that period:

**Table 4/6: Home Demolition Operations in Jerusalem During the Period 2000–2015<sup>56</sup>**

<b>Year</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2007</b>	
<b>Number</b>	21	51	63	94	80	78	44	59	
<b>Year</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>
<b>Number</b>	83	81	39	41	61	95	96	98	<b>1,084</b>

Furthermore, the inclination to isolate Jerusalem’s Arab neighborhoods by a series of roadblocks and checkpoints began to be reinforced following the furor that accompanied the burning of the child Muhammad Abu Khdeir. Furthermore, with the outset of the *Intifadah* at the end of September 2015, Israeli authorities started using this method as one of their basic tools in preventing operations against them, thus they began isolating the Arab population from the city, while keeping the city open and available to the Jewish population. On 5/11/2015, OCHA–oPt published a map that showed Israeli forces setting up 30 roadblocks in the vicinity of Jerusalem’s Arab neighborhood, in a way that greatly hindered the citizens’ movement and ability to communicate.<sup>57</sup>

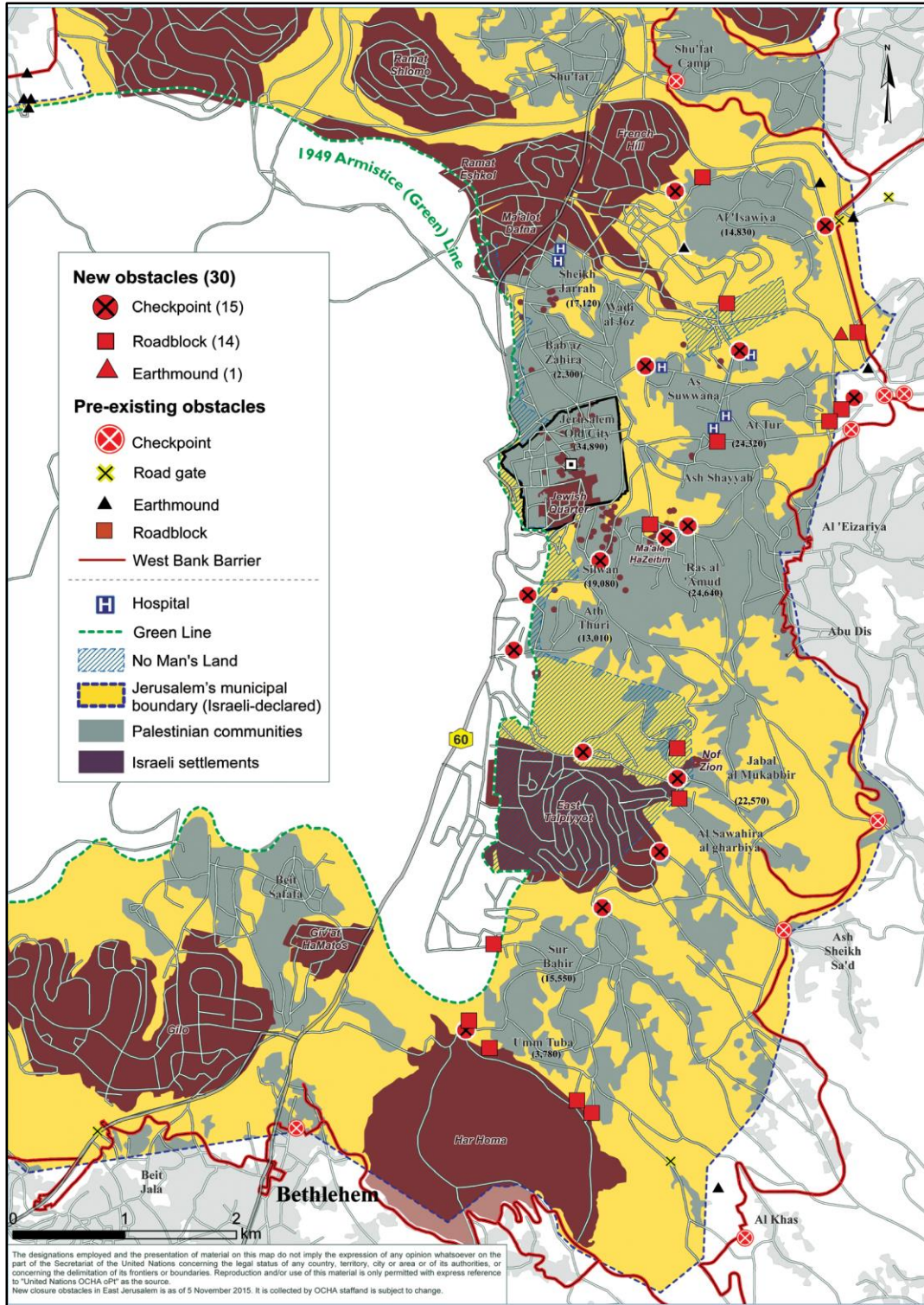
<sup>55</sup> Estimates were based on the average of 5.2 persons, which is the average number of members of the Arab Jerusalemite family.

<sup>56</sup> For 2000–2008, see ARIJ & LRC, *Demolishing Palestinian Houses*, POICA, 19/12/2009, [http://www.poica.org/editor/case\\_studies/view.php?recordID=2254](http://www.poica.org/editor/case_studies/view.php?recordID=2254). As for 2009–2014, see *Demolition of Houses in Jerusalem During 2009*, site of al-Maqdese for Social Development (MSD), Jerusalem, 7/1/2010, [www.al-maqdese.org/arabic/index.php?pagess=main&id=207](http://www.al-maqdese.org/arabic/index.php?pagess=main&id=207) (in Arabic); LRC, *Jerusalem Under Occupation – 2010*, POICA, <http://poica.org/poica/2011/01/jerusalem-under-occupation-2010/>; LRC, *Israeli violations against people and land 2011*, POICA, 1/1/2012, [http://www.poica.org/editor/case\\_studies/view.php?recordID=4148](http://www.poica.org/editor/case_studies/view.php?recordID=4148) (in Arabic); MSD, *Report on Houses demolition in East Jerusalem 2013*, <http://www.al-maqdese.org/attachment/000000387.pdf> (in Arabic); ARIJ, *Israeli Settlements and Violations: “Israeli Activities Report in the occupied Palestinian territory in 2013,”* 2/3/2014, <http://poica.org/poica/2014/03/israeli-settlements-and-violations-israeli-activities-report-in-the-occupied-palestinian-territory-in-2013/>; and see ARIJ, *Israeli Activities in the occupied Palestinian Territory*, POICA, December 2014, p. 2, <http://www.poica.org/details.php?Article=7363>. And for 2015, see ARIJ, *The Israeli Violations in the Occupied Palestinian Territories – Annual Report 2015*, 21/1/2016, <http://poica.org/poica/2016/01/the-israeli-violations-in-the-occupied-palestinian-territories-annual-report-2015/>.

<sup>57</sup> OCHA–oPt, *New Movement Restrictions in East Jerusalem*, 5/11/2015, [http://www.ochaopt.org/documents/ej\\_2015oct21.pdf](http://www.ochaopt.org/documents/ej_2015oct21.pdf)



**Map 1/6: New Checkpoints and Concrete Barriers in Jerusalem on 5/11/2015<sup>58</sup>**



<sup>58</sup> Ibid.





As for the situation on the ground in Jerusalem, the Oslo Accords imposed a geographic reality in which most of the Palestinian population is kept away from direct contact with Israelis. Contact remained confined to three main points: the city of Jerusalem, the center of the city of Hebron, and Area C, which include most of the WB territories but with a limited number of the residents of small villages and the nomadic population. This meant that the largest Palestinian human mass that remained in direct contact with the occupation was in Jerusalem. Perhaps this, coupled with the intensification of the conflict over *al-Aqsa* Mosque, contributed to the launch from Jerusalem of the last three popular confrontations in the history of the conflict during 1996, 2000 and 2015.

The last “Palestinian Strategic Report” gave the diagnosis that Jerusalem was constantly on the verge of eruption; however, this situation remained isolated and reached its limits. Thus, in 2012, Jerusalem witnessed 78 confrontations, 6 stabbings and 21 other incidents;<sup>59</sup> in 2013, it witnessed repeated escalations at the times of incursions into *al-Aqsa* Mosque and its siege, and with the Palestinian outbursts of resistance. 2014 saw the launch of the “Ramadan furor” that followed the burning of the child Muhammad Abu Khdeir on 4/7/2014, which soon moved to the GS front in the form of a fierce 52-day war. It also saw the launch of individual resistance operations such as the running over operation carried out by ‘Abdul Rahman Shaludi on 22/10/2014; the assassination attempt on the life of Yehuda Glick at the hands of Mu‘taz Hijazi on 29/10/2014; running over operation by Ibrahim al-‘Akari on 5/11/2014; and shooting incident carried out by Ghassan and ‘Uday Abu Jamal on 18/11/2014.

The challenge for the ongoing confrontation in Jerusalem during those three years was how to spread beyond the Jerusalem borders to become an all-inclusive national uprising, despite the PA’s political will to prevent it and its continuous intensive security coordination with Israel. The continuous coordination of resisting youth and the presence of creative individual initiatives, played an important role in overcoming the challenges posed by the PA, right up to the launch of the Jerusalem *Intifadah* at the end of September 2015 with most of the operations being in Jerusalem; such as the stabbing incident carried out by Muhannad al-Halabi on

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<sup>59</sup> Mohsen Mohammad Saleh, *The Palestinian Strategic Report 2012–2013*, p. 287.

3/10/2015; shooting in an Israeli bus carried out by Bahaa Elayyan and the prisoner Bilal Abu Ghanem on 13/10/2015; in addition to the clashes centered in Jerusalem during the first months of the *Intifadah*.

It should be noted here the prominent role of settlers as a colonialist tool that, during recent years, preceded the state and its army in their confrontations. Thus, the burning of the child Muhammad Abu Khdeir was carried out by settlers and led to the Ramadan furor in Jerusalem, which became an all-out war in GS in 2014. The crime of burning the Dawabsheh family in July 2015; and the successive incursions into *al-Aqsa* Mosque in September 2015, which ended with the launch of the Jerusalem *Intifadah*, all came at the initiative and incitement of settlers. The state's role here ranged from protection of the status quo to engaging in confrontation at a later date.

### ***Third: Judaization and Settlement in Jerusalem***

#### **1. Developments in the Building on the Separation Wall Around Jerusalem**

During 2014 and 2015, no reliable update on the development of the construction of the Wall was published. Reports were issued by OCHA, but its last update was published in 2013. Field reports show that the development in the work on the Wall in 2014 centered on three key points, all of which were positioned in the south; the first in the vicinity of Beit Jala; the second in the vicinity of the Walaja village and the crossing to the Cremisan monastery that connects them; and the third in the eastern limit of the Etzion settlement bloc, southwest of the town of Artas in Bethlehem.<sup>60</sup>

#### **2. Settlement Consolidation**

Settlement policies continued at their usual pace, as the priorities of the settler movement remained the same during the period 2014–2015. Jerusalem had primacy and was allocated more than half the settlement units; Salfit came next, where there was focus on what was known as the “Ariel Finger,” which includes a bloc of settlements surrounded by a fence that follows the limits of the 1948 occupied

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<sup>60</sup> ARIJ, *Israeli Activities in the occupied Palestinian Territory*, pp. 10–11.



territories. It cuts the WB horizontally up to the northeast of Salfit. Then there was Ramallah, where the focus is on the southern settlements sector, which reinforces its separation from Jerusalem and the southern WB in general.

The consolidation of the settlements' southern sector has succeeded in attracting large numbers of settlers due to its contact with the Jewish Center of the city in the west of Jerusalem, as well as the scarcity of Arab neighborhoods that are in direct contact with it. This has encouraged the Israeli government to try planning a similar sector in the north; and so it began pushing strongly in that direction starting in 2012. Thus, it adopted a more realistic and conservative expansionist approach, more likely to attract the Jewish population than the approach of ring-shaped settlements that used to be prevalent.

**Table 5/6: Total Number of Approved Residential Units in the Settlements of Jerusalem 2014–2015**

<b>Residential Units</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>	<b>Expected household capacity<sup>61</sup></b>
<b>Approved residential units in the southern sector</b>	7,890	55.3	26,826
<b>Approved residential units in the northern sector</b>	4,098	28.7	13,933
<b>Approved residential units in the rest of Jerusalem settlements</b>	2,282	16	7,759
<b>Total</b>	<b>14,270</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>48,518</b>

<sup>61</sup> The household capacity was calculated by considering the average size of Jewish households in Jerusalem 3.4 persons, see Maya Choshen & others, *Jerusalem: Facts and Trends 2013* (Jerusalem: JIIS, 2013), p. 26.

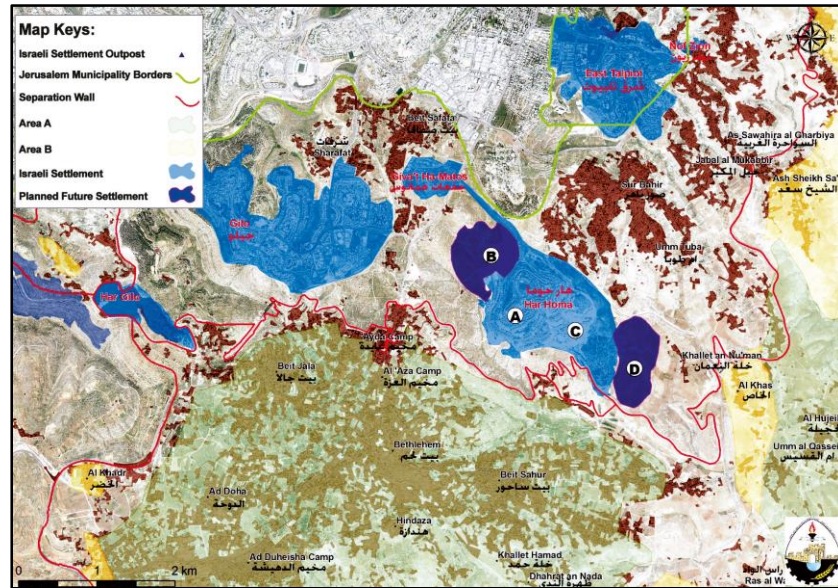
**Table 6/6: Residential Units Approved or Proposed for Construction in the Settlements of Jerusalem 2014–2015<sup>62</sup>**

Location	Settlement	2014		2015		Total
		No. of approved or proposed units for construction	Total no. of residential units in each government	No. of approved or proposed units for construction	Total no. of residential units in each government	
Jerusalem	Ramat Shlomo	1,000	10,848	1,531	3,422	14,270
	Ramot	1,249		318		
	Gilo	708		691		
	Givat HaMatos	2,561				
	Harhoma	1,761		19		
	Talpiot	1,800				
	East Talpiot	350				
	Ma'ale Adumim			112		
	Kfar Adumim	19				
	Nofei Prat	256				
	Pisgat Ze'ev	259		115		
	Neve Yaakov	238		26		
	A settlement neighborhood near Herod's Gate			12		
	Giv'at Ze'ev	647		576		
Giv'on HaHadasha		22				
<b>The rest of WB areas</b>		5,856	6,245	4,151	5,016	<b>11,261</b>
<b>Total</b>		<b>17,093</b>		<b>8,438</b>		<b>25,531</b>

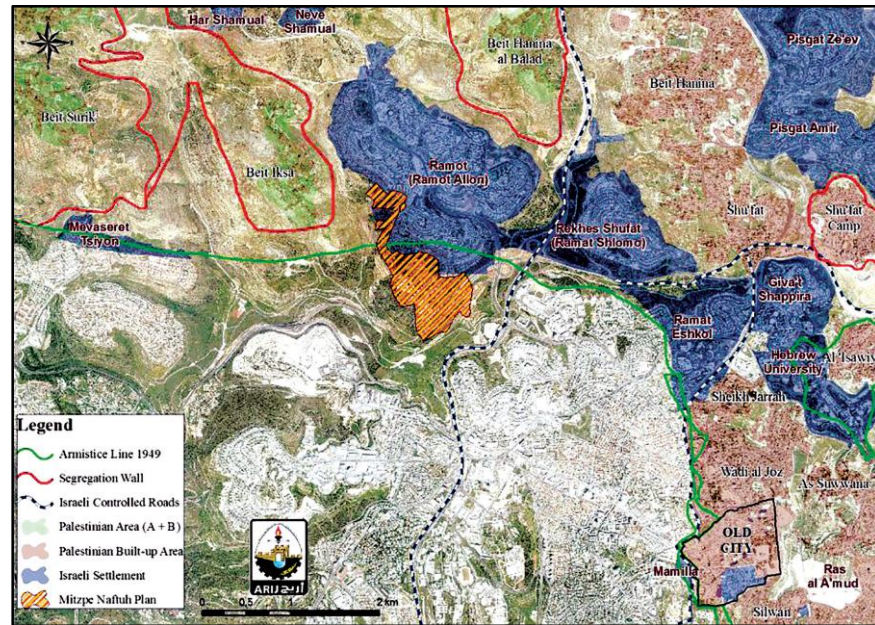
<sup>62</sup> ARIJ, The Israeli Violations in the Occupied Palestinian Territories – Annual Report 2015, 21/1/2016; and see ARIJ, Israeli Activities in the occupied Palestinian Territory, pp. 13–15.



**Map 2/6: Southern Sector Settlements That Show the Expansions of Har Homa Settlements<sup>63</sup>**



**Map 3/6: Northern Sector Settlements That Show the Expansions of the Ramot Settlement in the Direction of West Jerusalem<sup>64</sup>**



<sup>63</sup> ARIJ, Israeli Supreme Court Approves Application of “Absentee Property” Law on Properties of West Bank Residents Within the Borders of the Israeli Jerusalem Municipality, POICA, 29/4/2015, [http://www.poica.org/upload/Image/june\\_2014/abu-ghneim/homa-map.jpg](http://www.poica.org/upload/Image/june_2014/abu-ghneim/homa-map.jpg) (in Arabic)

<sup>64</sup> ARIJ, “Mordot Ramot” A unique Green area to be replaced by a colonial neighborhood, POICA, 4/12/2015, <http://www.poica.org/details.php?Article=8675>

## Hotbeds of Judaization in Palestinian Neighborhoods

The Israeli authorities reinforced their settlement and new neighborhoods policy with a parallel policy of deliberately changing the character of Palestinian neighborhoods and establishing Judaization centers within them, in particular the central neighborhoods surrounding the Old City; and to achieve that they relied on the settlement organizations' prominent role. During 2014–2015, Judaization projects focused on three key areas: Salah Ad-Din Street, Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan.

- a. The Yeshiva School in the central post office building: on 13/3/2014, the Ateret Cohanim Organization announced that it had acquired a part of the central post office, an area that exceeds one thousand square meters. This post office was built by the Jordanian government in Salah Ad-Din Street.<sup>65</sup> The Israeli government took control of it and turned part of it into a police station. On 3/9/2014, Ateret Cohanim announced the opening of a Jewish seminary in the location, which it called Otzmat Yerushalayim.<sup>66</sup>
- b. Ohr Somayach Yeshiva Plan: In February 2014, The Jerusalem Planning and Building Committee approved the 12-story building, three floors of which will be underground in Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood, for which it will allocate appropriated land with an area of 9,600 square meters. On 28/8/2014, the project was submitted to the Jerusalem municipality for approval.<sup>67</sup>
- c. More phantom graves: there is an increase in the activity of planting fictitious graves in Silwan and at the foot of the Mount of Olives facing Ras al-‘Amoud. This exaggerated spread of graves has the aim to close off the area available for the expansionist needs of the most populated neighborhood in Jerusalem.

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<sup>65</sup> LRC, The Monthly Report on the Israeli Violations of Palestinian Rights in the Occupied City of Jerusalem March 2014, Jerusalem, Year 8, Issue 3, p. 10, [http://poica.org/upload/Image/june\\_2014/JR03.pdf](http://poica.org/upload/Image/june_2014/JR03.pdf)

<sup>66</sup> LRC, The Monthly Report on the Israeli Violations of Palestinian Rights in the Occupied City of Jerusalem, September 2014, POICA, p. 22, [http://www.poica.org/upload/Image/october\\_2014/jer9.pdf](http://www.poica.org/upload/Image/october_2014/jer9.pdf)

<sup>67</sup> LRC, The Monthly Report on the Israeli Violations of Palestinian Rights in the Occupied City of Jerusalem, August 2014, POICA, p. 14, [http://poica.org/upload/Image/september\\_2014/sub\\_sept2014/jer08e.pdf](http://poica.org/upload/Image/september_2014/sub_sept2014/jer08e.pdf); and *Haaretz*, 12/2/2014, <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/1.573895>



### **3. Infrastructure that Reinforces the Jewish Presence**

As settlement expansion is focused on the northern and southern sectors, infrastructure works are also focused on improving these two sectors, strengthening the connections between them and bolstering their communication with the city's Jewish center in the west of Jerusalem. Concerning building connections between the settlements and the west of Jerusalem, the Israeli government pushed ahead with the second line of Jerusalem Light Rail, in spite of the controversy about the real feasibility of its first phase, and in spite of its frequent breakdowns and stops during the Jerusalem *Intifadah* when it came under successive attacks.

#### **Road 4 Aims to Promote the Southern Sector**

A road connects Har Homa settlement with the Gush Etzion settlement bloc; intersecting with Highway 50 that connects the southern sector settlements with the city's Jewish center in the west of Jerusalem. This road causes additional fragmentation of Beit Safafa's neighborhoods; separating them, one from the other, and of the suburb of Sharafat, which has become encircled on all sides by settlements and settlement bypass roads. The implementation of this road was begun after an Israeli court approved its scheme and all objections submitted against it have been rejected.<sup>68</sup>

#### **Development of Road 21 (Begin Highway)**

On 21/1/2013, Israeli bulldozers began work on Road 21, which connects the northern sector settlements with each other, and continues on its way to the west of Jerusalem. In April and August 2014, during work on this road, several olive groves in the vicinity of Shu'fat were razed.

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<sup>68</sup> The Monthly Report on the Israeli Violations of Palestinian Rights in the Occupied City of Jerusalem, January 2014, POICA, p. 16, [http://poica.org/upload/Image/january\\_articles\\_images\\_2014/JR01.pdf](http://poica.org/upload/Image/january_articles_images_2014/JR01.pdf)



التقرير الاستراتيجي الفلسطيني

2015-2014

الفصل السادس

القدس والمقدسات

2015-2014

