

The Palestine Strategic Report 2016 – 2017 Ch.3



The Land and the Holy Sites

2016 – 2017

NOTE: The complete volume of
The Palestine Strategic Report 2016 – 2017
will be published soon



The Land and the Holy Sites¹

Introduction

The Palestinian Strategic Report of 2014–2015 reviewed the steady rise of the extremist Zionist “Temple” associations, as they moved from the margins of the Israeli political system to its center, all the way up to their acquisition of a quarter of the seats in the current government. This was an indication that *al-Aqsa* Mosque, specifically, is likely to be subjected to unprecedented attempts to change its identity. Thus, in September 2015, the battle to implement temporal partition of the mosque became the first attempt by these associations, and the government supporting them, to benefit from their newly-acquired influence. However, this attempt ended in the Jerusalem *Intifadah* (uprising) which manifested in the form of effective individual resistance operations. This came as a response to attacks and abuse carried out against “*al-Murabitat*” (female defenders of *al-Aqsa* Mosque) at the gates of *al-Aqsa*, where they stood firm against the attempt at partition. These incidents reinforced the Israeli government’s conviction that the attempt to change the identity of *al-Aqsa* Mosque must be preceded by undermining *al-Murabitat*’s activities, and by putting an end to their supply lines. Thus, they attacked the institutions that are administered by the Islamic movement in the territories occupied in 1948. Yet Israel did not allow the establishment of alternatives to these institutions; and they arrested those in charge. Moreover, they tried to ban Ribat (in the form of a garrison inside the mosque). Then on 17/11/2015, they banned the Islamic movement itself.

By the end of 2015, the implementation of these measures stripped the mosque of the human shield that used to protect it; unlike 2010 when the experiment of terraces of learning and Ribat emerged to reactivate the cordon of public protection. On the morning of 14/7/2017, the Israelis concluded that the attacks carried out by three young men from the Jabarin family constituted a suitable pretext to alter, in one stroke, the identity of *al-Aqsa* Mosque. But then came the huge public gathering at the gates of *al-Aqsa* and the Old City to restore, with

¹ This study is the approved English translation of chapter three of *The Palestine Strategic Report 2016–2017*, edited by Dr. Mohsen Mohammad Saleh. It is an analytical study of the conditions of the Land and the holy sites in 2016–2017. The Arabic version of this Report was recently released in 2018, and the draft of this chapter was written by Ziad Bhies.

great force and efficacy, the protective cordon around the mosque. Faced with the threat that the Lion's Gate uprising could expand to an all-out popular *Intifadah*, the Israeli government withdrew all its measures at once, just as it had imposed them all at once. Thus, for the second time in two years, the balance of power proved that it would not allow Israel to impose changes on the identity of *al-Aqsa* Mosque, whether partially or wholly, and left it able only to maneuver on entry procedures, and on seasonal bases. Today, this bet remains open; between, on the one hand, a government driven by an extremist ideology that considers the Judaization of *al-Aqsa* its central agenda, the regional vacuum its suitable opportunity, and its measures capable of suspending popular actions; and, on the other hand, popular actions capable of taking the initiative, finding solutions and continuing the battle to protect *al-Aqsa*'s identity.

First: Islamic and Christian Holy Sites

1. Al-Aqsa Mosque

a. Control of the Mosque's Administration

During 2016–2017, the biggest headline was the Israeli attempt to wrest or interfere with Al-Aqsa Mosque's administration. This attempt oscillated between two approaches: the first was trying to force the Jordanian Ministry of Awqaf, Islamic Affairs and Holy Places to exercise the role of deputy administrator of *al-Aqsa*, and agreeing to all the wishes and commands of the Israeli occupier. This attempt was initiated in the 2015 understandings of US Secretary of State John Kerry and continued with a plan to establish a network of Jordanian cameras in *al-Aqsa* Mosque, approved by the two parties. These were to monitor everything happening inside: in its buildings, open courtyard and facilities. It was reinforced by trying to subject all maintenance and restoration work being done by the Jordanian Ministry of Awqaf, Islamic Affairs and Holy Places to the control of the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) and Jerusalem municipality. The two sides continued to explore this track until July 2017.

The second phase was that of a power grab of the administration, first with a single blow during the Lion's Gate uprising, and secondly with reprisals for their



failure to stop it. Israel's attempt to wrest the full powers of the Mosque's administration from the Jordanian Ministry of Awqaf, Islamic Affairs and Holy Places during July 2017, meant that rejecting and confronting these measures was the only option open to Jordan to preserve its role and credibility.

The Cameras

The Israeli authorities tried to impose a full temporal division in *al-Aqsa* Mosque during the days of the Jewish New Year (Rosh Hashana) 13–16/9/2015 and in the period of *Sukkot* (Feast of Tabernacles) and *Shmini Atzeret* (Eighth Day of Assembly) 29/9–6/10/2015, by completely shutting *al-Aqsa* to Muslims during those days and opening it to the Israeli intruders. This led to the outbreak of the Jerusalem *Intifadah* that forced the Israeli government to look for a way to back down from those measures. Hence Kerry's declarations made in Amman on 24/10/2015, through which the American Secretary of State tried to attribute diplomatic achievements to the Israelis, although they were the party caught in a political predicament. Among these so-called achievements was considering “visit” an “undisputed right” of Jews, while “prayer” was an “undisputed right of Muslims,” by stating that it is a “fundamental fact” that it is “Muslims who pray on the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif and non-Muslims who visit.” The second achievement was to force Jordan to install a network of cameras that would photograph, around the clock, everything going on inside *al-Aqsa*. Jordan officially adopted the project of a network of surveillance cameras and presented it as an essential tool to monitor and expose Israeli violations taking place inside *al-Aqsa*. In contrast, the Israeli media and the “Temple” associations' circles presented these cameras as a security monitoring network that observe the worshipers' behavior and their objections to the storming of the mosque, so they can call them to account for it. The Israelis' keenness on having these cameras installed before the Jewish holidays in March and April of 2016 was to help them “monitor and document Muslim rioters.”²

² *Israel Hayom* newspaper, 6/3/2016, <http://www.israelhayom.com/2017/07/20/surveillance-cameras-to-be-installed-on-temple-mount/> (in English); and Remarks to the Press With Jordanian Foreign Minister Nasser Judeh, Remarks, John Kerry, Secretary of State, Amman Marka Airport, Amman, Jordan, 24/10/2015, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2015/10/248703.htm>

Objectively, these cameras were intended as an implicit authorization for Israel to monitor and call to account the worshipers, under the cover of Jordan's administration of *al-Aqsa*. This measure was bound to take a dangerous direction that threatened to move the struggle over the mosque to the Arab interior, Jordan in particular. Thus, in view of successive Jordanian statements on the intention to install the cameras (the latest of which came on 16/3/2016 from Mohammad Momani, Jordanian Minister of State for Media Affairs),³ the popular Palestinian leadership, headed by 'Ikrima Sabri, former Grand Mufti of Jerusalem and Palestine and head of the Islamic Supreme Committee, and Sheikh Raed Salah, head of the Islamic Movement in the 1948 occupied territories, advised the Jordanian government on 22/3/2016 not to install the cameras.⁴ In Jerusalem, this coincided with Palestinian popular and political rejection, and the launch of a youth campaign, which threatened to break those cameras once installed. It also coincided with correspondences and appeals from Al Quds International Institution and Jordanian popular institutions, to the Jordanian government to assess the serious consequences of installing those cameras, including moving the conflict into Jordan where it could affect the Jordanian government. The Jordanian Prime Minister, Abdullah Ensour, responded on 18/4/2016 that Jordan had abandoned the plan to install the cameras. What is noteworthy here is that the PA adopted a position counter to this popular consensus. On 23/3/2016 it supported the Jordanian plan to install the cameras, as if to counter the popular position expressed the day before.

The Israeli authorities responded to Jordan's refraining from installing the cameras by installing high resolution cameras at al-Ghawanmeh and Moroccan gates, above al-Tankaziyya School located in the western gallery of the Mosque, and at Lion's Gate in the northeast of *al-Aqsa* Mosque. This response came on 9/5/2016,⁵ 20 days after Jordan had rejected the project, thus confirming that the Israeli authorities viewed the Jordanian cameras project to be no more than a surveillance network to be installed by proxy.

³ *Addustour* newspaper, Amman, 17/3/2016.

⁴ Site of The Palestinian Information Center (PIC), 22/3/2016.

⁵ PIC, 9/5/2016.



Interference in the Restoration Work

Since 2010, the Israeli authorities have been trying to subject the Jordanian restoration work to IAA and Jerusalem municipality control, in order to impose a reality in which the Jordanian Ministry of Awqaf, Islamic Affairs and Holy Places crews becomes part of a system controlled by the Israelis in every detail and decision made, thus, trying to replicate the model of the clean occupation applied in WB.

During the period covered by this report, the following took place: on 3/6/2016 Israeli authorities prevented the opening of 80 sanitary units furnished by the Jordanian Ministry of Awqaf, Islamic Affairs and Holy Places at al-Ghawanmeh Gate to be ready for the holy month of Ramadan. Two months later, on 8/8/2016, the Israeli police stopped the restoration work at the Dome of the Rock. They brought in an IAA expert to assess Jordanian restoration work. They suspended this work for several consecutive days and arrested the engineer in charge. This was followed on 16/8/2016 by halting maintenance work at *al-Aqsa* Mosque. On 9/2/2017, after a short resumption, the Israeli authorities once again halted restoration work at the Dome of the Rock. On 8/3/2017, they prevented the repair of one of the wooden doors of the Qibli Mosque and re-arrested the director of reconstruction. On 24/5/2017, they damaged the loudspeakers of the Moroccan Gate minaret, so that US President Donald Trump would not hear the Islamic call to prayer (*adhan*) while visiting the Western Wall, considered a Jewish holy site.⁶

We can deduce from these measures that the Israeli authorities continue to seek to convince Jordan that the only way for it to continue having a role in the administration of *al-Aqsa* Mosque is by coordinating directly with their departments in Jerusalem. Otherwise, they risk leaving gaps in the reconstruction work. Apparently, Israeli authorities are planning to use these gaps as pretexts to intervene directly in the Mosque's maintenance and restoration.

⁶ Palestine News and Information Agency (WAFA), 24/5/2017.

Aggression on *al-Aqsa* During the Lion's Gate Uprising

On 9/8/2017, two weeks after opening the doors of the mosque in response to public pressure, the Administration of Jerusalem's Awqaf and al-Aqsa Mosque Affairs, charged with examining the effects of the two weeks long Israeli aggression on *al-Aqsa* Mosque, announced preliminary results of what it had inspected.⁷ On 26/11/2017, it announced its final report, four months after the end of that aggression.⁸ These developments indicated the seriousness with which the Administration of Jerusalem's Awqaf dealt with the challenges concerning *al-Aqsa* Mosque and the attempts to end its role there. An analysis of Israeli behavior documented in the two reports indicates that the five basic determinants of Israeli government conduct toward *al-Aqsa* Mosque are:

First: Trying to prove the “temple” narrative: for over 14 days, the Dome of the Rock was the focus of Israeli aggression. In its report, the Administration of Jerusalem's Awqaf and al-Aqsa Mosque Affairs confirmed that the Israeli authorities took two samples from two different sites in the body of the rock for examination; then they sprayed a white matter on the rock. The report did not clarify what that white matter was. They explored the bases of arches, indicating that they were looking for an earlier building below the columns on which the dome rests. They also removed pieces from the tile found directly around the rock. This intensive targeting of the rock indicates that the Israeli government had adopted the narrative of the extremist “Temple” associations, in which they claim that the rock is the site of the “Holy of Holies.” Israel therefore tried to reinforce this narrative with an archaeological exploration that the Administration of Jerusalem's Awqaf would never have allowed.

This view was consolidated by an accompanying Israeli focus on the leveled grounds of the Mosque called the Mosque's levels. The stone-pulling and

⁷ A statement issued by The Administration of Jerusalem's Awqaf and al-Aqsa Mosque Affairs of the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs: “Preliminary Conclusions of Technical Committees Concerning the Damages of Intrusions into al-Aqsa Mosque 14–27/7/2017.”

⁸ A statement issued by The Administration of Jerusalem's Awqaf and al-Aqsa Mosque Affairs of the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs: “Tampering and Vandalism left by the Israeli occupation in al-Aqsa Mosque during its Closure 14–27/7/2017,” 26/11/2017; and see Islamic Awqaf Department Reveals the Effects of Vandalism at Al-Aqsa Mosque During Last July, site of Wadi Hilweh Information Center—Silwan (silwanic.net), 26/11/2017, <http://www.silwanic.net/index.php/article/news/77188> (in English)



marble-cutting works concentrated on the old *al-Aqsa* Mosque, which is a long corridor situated under the Qibli Mosque, leading to its southern wall. It continues under a small dome known as Cradle of Jesus on the eastern wall of the mosque, at the stairs leading down to the “Marwani Musallah” (Marwani prayer hall) also called al-Marwani Mosque; which constitutes the southeastern level of *al-Aqsa* Mosque.

The search in these levels reveals a desire to question the historic Islamic narrative of *al-Aqsa* Mosque. In addition, searching for the remains of ancient buildings can be used as an attempt to find historic legitimacy for the alleged temple.

In conclusion, Israeli actions in *al-Aqsa* Mosque during the two weeks of aggression indicate that replacing *al-Aqsa* with the “temple” is a central objective of Israel. This is not an agenda adopted by marginal societies, as it had appeared before the year 2000; which predicates that the aggression on *al-Aqsa* is likely to be repeated and escalated. To face this eventuality, there must be a Palestinian, Arabian, and Islamic political and field performance, based on recognizing this existential threat, and providing effective tools to deter and end it.

Second: Exploring ways to open the Repentance and Mercy gates: which are two giant doors in the eastern wall of *al-Aqsa* Mosque, closed by a stone building, over whose origin accounts vary. During the 2017 Israeli aggression, the Administration of Jerusalem’s Awqaf report detected total excavation of the stones that close these gates, up to *al-Aqsa*’s outer gate. This means that the Israeli authorities wanted to measure the depth of the building that shut these gates and to explore what kind of materials were used as well as their hardness. They may have taken a sample to try to analyze the age of this closure; hoping it would be a helpful factor in their primary obsession, the narrative of how the “temple” was built.

This action can be explained by understanding why Israel singled out the eastern part of *al-Aqsa* courtyard: for after opening the giant gates of the Marwani prayer hall in 1999, the Israeli authorities did not allow the removal of the rubble consisting of earth, large stones and metal pieces. The Administration of Jerusalem’s Awqaf ordered it piled up in the eastern part of *al-Aqsa* courtyard, starting from the gates of the Marwani prayer hall in the south and up to Imam

al-Ghazali platform in the north. This reality resulted in abandoning prayers in this vast area because it was no longer appropriate for praying. Then with the rise in incursions by extremist Jews, starting in 2010, the incursion path planners began preparing to reach the east of *al-Aqsa* Mosque, as their main target. Concurrently, they started an archeological endeavor to search this rubble, claiming that it dates back to the era of “the second temple”. Meanwhile, in their break-ins, the extremist Jews focused on rubbing themselves with earth found in the rubble to boost their claim that it is sacred.

In 2013, when the “Temple” Associations’ circles felt that they were close to achieving the temporal division of *al-Aqsa* Mosque, they proposed schemes for spatial division. Thus, Likud put out a map that proposed the appropriation of the eastern part of *al-Aqsa* courtyard; taking advantage of its being neglected due to the debris there. This proposal benefits from the fact that the eastern wall of *al-Aqsa* Mosque overlooks a non-inhabited area, as it is at the same time the eastern wall of Jerusalem’s Old City. This meant that it would be difficult for Jerusalemites to counter Jewish intruders coming through it. Jerusalem’s Old City Project “Kedem Yerushalayim,” presented in 2007, included a proposal to establish a large center to bring visitors to the east of the Mosque, and a cable car to connect the center to the Mount of Olives, in order to attract the Jews to the northeastern side of the mosque, complementary to, and in equal numbers to, its southwest.

Adding all these introductory accounts to current and previous moves of closing and seizing the Mercy and Yusufiyah cemeteries east of the Old City brings together the fragments of a scattered picture. For the Israeli government was adopting the spatial division of *al-Aqsa* Mosque as its target, while seeking to appropriate the eastern part of the mosque and allot it to Jews. It also sought to establish an external infrastructure above the three Islamic cemeteries to attract large number of settlers, while exploring the possibility of opening the Mercy and Repentance gates to let them be the main entrance for the Jewish intruders into the Mosque.

Third: Finding espionage and surveillance alternatives: security control of *al-Aqsa* Mosque was the main issue in the Lion’s Gate uprising. This uprising ended when the Israeli government was forced to dismantle cameras, security



gates, and iron bridges and corridors. It seemed that Israel tried to obtain minimal surveillance by planting devices inside the buildings of the Mosque, in particular the Qibli Mosque and the Dome of the Rock, which are structures that had not been singled out by Israel since 1967. The Administration of Jerusalem's Awqaf report confirmed the implantation of iron bolts that were probably monitoring and filming devices. It did not mention the fate of these iron bolts, and whether the Awqaf had dismantled them or left them in place. A follow-up on this development to ensure the dismantling of the equipment.

Fourth: Control of the archives and data: Israel is waging a battle to monopolize the narrative. To this end, Israeli operatives stole a number of historical libraries, the archives of newspapers published in Haifa, Jaffa and Jerusalem, in addition to the archives of Islamic courts and the Supreme Muslim Council. The archive kept at *al-Aqsa* Mosque had remained untouched until the Lion's Gate uprising. It includes administration and reconstruction archives, as well as libraries and manuscripts. The Administration of Jerusalem's Awqaf report documented that copies of all the papers and data were taken from *al-Aqsa* Mosque while the originals remained in it. This means that the Lion's Gate uprising blocked the door to monopolizing and stealing this data but did not prevent the occupation from laying its hands on them to fill important gaps in its own archives.

Fifth: Attempting to criminalize the institutions operating inside *al-Aqsa*: The *Awqaf* institutions operating within *al-Aqsa* Mosque are vital for its sustainability; from the Administration of Jerusalem's Awqaf and its divisions to guards, imams, and preachers, to the manuscripts section, up to the "Islamic Shari'ah" (religious) school. The reduction in the popular protection cordon engenders a reduction in these institutions and their ability to work. The Israeli forces did not miss the chance when they were alone in *al-Aqsa* Mosque to confiscate quantities of chemicals from the manuscripts' section and the laboratories of the Islamic Shari'ah school. They were most likely looking for evidence to incriminate them in connection with those chemicals. The result of this research has not been put to use yet, but this remains a future possibility.

Measures Taken Following the Lion's Gate Uprising

Israeli measures following the Lion's Gate uprising focused on two basic goals: the first goal, emptying the victory achieved in this uprising of its significance. Thus, on 27/7/2017, Israeli forces contrived a bloody confrontation with the crowds entering *al-Aqsa* Mosque. They deliberately carried out a meticulous inspection of certain chosen individuals, to imply that their security control was present in one way or another. They once again revoked the lists of *al-Murabitat*, particularly those on the list of prohibitions, popularly known as the Golden List. They detained some of them repeatedly, notably Hanadi Halwani, Khadijah Khoways and Sahar al-Natsheh. They also barred a number of Awqaf officials and *al-Aqsa* guards from entering the Mosque.

Perhaps the most important of these attempts was the one on 22/8/2017, at the beginning of the academic year; when the Israeli authorities prevented the entry of textbooks to *al-Aqsa* schools, under the pretext that they were printed by the presses of the PA, which is banned in Jerusalem, under the Oslo Accords.⁹ Then on 2/10/2017, they banned the students of those schools from playing in the Mosque,¹⁰ claiming that the nature of *al-Aqsa*'s sanctity should be imposed according to the Jewish concepts of the sacred, which was an implicit attempt to impose Israeli authority indirectly on the Islamic sanctification of the mosque. Thus, students and children playing in the mosque and its courtyard became a factor in defending *al-Aqsa*'s Islamic identity. The sacred in Islam is not ruled by the dual sacred-mundane that rules the Biblical definition of the sacred, which sees in every mundane act a profanation and distortion of the purity of the sacred. The mosque in Islam is a center of life, where people can eat their breakfast or early dawn meal during Ramadan, can study or learn, can convene meetings; they even can sleep in it. One can play in the mosque and have a good time with his children and friends, provided they do not disturb the congregational prayer. Within this understanding, the decisions of the Israeli Supreme Court and "temple" police aim to redefine *al-Aqsa* Mosque to Muslims according to the biblical rules of sanctification.

⁹ WAFA, 22/8/2017.

¹⁰ PIC, 2/10/2017.



The second important attempt was to recall the security ban of 2003 on the Islamic Heritage Committee, when the “temple” police filed, on 11/9/2017, a request to the court to impose a permanent closure on the buildings of Mercy Gate,¹¹ as the seat of that structure that had been banned 13 before. Based on the above analysis, this request aimed to empty the eastern part of the Mosque’s courtyard of any Awqaf institutions, to improve Israel’s chances of appropriating it. It is because the Mercy Gate building, which belongs to the Awqaf, is today the seat of Imam al-Ghazali chair. Furthermore, Awqaf officials were planning to transfer some of their working sections to it; but its closure by the Israeli police made them hesitant to do so.

The second goal of Israeli measures following the Lion’s Gate uprising was to restore the morale of those in favor of the partition project and the “Temple” Associations. On 1/8/2017, which coincides with the “Tisha B’Av” Jewish fast day (in memory of the destruction of the temple), the “Temple” Associations tried to stage the largest intrusion in their history. The Israeli police provided them full protection and shut the Mosque completely to Muslims. The Israeli bus company “Egged” provided free transport to the intruders. Yet the next day, the coalition of the “Temple” Associations announced that the number of intruders was 1,300 persons.¹² Media monitoring recorded repeated entry and exit of groups of intruders, with the aim to raise their numbers. Comparing this figure with the number of those stationed at Lion’s Gate, which exceeded 35,000, in spite of their being subjected to repression and gas bombs, reveals an important fact that the Jewish “Temple” agenda, despite its official rise and wide acceptance in Israel, does not arouse the public nor constitute a consensus outside the spectrum of the “Temple” Associations. While the identity of *al-Aqsa* Mosque has the consensus of Palestinians and is a motivation to the public to organise and take action. This important difference means that the adoption of the “Temple” agenda serves functionally the obsession of the “Jewish state” and society with the Jewish identity of the state, but without the willingness to sacrifice self-interest. While on the Palestinian side, it is a fundamental pillar of their identity.

¹¹ *Alquds* newspaper, 12/9/2017.

¹² WAFA, 1/8/2017.

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

Constructions in the Vicinity of the Mosque

In 2014–2015, six central constructions aimed to change the horizon in the vicinity of *al-Aqsa* from two sides: the first was the southwest of *al-Aqsa* where four of these structures are located: Strauss House to the north of the Western Wall Plaza, the construction of which has been completed. Then there was the house of essence Beit Moreshet HaKotel, located on the west side of the Western Wall Plaza, whose approval stages were completed in 2015 and for which there was an invitation to submit tenders on 6/4/2017 for the implementation of its infrastructure. There was also the Glory of Israel (*Tiferet Yisrael*) Synagogue whose foundation stone was laid on 27/5/2014; its approval and planning stages were completed on 3/10/2016. And finally there was the upper plaza, otherwise known as Natan Sharansky plan, located south of the Moroccan Gate, that has an area of 900 m². It was approved by the Israeli government on 30/1/2016. However, the issue of the Moroccan Hill, which is currently being discussed at the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), stands in the way of its progress; its foundation work has been shrouded in secrecy. On 4/1/2016, the Administration of Jerusalem's Awqaf and al-Aqsa Mosque Affairs warned against construction work being done under the Moroccan Gate whose nature was unclear.

The second side is the southern part of Silwan. It includes the Gihon Spring Center located above the Spring Tower, the construction of which has been completed. It also includes the Kedem Center, which will be the most important attraction for visitors to Silwan, located opposite the southern wall of the Old City. It is still in the approval stage, delayed by objections from left-wing organizations and some Arab institutions. The approval phase is expected to be completed and implementation begun during 2018.

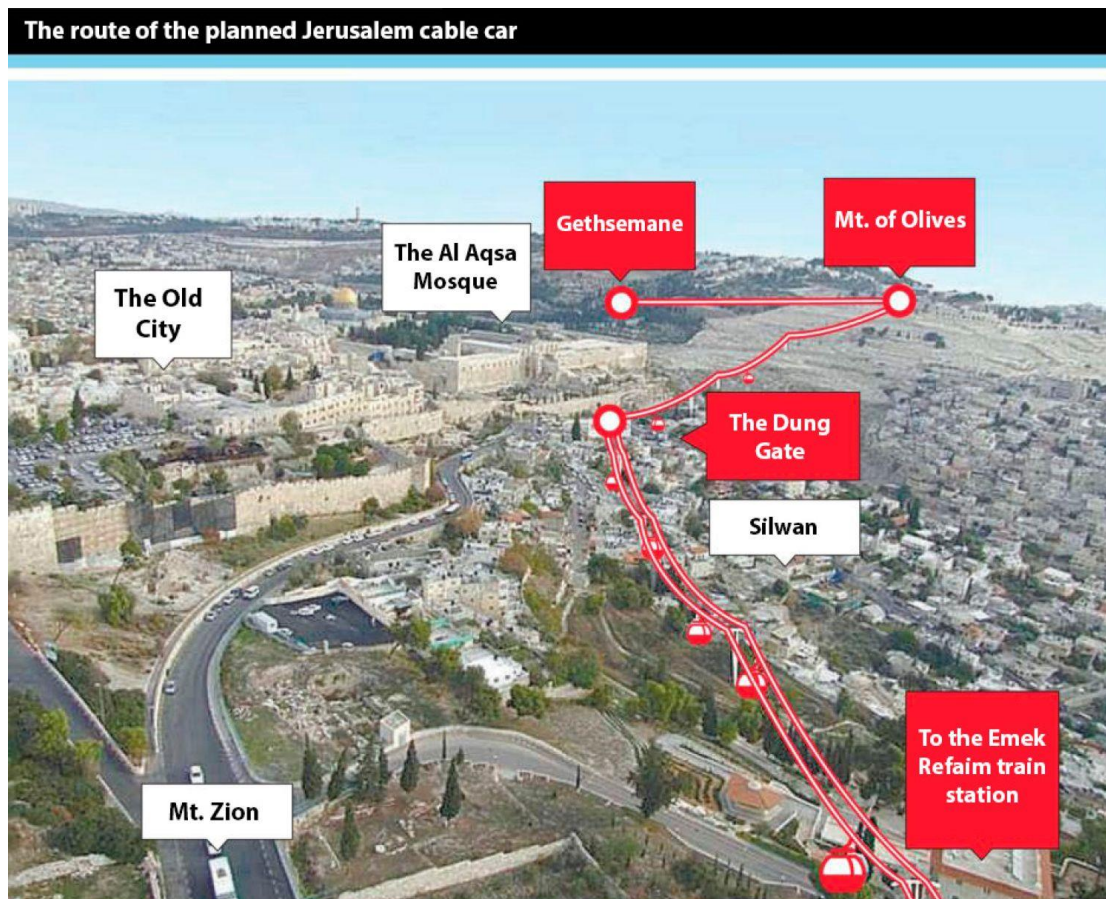
During 2016–2017, two new construction projects began:

First: Jerusalem's Planned Cable Car: Talks regarding it started in 2007, and detailed plans were completed during 2016 when, on 25/8/2016, Jerusalem's mayor Nir Barkat presented his vision of a planned cable car at an internal meeting



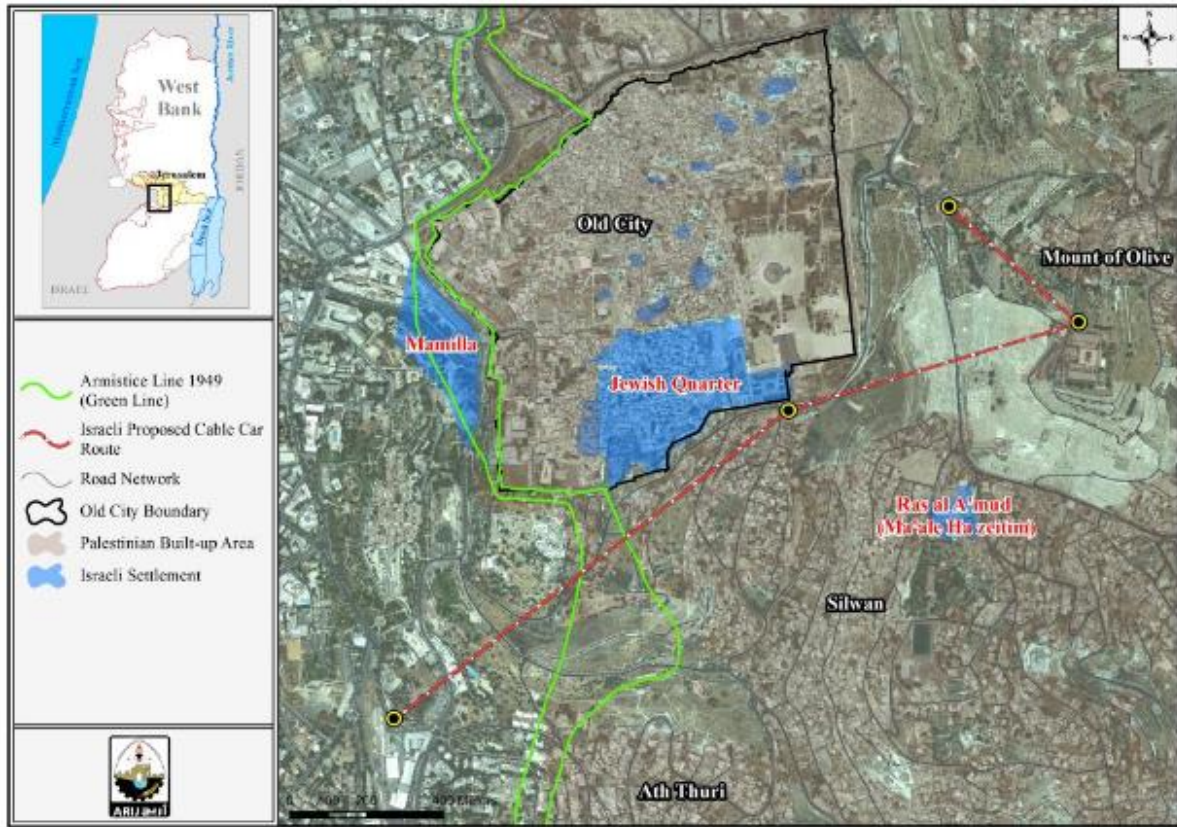
of the Likud Party. According to the municipality's published plans, the cable car will have four main stops: the First Station complex in southern Jerusalem; the Kedem Center, which belongs to the right-wing organization Ir David Foundation (aka Elad), near Silwan; the Seven Arches Hotel on the Mount of Olives; and the churches of Gethsemane, near the Old City's Dung Gate. The cable car will require construction of 15 large concrete pylons, the tallest of which will be 26 meters high. According to the plan, each car along the 1.4-kilometer line will be able to carry up to 10 passengers, and 73 cars will operate simultaneously for a total capacity of 3,000 passengers per hour at peak times.¹³

The Route of the Planned Jerusalem Cable Car



¹³ *Haaretz* newspaper, 25/8/2016, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/premium-barkat-east-jerusalem-cable-car-will-clarify-who-really-owns-city-1.5428939>; and *Haaretz*, 20/11/2017, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/premium-jerusalem-fast-tracks-planned-cable-car-to-western-wall-despite-criticism-1.5466912> (in English)

Map 1/3: Israeli Proposed Cable Car Route



Source: <http://poica.org/upload/Image/2016/Feb%202016/Cable%20Car.jpg>

Second: Western Wall Elevator project: which will start in the Jewish Quarter and descend to the Western Wall plaza. In addition, a pedestrian tunnel will stretch from the exit of the elevator to the security checkpoint at the Western Wall plaza.¹⁴ This plan was approved by the Planning and Building Department in Jerusalem's Municipality on 30/11/2016, and by the government on 28/5/2017.¹⁵

Excavations

Despite the media's insistence on headlining every bit of news about the excavations as "disclosure," a review of the excavations map confirms that what was really taking place was the opening of known excavations after having them

¹⁴ Arutz Sheva 7 (Israel National News), 28/5/2017, <http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/230273>

¹⁵ Ibid.



expanded, rehabilitated and made suitable for visitors. Furthermore, attractions to draw visitors were developed as the excavations themselves were silent and not appealing to the public. Thus, some of them were furnished as synagogues and halls for holding events and meetings, or as historical shrines where sound and light shows were presented and modern technology are used to entertain visitors. During 2016–2017, there were developments in two excavation sites:

First Site: The excavation of the southwestern corner of *al-Aqsa*'s wall: This excavation will connect the Herodian Road in the south, which extends to Ein Silwan, to the Western Wall network in the north. The work on its expansion and rehabilitation has been going on for more than five years; and it has reached a depth of more than 80 meters. On 3/8/2016, the IAA and Ir David Foundation claimed that five archaeological strata were found during the rehabilitation of these excavations.¹⁶

Second Site: The Herodian Road: on 16/8/2016, media sources detected the removal of quantities of rubble from it that seem to have resulted from its rehabilitation, as well as from extending it towards the north, at the entrance of Wadi Hilweh neighborhood in Silwan.¹⁷ On 23/8/2016, the IAA announced that these excavations were part of a 580m long tunnel to connect Siloam Pool or Silwan Pool to the wall of the Old City; thus confirming that the talk was about the Herodian Road itself.¹⁸ It seems that work on this extension has been completed, and it was opened to visitors on 28/12/2016 in the presence of the Israeli Minister of Culture Miri Regev and Jerusalem's Mayor Nir Barkat. This excavation was funded by the Ir David Foundation.¹⁹

¹⁶ Land Research Center (LRC), The Monthly Report on the Israeli Violations of Palestinian Rights in the Occupied City of Jerusalem August 2016, Jerusalem, Year 10, Issue 8, p. 33, site of Project for Monitoring Israeli Occupation Activities (POICA), <http://poica.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/august2016a.pdf> (in Arabic)

¹⁷ PIC, 16/8/2016.

¹⁸ PIC, 23/8/2016.

¹⁹ Site of Arabs 48, 28/12/2016, <http://bit.ly/2nqHIdb>

Perhaps the most important development during the period covered by this report was the political adoption of the excavations by the Israeli government, when it held its session of 28/5/2017²⁰ in the Behind Our Wall Hall (*Ahar Kotlenu*). The renovation of this hall was entirely funded by the Jewish Ukrainian billionaire Zvi Hirsch Bogolyubov and inaugurated in 2015.²¹

2. Jerusalem's Islamic Holy Sites

Outside the scope of *al-Aqsa* Mosque, Israeli aggression has concentrated on cemeteries. As cemeteries used to be built on the outskirts of cities, and as the definition of the city of Jerusalem in the successive Islamic eras did not exceed the wall of the Old City, the main bulk of Jerusalem's graves are located around it, in the east and west. With the successive expansions of the borders of the city of Jerusalem during the British occupation and then the Israeli occupation, these graves came to be in the heart of the city. This caused the Israel to perceive them as real estate opportunities and to seek to acquire them to build central facilities on them. The Mamilla Cemetery was the main victim of this policy; for it initially had an area of 200 donums (200 thousand m²) but was subjected to gradual chipping away at its land, so that today only 15 donums (15 thousand m²) of it remain. It is still subject to the threat of being leveled or totally removed. Above this cemetery, headquarters of ministries, hotels and gardens were erected. The Center for Human Dignity–Museum of Tolerance (MOT) is the most recent facility to be built on its land. The fact that the Mamilla Cemetery was occupied in 1948 facilitated Israel's singular control of it.

As for the eastern cluster of cemeteries, they are adjacent to the Old City's wall from the east and consist mainly of the Mercy, Yusufiyah and Martyrs cemeteries. These cemeteries contain historical graves, some of which date back to the era of Prophet Muhammad's Companions, as in Mercy Cemetery. These cemeteries are still in use and contain new graves, a fact that makes controlling or usurping their territories much harder.

²⁰ Site of Aljazeera.net, 28/5/2017, <http://bit.ly/2GvkUBu> (in Arabic)

²¹ For more information about this excavation, see Mohsen Mohammad Saleh (ed.), *The Palestinian Strategic Report 2014–2015* (Beirut: Al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies and Consultations, 2016), p. 295.



a. The Mercy Cemetery

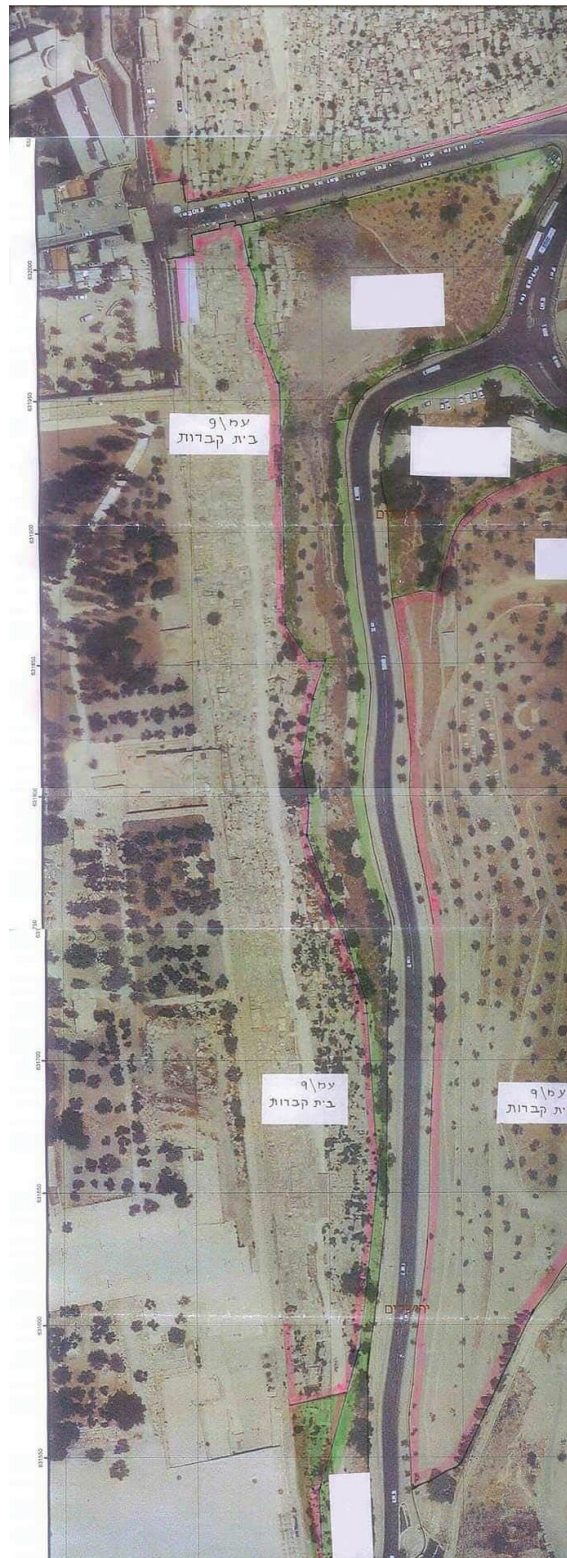
In 2016–2017, targeting focused primarily on Mercy Cemetery; an approach inseparable from the spatial division plan and the appropriation of the eastern parts of *al-Aqsa* courtyard. Taking hold of the Mercy Cemetery is an essential prerequisite to opening and putting to use the Mercy and Repentance gates. Although the Israeli authorities are still far from being in full acquisition of this cemetery, they keep closing it to any new burial, and they try to nibble gradually at it. They continue to do so up to the time of writing, as on 19/7/2016, the IAA demolished three graves in it;²² and on 23/10/2016, they demolished two more.²³ On 1/11/2016, they demolished eight graves that were readied for burial.²⁴ While on 18/12/2016, Israel Nature and Parks Authority fenced part of the cemetery, prohibited burial in it and declared it a “national park.” Finally, on 10/12/2017, the Israeli authorities put a fence around the entire cemetery and declared all of it a “national park,” in an apparent attempt to utilize the American decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel to leap forward with their plan to divide *al-Aqsa*.

²² PIC, 16/7/2016.

²³ LRC, The Monthly Report on the Israeli Violations of Palestinian Rights in the Occupied City of Jerusalem, October 2016, Jerusalem, Year 10, Issue 10, p. 12, POICA, <http://poica.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/oct2016e.pdf> (in English)

²⁴ WAFA, 1/11/2016.

Map 2/3: The Municipality Published Map on 12/12/2017, which indicates that the entire area of the Mercy Cemetery is a “National Park.” The Hebrew writing indicates the cemetery location.



b. The Yusufiyah Graveyard and the Martyrs Cemetery

Within the Israeli vision that seeks to attract the largest number of Jewish visitors to the northeast of *al-Aqsa*, the Lion's Gate occupies a central position, being the only open gate in the eastern wall of the city and therefore candidate to become the main attraction for Jewish visitors. This vision can be traced back to the old 2007 Jerusalem project "Kedem Yerushalayim," which included a proposal to establish a large center to bring visitors to the east of the Mosque, of an area of more than 15,000m² that includes a shopping and entertainment center, a cinema, a historical museum and a cable car station.

The Yusufiyah Graveyard constitutes most of the land surrounding Lion's Gate in the city's wall, and any construction project in the area requires full or at least partial acquisition of it. Israel's current endeavor is still focused on trying to close the Yusufiyah Graveyard to new burials and appropriate the parts of it that are adjacent to the Valley of Hell. On 3/7/2017, Israel placed barbed wire around a part of the cemetery to prevent burial in it, declaring it a "national park."²⁵ And on 21/8/2017, the bulldozers of Jerusalem municipality tried to demolish part of the wall of the Yusufiyah Graveyard to annex a new area to what it considers a "national park." However, the Preservation of Islamic Cemeteries Committee was able to prevent that.²⁶ But the bulldozers returned on 11/9/2017 to demolish a wall and level part of the Martyrs Cemetery, which is considered an extension of the Yusufiyah graveyard.²⁷

c. The Mamilla Cemetery

In 2016–2017, the Mamilla Cemetery was subjected to three offensives: the first was holding a wine festival on its land on 31/8–1/9/2016.²⁸ The cemetery was subjected to acts of razing and disinterment twice, the first on 24/9/2017, which led to the uncovering of eight skulls and skeletons,²⁹ and the second on 26/10/2017.³⁰

²⁵ PIC, 3/7/2017.

²⁶ PIC, 21/8/2017.

²⁷ WAFA, 11/9/2017.

²⁸ WAFA, 30/8/2016.

²⁹ Citing Mustafa Abu Zahrah, the head of Preservation of Islamic Cemeteries Committee in Jerusalem, PIC, 25/9/2017.

³⁰ PIC, 26/10/2017.

d. Demolition of Prayer Rooms and Mosques

On 23/5/2016, the Israeli authorities demolished a prayer room located in al-Anbiya' (prophets) Street in al-Musrara neighborhood, opposite Damascus Gate.³¹ And on 15/11/2016, the foundations of al-Mintar Mosque in Sur Baher, south of Jerusalem were demolished.³²

3. Islamic Holy Sites in the Rest of Palestine

a. Restricting the Adhan (the Islamic call to prayer)

2016 began with the Israeli government waging a war against the call for prayer (*adhan*), as one of the manifestations of Islamic identity. At the same time, it attempted to assert the purity of Israel's Jewish identity; while the growing Arab and Islamic presence, in number and kind, in the 1948 occupied territories and in Jerusalem, made achieving this "purity" only a distant possibility.

In the case of existential conflict over identity, *adhan* gains a new meaning, for it becomes a daily declaration of Islamic presence especially as it is in Arabic. For the Israeli occupier, who wants to replace it, *adhan* is a complex challenge; for he does not want the Arab and Islamic identity to exist on Palestinian land, let alone for its public presence to be declared on a daily basis.

Colonialism that endeavors to eliminate the original owners of the land, along with their physical existence and culture, and to establish in their place the existence and culture of the colonizer, is a violent form of colonialism. However, this mental perception can become a weakness if the owner of the land remains and declares his presence. This kind of colonial mentality cannot not accept coexistence between the two sides; failing to get rid of the landowner, it automatically tends to withdraw. The practical translation of this is that all the civic centers in which the Arab and Islamic identities are present constitute a threat of expulsion and emigration to Israeli Jews, driving them out of these centers, such as Jerusalem, the Triangle area and Nazareth. Based on this diagnosis, Israeli authorities seek to reduce the Arab and Islamic presence in the public domain. In this way, its attack on *adhan* is easily understood. It is not

³¹ Wadi Hilweh Information Center—Silwan (silwanic.net), 23/5/2016, <http://www.silwanic.net/index.php/article/news/76343/ar> (in Arabic)

³² *Alquds*, 15/11/2016.



merely an arbitrary hostility toward Islam, but rather an objective need to address the fragility of the colonization idea when confronted with steadfastness and the presence of an opposing identity.

During the period covered by this report, on 4/1/2016, Netanyahu announced that he was keen to stop the “nuisance” noises from the mosques in the 1948 occupied territories.³³ In a meeting of the Likud bloc in the Knesset on 15/1/2016, Netanyahu called on them to apply the noise law on mosques in Jerusalem and in the 1948 occupied territories.³⁴ This law has in effect been applied to the mosques of Beit Safafa, where Israel Nature and Parks Authority removed the loudspeakers in its mosques and forced the mosques to broadcast the *adhan* over smaller, less powerful loudspeakers.³⁵ It is clear that this measure was intended to enhance the population absorption of the neighboring Gilo bloc, which constitutes one of the assimilation pillars in the southern demographic segment of Jerusalem’s settlements.³⁶ On 6/11/2016, the occupation authorities issued notices prohibiting the dawn *adhan* from the mosques of Rahman, Taybah and Al-Quds University in Abu Dis.³⁷

It is necessary here to stop and scrutinize the Israeli focus on the dawn *adhan* specifically. This *adhan*, which is broadcast before sunrise, constitutes a declaration of an Islamic presence; at a time when it is not joined by any other sounds or noise resulting from the activities of daily human life. The sound arrives after traversing long distances. And despite the relatively long distance, the specific choice of these mosques may have been an attempt to bolster the ability of East Talpiot settlers to stay in it without the presence of *adhan*. By invoking this interpretation, it is not difficult to come to the same conclusion expected to be reached by the Ministerial Committee for Legislation, which was commissioned to study a special draft of a law that prohibits broadcasting the *adhan* in Jerusalem and the Palestinian interior; for it approved it on 13/11/2016.³⁸

³³ *Alquds*, 4/1/2016.

³⁴ PIC, 15/1/2016.

³⁵ *Alquds*, 19/8/2016.

³⁶ The Gilo settlement suffered from reverse migration in 2001–2002, after it was heavily targeted during *al-Aqsa Intifadah* from neighboring Beit Jala. The Separation Wall that was built between them was the main reason for its demographic re-growth.

³⁷ Wadi Hilweh Information Center—Silwan ([silwanic.net](http://www.silwanic.net)), 6/11/2016, <http://www.silwanic.net/index.php/article/news/76645/ar> (in Arabic)

³⁸ *Haaretz*, 13/11/2016, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-israeli-ministers-ok-bill-banning-mosque-loudspeakers-1.5461159> (in English)

b. Attack Statistics

In previous years, this section was based on an annual report issued by the Solidarity Foundation for Human Rights, which used to be based in Nablus but was closed in 2014. Al-Aqsa Association for Waqf and Heritage used to provide an alternative census of the violations against Palestinian holy sites. Its reports have been discontinued since the end of 2015. The only statistics that the researcher was able to access was those issued by the Land Research Center for the year 2016, which stated that the holy sites in occupied Palestine were subjected to 195 attacks during that year. At the time of writing, the 2017 report had not yet been released. The other partial documentation issued during this period was that of the Palestinian Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, Yousef Adeis in which he said that the first nine months of 2017 witnessed the prohibition of broadcasting the *adhan* from the Ibrahimi Mosque 65 times and closure of it to Muslims 36 times.³⁹ The following section shows the attacks on the Ibrahimi Mosque in Hebron during 2016–2017.

Table 1/3: Attacks on the Ibrahimi Mosque in Hebron 2016–2017⁴⁰

Attacks	2016	2017
Worshippers Entry Obstructions	37	27
Intrusions	17	22
Constructions Altering its Surrounding Features	25	17
Excavations Under the Mosque	3	1
Mosque Closure	20	15
Arrests Inside the Mosque	8	13
Beating Worshipers Inside the Mosque	2	4
Shooting or Tear Gas Incidents	1	1
Adhan Ban	546	591
Total	659	691

³⁹ Wafa, 2/10/2017.

⁴⁰ We thank the researcher Kamal al-Ja'bari for his meticulous calculations, which are based on the annual documentation of Israeli attacks on the Ibrahimi Mosque and its surroundings by the site of Wafa Info. However, numbers in the table are only those of the Mosque's violation without the surroundings. See Israeli Attacks on the Ibrahimi Mosque in 2016, Wafa Info, <http://info.wafa.ps/atemplate.aspx?id=10844>; and Israeli Attacks on the Ibrahimi Mosque in 2017, Wafa Info, <http://www.wafainfo.ps/atemplate.aspx?id=12979>



4. Christian Holy Sites in Jerusalem and the Rest of Palestine

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Orthodox Church in Jerusalem used to possess 18% of the area of mandatory Jerusalem, in addition to possessing extensive lands in Nazareth, Haifa and Jaffa. This is what made the British colonial authorities and then Israel view this church as “the hen that lays golden eggs,” given what could be acquired of its lands and real estate. What helped in this regard is the rift between the elite Greek clergy and an overwhelming majority of Arab nationalists of the same Christian denomination. The former’s ancestors had total dominance of the Church as a religious compensation for the fall of Greek political influence by the hand of the Ottoman Empire, and who continued to exercise a monopoly over the Church for narrow personal and factional interests. The latter, for a long time, sought reconciliation with their religious elite. They were often shocked to find that their interests and aspirations were the first thing that those elite forfeited.

Over the course of a century, the Zionist project, before and after the establishment of its state, acquired a large bloc of central real estate through sale agreements of Orthodox Church properties. These deals included the lands of Talbieh and the Monastery of the Cross, on which the Knesset buildings and the Israeli government headquarters stand; in addition to the lands of Abu Tor, at the expense of which the Giv’at HaMatos and Talpiot settlements are being expanded. These lands are known in the media as the lands of the “Mar Elias Monastery,” relative to the monastery to its south; in addition to the lands of Abu Ghuneim Mount, on which the Har Homa settlement was built; these lands used to be rented to the Church by the Administration of Jerusalem’s Awqaf. In addition, there are al-Shamma’h lands and many other lands, but there is no room here to list them all. History attests that no patriarch has come since Timotheos I (1939) and until Irenaios I who was deposed in 2005, who was not involved in such deals or did not sign a renewal of such deals. It seems that Theophilos III, the current Patriarch of the Orthodox Church in Jerusalem, is no exception to this rule, and that brought the issue of Christian holy sites to the forefront during the year 2017.

a. The Secret Transactions of the Orthodox Church Come Back to the Forefront

On 1/10/2017, the National Conference for the Support of the Arab Orthodox Cause was held at the Jacir Palace Hotel in Bethlehem. The conference declared a religious boycott of Patriarch Theophilos III on the grounds that the Israeli press had revealed new deals⁴¹ signed by Theophilos III with companies owned by settlement societies. Seven church real estate developments were reported during Theophilos III's tenure, among them four in Jerusalem. They are as follows:

1. Deal of St. Elias Monastery (2009): In this transaction, the Church contracted with a real estate development company close to the Israeli left and owned by Shraga Biran, on a land that Irenaios I had contracted with the right-wing Bara company to sell it to it before 2005, in order to start the expansion of East Talpiot settlement and establish the Giv'at Hamatos settlement on it.⁴² The Patriarchate explained that it signed the new agreement so that the Jerusalem municipality would miss the chance to "confiscate the land," by accelerating the conversion of the land's classification and building on it, to impose a new *fait accompli*. It added that, in the new contract, the Patriarchate share of the residential apartments was higher than that in the deal concluded with Irenaios I. It is quite clear that this action does not constitute a cancellation of the Irenaios I deal, but rather an improvement on its terms and a change in the identity of the beneficiary from the Zionist right to the Zionist left; especially since the development is place in the vicinity of settlements. Thus, it will be difficult for the Patriarchate to rent its share of the apartments to its Arab Church members and it will rent it to Israeli settlers and benefit from the revenue thereof.

⁴¹ The church's agreements usually are long term-ones, between 50–90 years, and renewable either by mutual agreement or automatically. Since, due to these agreements, the tenant would have an almost absolute power to deal with the real-estates as if he/she's the owner, the agreements were considered sales contracts.

⁴² A meeting was held on 18/4/2010, between the researcher of this chapter and Mr. Maher Hamdan, the church's attorney, who explained the details of the agreement, considering it the accomplishment of Patriarch Theophilos III of Jerusalem. On 27/10/2017, *Haaretz* quoted a church official that the church has done this to improve its share of apartments.



2. The Giv'at Oranim Deal (2012): On 14/10/2017, *Haaretz* revealed a deal to lease 27 donums (27 thousand m²) for 52 years in the Jewish center of the city, west of Jerusalem. The deal comprises 240 apartments and a commercial complex, for a rent of \$3.3 million⁴³, for the benefit of Kronti Investments Ltd., a company registered in the Caribbean Virgin Islands, a tax haven. The newspaper was unable to obtain information about the identity of the owner.⁴⁴ This deal is also a re-lease of an already leased property; so that this real estate will revert to the Kronti Company for an additional 52 years after the end of the current contract, whose expiry date is not clear.

3. Renewal of the Talbieh Deal (2016): Talbieh deal was the gravest transaction in the history of the Orthodox Church, as to its kind. For according to its terms, it facilitated the use of 570 donums (570 thousand m²) of land, above which government centers in the west of Jerusalem now stand. It is the area over which the decree to consider Jerusalem the Israeli capital was confirmed, after having been issued in 1950. The Knesset and government building and several central government buildings were built on it, in addition to a residential suburb of one thousand people. This deal was concluded in 1950 for a renewable period of 50 years, without providing for automatic renewal, meaning that it would have ended by the year 2000. In anticipation of this, the Israeli government, in 1988, hastened to deposit the rent for the next 50 years in the account of the Church; considering this a renewal of the contract for 50 more years. The Church's lawyers said that the Church's banking accounts were in a state of chaos that does not allow tracking. As each patriarch and every new financial management opens new bank accounts to run their businesses, the Patriarchate became unable to trace all its accounts, and thus did not realize that an amount had been deposited in its accounts until a long time later. The result was that the Israeli government considered the deal renewed, and that the Patriarchate accepted it implicitly without the need to state that in writing.⁴⁵

⁴³ US Dollar.

⁴⁴ *Haaretz*, 14/10/2017, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/1.816980> (in English)

⁴⁵ Details revealed in the mentioned above meeting with the church's attorney.

The dispute over this land continued, and for its part, the Patriarchate considered that the deal had not been renewed. Patriarch Theophilos signed a new contract with a private Israeli company to rent this land. Thus, the land became leased to a private Israeli company, in addition to the claim by the Jewish National Fund that the lease was renewed.⁴⁶ This was the second time that the tactic of re-leasing had been used to cause a dispute, but this does not negate the fact that both the first and second tenants are Israelis.

Following the news about re-leasing these properties to a new beneficiary, the Jewish National Fund raised the issue politically and in the media; considering that the Patriarchate had placed the land and its inhabitants at the mercy of private investors. As a result, right-wing MK Rachel Azaria of the Kulanu bloc signed 40 MKs onto a private members' bill to allow the state to confiscate land that had been sold. The confiscation would take effect from 1/1/2018, and the private investors would be compensated.⁴⁷ At the time of writing, the petition was still on its way to becoming legislation.

4. Ruling on Real Estates at Omar Square: on 31/7/2017, the Jerusalem District Court issued a landmark declaration that upheld a set of real estate deals,⁴⁸ in which the Imperial Hotel, the Petra Hotel and 27 shops in the square that connects Jaffa Gate to the road leading to the Armenian Orthodox Patriarchate to the north were sold. This is the deal, which led to the sacking and demoting of then-patriarch Irenaios, and his imprisonment in the Church. The ruling of that court gave Ateret Cohanim authority over Omar Square properties and supported their claim of the validity of their purchase deal. Patriarch Theophilos III responded by holding a press conference on 12/8/2017 at the Orthodox Patriarchate in Amman, in a symbolic move that constituted the first precedent for the Patriarch to hold a press conference, in which he declared his rejection of this decision that he considered “unfair and baseless”; he announced that he would go

⁴⁶ *Haaretz*, 28/7/2017. (in Hebrew)

⁴⁷ Site of The Times of Israel, 7/9/2017, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/greek-church-land-investors-threatening-to-cancel-leases-kkl-boss-says/>

⁴⁸ The Times of Israel, 1/8/2017, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/court-sides-with-right-wing-jewish-group-in-old-city-church-property-dispute/>



to the Israeli Supreme Court to challenge it.⁴⁹ Although the judicial process is one of the options available to the Patriarchate to try to overturn the Omar Square deal, reliance on the justice of the Israeli Supreme Court remains limited. The political judgment issued by the Court of First Instance in Jerusalem is likely to recur at the level of the Supreme Court, but after a longer period of time.

5. Selling the Lands of the Clock Tower in Jaffa (2013): On 10/7/2017, the Arabs 48 website published an assertion from informed sources that the Orthodox Church had sold the land of the monastery located near the Clock Tower in Jaffa, which has an area of six donums (six thousand m²) in the heart of the Old Jaffa city, for only \$1.5 million, to a private company named Bona Trading, registered in the Caribbean islands of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. The website quoted these developments from a statement by a number of Orthodox bodies in Beit Sahour, and another by the Christian Orthodox Charity Organization in Jaffa.⁵⁰ The Hebrew-language business newspaper Calcalist once again published the details of this deal, specifying the location of the sold real estate days after the issuance of the data.

This deal ignited popular protest against Theophilos III, because it gave the Israelis absolute superiority in their battle to liquidate the Arabic historical center of Jaffa, as part of a larger and more comprehensive war to liquidate the old towns of Haifa, Jaffa, Acre and Nazareth. The same report carried the Church's response to this news, in which it explained that after studying the previous lease of this land, concluded in 1997 under the reign of Patriarch Diodoros I, for an unfair rent, it had decided to re-lease these endowments to a foreign company for the period following the 99 years in which the current tenant contract ends. The aim is to protect the properties from the possibility of claiming the remaining right of the Patriarchate in their ownership, and to address the meager rent provided for in the aforementioned transaction.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Jordan TV live coverage of the Patriarch's press conference can be found on Jordan TV channel, site of YouTube, 12/8/2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QhEi-zdEitI>

⁵⁰ Jaffa: Did the Patriarchy Sell the Monastery Market?, Arabs 48, 10/7/2017, <http://bit.ly/2o17dmu>
The photo of the statement of the Orthodox Society – Jaffa is dated on 2016, however, it seems that there is a mistake in the statement, for the researcher didn't find any media coverage of the event in 2016, whereas all other indicators state that events happened in the same month of 2017.

⁵¹ Ibid.

In the end, the deal meant leasing the property beyond the 99 years that Diodoros had leased at a pre-collected price, 79 years before the contract's entry into force, and for the benefit of an unidentified company located in a tax haven. This means that it is most likely owned by Israeli investors who wish to remain anonymous; the fact that confirms the Israeli ownership of the full benefit of this land for a period that may extend until the year 2196.

6. Sale of Caesarea Lands 2015: A few days after the announcement of the Clock Tower deal in Jaffa, news leaked that the Church was leasing lands in Caesarea. The *Haaretz* newspaper again published the details of this deal on 14/10/2017, shedding light on the fact that, in 2015, the Church sold 430 donums (430 thousand m²) near the historical center of Caesarea for \$1 million,⁵² for the benefit of Senet Ventures inc., which is registered in the Caribbean islands of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. This is the largest land reported to have been sold during the Theophilos III era.

7. The Tiberias Deal: Simultaneously with the announcement of the Caesarea deal, Israeli press revealed another deal signed by Theophilos III to sell 11 donums (11,000 m²) on the shore of Lake Tiberias to Kronty Investments Ltd., the same company that bought the Giv'at Oranim properties.⁵³

b. Patriarch Theophilos and the Legitimacy Battle

Despite the Church's attempt to justify the deals and present them as reformation of old deals, the truth that cannot be overlooked is that these deals arranged the re-lease of six central properties to Israeli or foreign companies located in tax havens, for new periods of time. Some of these were for more than a century, in exchange for pre-collected low prices that the Patriarchate was paid in cash. The Patriarchate's attempt to take advantage of the anonymity of foreign company owners did not last long; as the growing pressure to confiscate the lands from the new buyers prompted them to reveal their identity. Thus, on 22/11/2017, the Times of Israel published a report revealing that the owner of Kronti

⁵² *Haaretz*, 14/10/2017, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/1.816980> (in English)

⁵³ Information on this deal are less than those of other deals, the ownership of Kronti Investments Ltd is mentioned in "Selling Holy Land: Inside the Greek Patriarchate's Jerusalem Property Deals," The Times of Israel, 22/11/2017, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/selling-holy-land-inside-the-greek-patriarchates-jerusalem-property-deals/>



Investments in the Virgin Islands, which bought real estate in Jerusalem and Tiberias, is David Sofer, an Israeli millionaire based in London, and Michael Steinhardt, an American Jewish millionaire based in New York. The two share the ownership of Abu Tor lands, above which the Giv'at Hamatos settlement is being expanded.⁵⁴

These accumulated transactions leave no room for good faith towards Patriarch Theophilos III, especially as he took over the Patriarchate with a pledge to revoke the Omar Square deal, which he has so far failed to do. If Ateret Cohanim was able to administer the Imperial and Petra hotels and the adjacent shops, Theophilos III would have lost legitimacy as Patriarch; because of his failure to fulfill the pledge, on the basis of which he assumed the patriarchate, and at the same time he will be a continuation of the Greek Patriarchs before him, none of whom failed to mastermind such deals during their tenures. Perhaps these combined considerations were the motive behind the Orthodox public movement against him, over five consecutive months and with rising ceilings, calling for his deposition.

On 9/9/2017, an extensive Orthodox public movement against the Patriarch began in Jerusalem with a demonstration called by the Arab follow-up committee.⁵⁵ Then on 16/9/2017, a demonstration was held in Nazareth stressing rejection of the deals and of Theophilos III's appropriation of the Church's decision.⁵⁶ On 1/10/2017, the aforementioned National Conference for the Support of the Arab Orthodox Cause was held in Bethlehem and made the decision to boycott Patriarch Theophilos III.⁵⁷ On 8/10/2017, Haifa witnessed a demonstration carrying the same headlines as that of Nazareth.⁵⁸ On 16/11/2017, a demonstration took place in Lod demanding the removal of Patriarch Theophilos III.⁵⁹ The announcement of Trump's decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel got the Patriarch out of the limelight. But soon on 6/1/2018, he came back to the forefront when eggs and shoes were thrown at his motorcade while he was on his

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Arabs 48, 9/9/2017, <http://bit.ly/2tKef4h>

⁵⁶ Arabs 48, 16/9/2017, <http://bit.ly/2FMBsaE>

⁵⁷ *Alquds*, 3/10/2017.

⁵⁸ Arabs 48, 28/10/2017, <http://bit.ly/2Hvhw9z>

⁵⁹ Arabs 48, 16/11/2017, <http://bit.ly/2pb5ASZ>

way to the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem to participate in the Christmas Mass according to the Eastern Calendar.⁶⁰

Patriarch Theophilus III sensed the danger inherent in this public escalation; especially that he had witnessed what happened to Irenaios I before him, who continues to be imprisoned in the church to protect him from the street. So, he hired Debby Communications Group,⁶¹ a public relations firm owned by Moshe Debby,⁶² who had worked as a spokesperson for the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2000.⁶³ At the end of September 2017, the company opened social media accounts in Arabic for the church, this same church whose clerics do not care to learn Arabic even though they spend their entire lives among Arabs. Simultaneously, and in cooperation with his aides, the Patriarch arranged communications with the Jordanian Royal Court, and with the Office of the Palestinian Presidency, during which he convinced them of his point of view. History tells us that these two parties usually avoid interference in the affairs of the Church and dread the movement of the Orthodox street that rejects its actions. This happened in the Omar Square deal, when they supported Patriarch Irenaios I, before they went back and responded to the popular demand for his dismissal.

A delegation of the Jordanian Ministry of Awqaf, Islamic Affairs and Holy Places visited Patriarch Theophilus in Jerusalem. The participants in this visit were Sheikh ‘Azzam al-Khatib, Director General of Jerusalem Awqaf Department, Sheikh ‘Umar al-Kiswani, Director of *al-Aqsa* Mosque and Sheikh Najeh Bkeirat, head of religious education. This visit was met with widespread public condemnation because it came on 3/10/2017, in a context that undermined the decisions of the National Conference for the Support of the Arab Orthodox Cause that, only two days earlier, had decided on boycotting Theophilus III, prompting the two Sheikhs, al-Kiswani and Bkeirat, to issue explanatory statements, in which they said that the visit was meant to clarify facts about the deals. However, the published commemorative photo of the meeting shows a protocol welcome of the

⁶⁰ Arabs 48, 6/1/2017, <http://bit.ly/2FwUIIt>

⁶¹ *Haaretz*, 27/10/2017, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/1.819264> (in English)

⁶² Official site of Debby Communications, <http://debby.co.il/about-us/>

⁶³ Site of British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), 22/12/2000, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/1082444.stm (in English)



Patriarch not commensurate with an investigation and fact-finding session.⁶⁴ Whatever the clarification was, it turned out that this visit was a necessary step toward King Abdullah II receiving the Patriarch in Amman on 18/10/2017.⁶⁵ Palestinian President Mahmud ‘Abbas and Prime Minister Rami al-Hamdallah had received the Patriarch before that on 15/10/2017.⁶⁶

What the Patriarch has achieved by his actions reflects an image of him being afforded given Palestinian and Jordanian official legitimacy, whereas he was met with rejection from the people of his denomination on both sides of the river; in continuation of the same rift between the Greek elite and the nationalist people of his church. The legitimate question here remains: If the British and Israeli occupation authorities had invested in this rift to achieve their goal of liquidating the Arab Christian presence and laying their hands on the Orthodox Church properties; why haven’t the Jordanian state and the PA done their part in facing up to this rift?

c. The Initiative of Reconstructing the Holy Sepulcher

On 11/4/2016, the Jordanian Royal Court announced an initiative by King Abdullah II to contribute to the planned reconstruction of the “Holy Sepulcher” in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. Patriarch Theophilos III responded directly by sending a message of appreciation for this initiative and announced that the Patriarchate accepts it. The care of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher is shared by six Christian denominations, mainly: the Greek Orthodox, Armenian Apostolic and the Roman Catholic churches, in accordance with the existing status, ratified in Article 57 of the Berlin Treaty of 1878 between the great European Powers and the Ottoman Empire⁶⁷ following the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877–1878. This joint administration by conflicting parties disrupted any agreement on the renovation of the Edicule, which became cracked in the 1940s. So, in 1947, Britain built

⁶⁴ The Media published photos of the meeting, where the Awqaf delegation handled the patriarch a gift.

⁶⁵ *Alghad* newspaper, Amman, 19/10/2017.

⁶⁶ *Alghad*, 16/10/2017.

⁶⁷ The text of the Berlin Treaty was published by *The Maitland Mercury* newspaper on 5/9/1878, site of the National Library of Australia, <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/18830646#>, and Article 57 stated that the right of official protection “conceded to France are expressly reserved, it being well understood that the status quo with respect to the Holy Places shall not be seriously affected in any way...”

reinforced iron protectors around it to relieve the pressure on its walls and prevent them from cracking even more. The three bodies were not able to reach an agreement on renovation until April 2016, in coordination with the National Technical University of Athens, attended by the Jordanian Ambassador there.⁶⁸ Work on renovation began in June 2016; the iron cage was removed from around the tombstone building in February 2017.⁶⁹ The renovation work was completed and the tomb building was inaugurated after renovation on 22/3/2017 in the presence of representatives of the three Christian bodies, Jordan and the PA. It was announced then that the cost of restoration amounted to \$3.5 million, with contributions from the three churches, the King of Jordan, the PA, and a number of benefactors.⁷⁰

Jordan and the PA succeeded in consecrating the Arabism of the Orthodox Christians in Palestine and the role of the national authorities that represent them in the reconstruction of their church, although these authorities represent peoples with a Muslim majority. As for Patriarch Theophilos III, he managed to consecrate his church's attachment to Greece by signing the restoration agreement with a Greek university. Furthermore, his understanding with the Roman Catholics on the reconstruction constituted a breakthrough in relations that reinforced his legitimacy.

d. Attacks on Churches and Monasteries

At the beginning of 2016, Rabbi Benzi Gopstein, head of the extremist Lehava organization renewed the call to burn the churches of occupied Jerusalem, considering the Christian presence in Jerusalem a threat to Jewish purity.⁷¹ This call was followed by an attack on the cemetery of Catholic monastery of Beit Jamal, which is run by the Salesian order, west of Jerusalem, which included the breaking of crosses and attempts to dig graves.⁷² Then on 17/1/2016, offensive words were inscribed on the wall of the Dormition Abbey compound of the Orthodox Church of Jerusalem, on Mount Zion, southwest of Old Jerusalem. "The words 'Christians to

⁶⁸ Site of Jordan News Agency (Petra), 11/4/2016; and *The New York Times* newspaper, 6/4/2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/07/world/middleeast/jerusalem-christians-jesus-tomb.html>

⁶⁹ *Haaretz*, 17/2/2017, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-1.773834> (in English)

⁷⁰ *Al-Hayat al-Jadida* newspaper, Ramallah, 22/3/2017.

⁷¹ Wafa, 3/1/2016.

⁷² PIC, 9/1/2016; and Ynetnews, 10/1/2016, <https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4750637,00.html>



Hell,' 'Death to the heathen Christians the enemies of Israel,' and 'May his name be obliterated,' accompanied by a Star of David, were crudely scrawled in red ink on a wall in the compound."⁷³ Finally, the Israeli authorities continued to build the Separation Wall surrounding the village of Walajah from the side of the Cremisan Monastery, with the aim of completely isolating it from its properties.⁷⁴

e. Decrease in the Number of Arab Christians in Jerusalem

During the decades of Israeli occupation of the city, with its two parts, the emigration of Christians from Palestine occurred at a much quicker pace than that of Muslims, despite their being equal in suffering the plight of seeking asylum, confronting the effects of being uprooted in 1948, direct occupation and restriction of movement and freedom since 1967. The rapid pace of Christian immigration can be explained by two central factors: first, the opening of opportunities for immigration by Western embassies, particularly those of the United States, Canada and Western Europe, and even Latin America; creating a tempting and attractive way out of their misery under occupation, thus causing a continual depletion in their numbers. The second important factor is the deep rift between the Greek elite and the members of the Palestinian Arab Orthodox community, who became virtual victims of a complex occupation; an Israeli occupation that controls geography and deprives them of their freedom; and a religious "occupation" that controls the church and worship in a manner that made staying in Palestine a hopeless undertaking for many Christians. Regaining their freedom is not close, nor is preserving their identity possible.

By the end of 2015, the number of Arab Christians in Jerusalem was 12,420 people,⁷⁵ 3.8% of Arab Jerusalemites; and 1.4% of the population of Jerusalem, in its two parts and including all its inhabitants, Jerusalemites and settlers. This is the

⁷³ *The Jerusalem Post* newspaper, 17/1/2016, <https://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Jerusalem-church-vandalized-with-crude-anti-Christian-slogans-441762>

⁷⁴ For more on the Cremisan Monastery, see Mohsen Mohammad Saleh, *The Palestinian Strategic Report 2014–2015*, pp. 308–309.

⁷⁵ Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research, *Statistical Yearbook of Jerusalem 2017, No. 31*, Jerusalem, 2017, Table III/9, http://www.jerusalemstitute.org.il/upload/yearbook/2017/shnaton_C0917.pdf

And according to the same reference, the number of non-Arab Christians was 3,200, see Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research, *Statistical Yearbook of Jerusalem 2017, No. 31*, Jerusalem, 2017, Table III/10, http://www.jerusalemstitute.org.il/upload/yearbook/2017/shnaton_C0917.pdf
Hence, the total number of Arab and western Christians of Jerusalem is 15,620.

lowest ratio for Christianity in the city since the first centuries of its establishment; moreover, this ratio is constantly eroding. In the long run, the depletion of Eastern Christianity from Jerusalem is a major threat, because it reinforces the claims of the absence of Christianity and serves as a background for Western Christian claims of what they consider the “recapture of Jerusalem,” which were once the basis for launching the Crusades.

Second: Population Under Occupation

1. The Reality of the Demographic Battle

By the end of 2015, the reality of the demographic balance in Jerusalem was as follows:

Table 2/3: Population Balance in Jerusalem by the End of 2015⁷⁶

		Arabs	Jews	Total
The two parts of Jerusalem	Number	323,700	542,000 ⁷⁷	865,700
	%	37.2	63.2	100
Eastern Jerusalem occupied in 1967	Number	320,000	212,000	532,000
	%	60	40	100

The ratio of the Jerusalemites in the city has continued to rise, but at a pace slower than before, reaching 37.2% of the city’s population by the end of 2015, while they still constitute 60% of the population of Jerusalem’s eastern part. Internal migration continues to be the primary source of depletion for the city’s Jewish population. Israeli statistics indicate that 2015 saw the arrival of 10,300 Jewish internal immigrants into the city, and at the same time, the exit of 18,100 of them from the city; making the total of this negative migration 7,800 Jewish

⁷⁶ Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research, *Statistical Yearbook of Jerusalem 2017, No. 31*, Jerusalem, 2017, Table III/1, http://www.jerusalemstitute.org.il/upload/yearbook/2017/shnaton_C0117.pdf; and Maya Choshen and Michal Korach, *Jerusalem: Facts and Trends 2017* (Jerusalem: JIIS, 2017), p. 16.

⁷⁷ This number includes 3,200 non-Arab Christians and 10,100 residents with no religious classification, totaling 13,300, see Maya Choshen and Michal Korach, *Jerusalem: Facts and Trends 2017*, p.16. Most of the residents with no religious classification are fighters of the Lahd Army, which collaborated with the Israeli occupation in south Lebanon, and their families, in addition to non-Jew immigrants. Israeli statistics included them with the Jews since 1998, where they form 1.5% of Jerusalem ‘s population. Therefore, the pure number of Jews in the city is 61.1%.



migrants.⁷⁸ This is a figure that tends to increase; for it was 7,400 in 2014 and 6,700 in 2013.⁷⁹ This demographic shift ensures the constant dilemma that the Israeli authorities have not been able to overcome to this day, namely that the city of Jerusalem is not particularly attractive to Jewish settlers.

Although Israeli sources tend to attribute this the above phenomenon to the difference in lifestyle between the ultra-Orthodox “Haredim” Jews and secular Jews. The Haredim constitute 34% of the city’s settlers, while they make up 9% of the wider population and only 2% of Tel Aviv.⁸⁰ This theoretically increases their expelling impact on the Jewish families that follow a secular lifestyle. Statistics show that the Haredim themselves tend to leave the city at the same rate as secular Jews. Among those who left the city in 2015, about 5,900 people moved to ultra-orthodox localities,⁸¹ meaning that the religious migrants constitute a ratio almost identical to their ratio in the total population.

Perhaps this confirms that the presence of the Arab and Islamic identities and the presence of resistance are the main elements that used to impede the settlements’ ability to attract Jews. Perhaps the following table will clarify this by considering the effect of the period between 2000 and 2006 on the settlements of Gilo, Neve Ya‘akov and East Talpiot:

Table 3/3: Population Development in the Main Settlements East of Jerusalem⁸²

Settlement	1985	1992	2000	2006	2015
Ramot Alon	20,100	38,100	37,900	41,400	45,000
Pisgat Ze’ev	14,800	29,400	36,500	41,900	41,200
Gilo	23,900	30,400	27,600	27,100	30,800
Neve Ya‘akov	–	–	20,300	20,200	21,800
Har Homa	–	–	–	5,700	19,900
Ramat Shlomo	–	–	11,300	14,700	15,100
East Talpiot	11,800	15,200	12,800	12,200	14,400

⁷⁸ Maya Choshen and Michal Korach, *Jerusalem: Facts and Trends 2017*, p. 53.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 22.

In contrast, the period of relative calm in Jerusalem between 2006 and 2015 caused a growth spurt in the settlements of Abu Ghuneim Mount (Har Homa) and Ramot Alon; while Gilo and East Talpiot settlements managed to recover their rate of growth during this same period.

If the last column of Table 3/3 is compared to the population density of Arab centers in East Jerusalem, it becomes clear that they tend to be close in density, unlike the settlements that vary in density, as shown in the following table:

Table 4/3: The 2015 Arab Population in Arab Neighborhoods in East Jerusalem⁸³

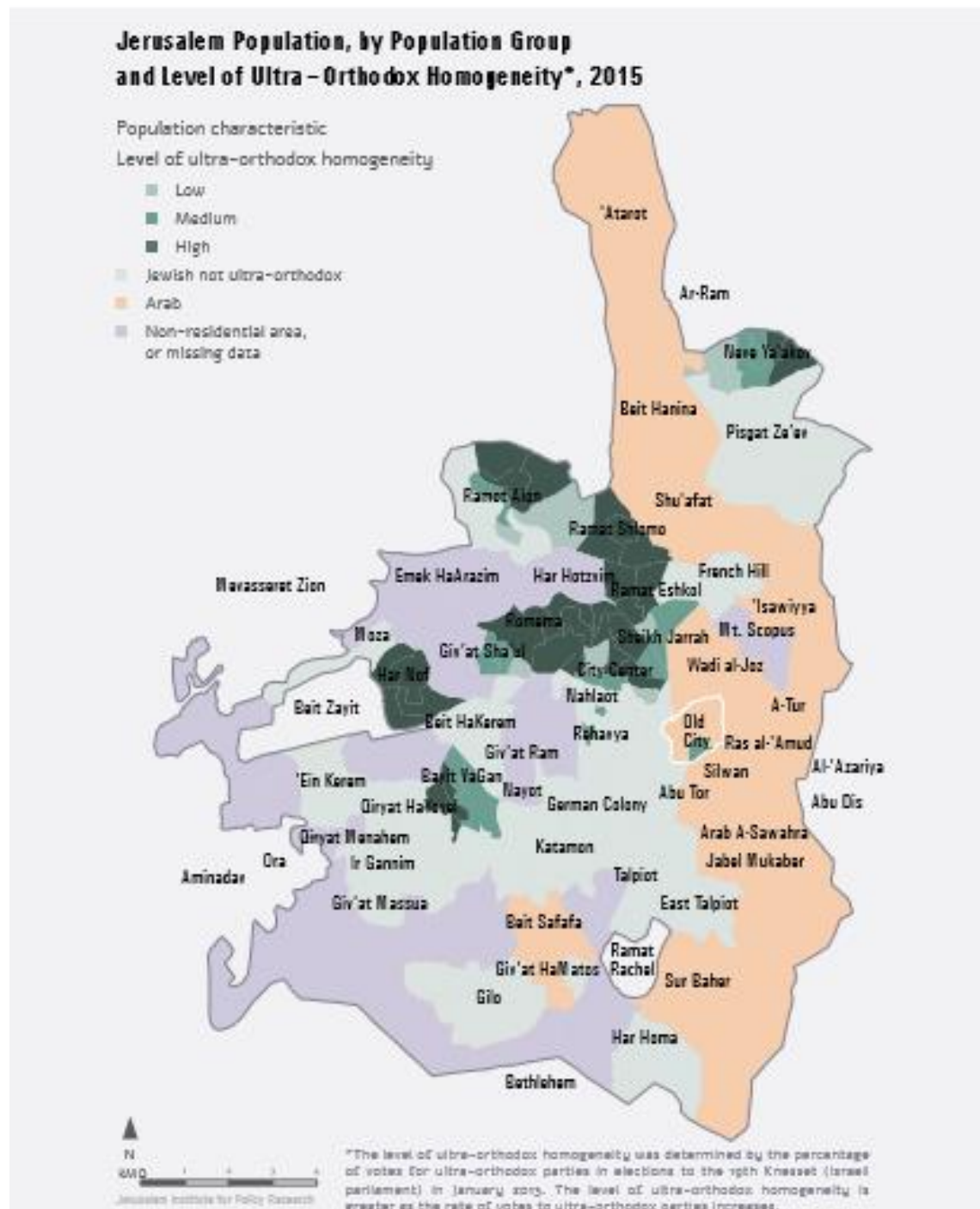
Neighborhoods	Beit Hanina	Muslim Quarter of the Old City	Ras al-‘Amud	Al-Tur	Kafr ‘Akb	Mukabbir Mount
Population	38,100	26,100	25,900	25,400	23,600	22,300

This convergence in the size of Palestinian neighborhoods is an expression of their natural development; while the disparity in the size of settlements reflects its predetermined character as population transfer projects, varying in their ability to attract people and prosper. Another property worth contemplating in Arab neighborhoods is that they form a central cohesive fabric with only two breaks imposed by the settlements. The first is the break of Shu‘fat from Sheikh Jarrah, formed collectively by Hebrew University, the French Hill and Ramat Eshkol. The second is the break by the settlement of Abu Ghuneim Mount (Har Homa) and Giv‘at Hamatos between Sur Baher and Beit Safafa, which allows the Arab neighborhoods to maintain their unified fabric as a cohesive city despite the 50 years of occupation, the attempt to plant settlements between them and around them, and the attempt to stifle their growth and expansion and turn them into an environment expeller of its people. The following map will illustrate this:

⁸³ *Ibid.*



Map 3/3: Jerusalem Population 2015



Source: Maya Choshen & Michal Korach, *Jerusalem Facts & Trends 2017*, (Jerusalem: JIIS, 2017), p. 23.

2. Attempts to Expel the Palestinian Population

a. Evacuation of the Bedouin Communities East Jerusalem

Since 2012, Israel has been seeking to empty the perimeter of the Adumim settlement bloc of Bedouin gatherings. This started with the most remote gatherings in Khan al-Ahmar, then moved to pursuing others in Wadi Abu Hindi and Jabal al-Baba, northeast of al-‘Ayzariyah. The maps issued by the Israeli army in 2012 showed that it was seeking to evacuate 2,300 Bedouins from the Adumim bloc, so that all their gatherings in it would relocate outside the planned route of the Separation Wall around them, keeping only one Arab town within this bloc, the town of al-Zayem. During 2017, evacuation operations focused on Jahalin Bedouins in the area of Jabal al-Baba and the nearby communities. It seems that the displacement of Bedouins was delayed beyond the date announced by the Israeli army. In addition, the work to complete the sections of the Separation Wall around the Adumim bloc was also delayed due to the repeated American objection to it, as it cuts off the geographical contiguity between the north and south of the WB. Israel had completed the Separation Wall’s sections around the town of al-‘Ayzariyah claiming security pretexts. The completion of the Separation Wall around the settlement of Adumim seems likely to be one of the first applications of the Trump decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. If this takes place, it will naturally accelerate the process of displacing the Bedouins of the region.

b. Appropriations of Jerusalemites’ Houses

The years 2014 and 2015, as outlined in the previous strategic report, saw large and unprecedented takeover operations in Silwan neighborhood that included 53 apartments, in addition to the continued confrontation with the Ateret Yerushalayim (formerly known as Ateret Cohanim) Society in the adjacent al-Saraya and al-Khalidiya enclaves. This year, the threat returned to the Old City of Jerusalem, where the Ateret Yerushalayim seized a number of properties, most notably al-Yuzbashi family property in the Sa'adiya neighborhood.



3. Demolition of Houses and Structures

Table 5/3: Demolition of Structures in Jerusalem 2016⁸⁴

Neighborhood	Silwan	Mukabbir Mount	‘Isawiyyah	Beit Hanina	Sur Baher
Number of structures	45	23	18	18	13

Neighborhood	Al-Tur	Al-Sawana	Sheikh Jarrah	Other neighborhoods	Total
Number of structures	10	5	4	24	158

Table 6/3: Demolition of Structures in Jerusalem 2017⁸⁵

Neighborhood	Isawiyyah	Mukabbir Mount	Beit Hanina	Other neighborhoods	Total
Number of structures	27	24	19	21	116

Adding the total number of destroyed structures during these two years to the number of those destroyed in 2000–2015, which is 1,084, the total number demolished in Jerusalem between 2000 and 2017 becomes 1,352 structures, consisting mostly of residential buildings.

4. The Field Situation in Jerusalem

This report has noted that, since 2012, Jerusalem has been in a constant state of strife, but this flare-up was isolated and ended at its borders. 2012 alone witnessed 78 confrontations, six knife stabbings and 21 other incidents.⁸⁶ The year 2013 saw continuous flare-ups, which interacted with the intrusions into *al-Aqsa* Mosque and its siege and with the strikes by the prisoners in Israeli prisons. As for 2014, it saw the launch of the “Ramadan uprising” after the burning of the boy Muhammad Abu Khudeir on 4/7/2014. This uprising soon spread to the GS front in a brutal war that lasted 52 days and witnessed the launch of individual

⁸⁴ The 2016 statistics include all demolished structures, including trade and agricultural ones, see Wadi Hilweh Information Center—Silwan (silwanic.net), <http://www.silwanic.net/index.php/article/news/76755/ar> (in Arabic)

⁸⁵ The 2017 statistics include all demolished structures, including trade and agricultural ones, see Wadi Hilweh Information Center—Silwan (silwanic.net), 1/1/2017, <http://www.silwanic.net/index.php/article/news/77233/ar> (in Arabic)

⁸⁶ Mohsen Moh’d Saleh (ed.), *The Palestinian Strategic Report 2012–2013* (Beirut: Al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies and Consultations, 2015), p. 287.

resistance operations, such as that carried out by ‘Abdul Rahman Shaloudi on 22/10/2014 when he rammed his car into a crowd of Israelis. On 29/10/2014, Mu‘taz Hijazi attempted to assassinate Yehuda Glick, and on 5/11/2014 Ibrahim ‘Akkari carried out another ramming incident, while ‘Uday and Ghassan Abu Jamal carried out a shooting incident on 18/11/2014. Up to the launch of the Jerusalem uprising through individual stabbing operations that came against the backdrop of trying to impose the temporal division of *al-Aqsa* Mosque and began by Muhannad al-Halabi on 3/10/2015, followed by a series of operations.

In 2016–2017, the pattern continued: Jerusalem was the center of popular resistance, while its surroundings showed little response, except for two periods: during the Lion’s Gate uprising 14–27/7/2017, and the capital’s uprising that followed the US recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, on 6/12/2017. Counting the operations during these two years brings to light the following:

Table 7/3: Outcomes of Resistance Operations in Jerusalem Between 1/1/2016 and 30/9/2017⁸⁷

Category	Number	Category	Number
Stabbing	24	Attacks with Palestinian dead casualties	17
Shooting	12	Palestinian dead	33
Arson and Molotov cocktails	13	Palestinian injured	554
Car-ramming attack	5	Israeli dead	10
Pipe Bombs	6	Israeli injured	100

Perhaps the most prominent field development during this period was the Lion’s Gate uprising that came in response to Israeli installation of electronic gates at the doors of *al-Aqsa* Mosque. The public refused to enter the mosque under these conditions; they gathered and garrisoned themselves at its doors until their total, during the last days of the uprising, reached 35 thousands, and was likely to increase further. This forced the Israeli authorities to seek an exit before the next

⁸⁷ We thank the researcher Kamal al-Ja‘bari for his patient and meticulous work on the documentation of this table and the tables of settlement building in Jerusalem and the West Bank, in addition to his valuable revision of news and daily events mentioned in this chapter.



Friday came, which was likely to witness an explosion that would make it difficult to control events afterwards.

In addition to massive crowds, the first Friday of the uprising witnessed a solo attack carried out by the now-prisoner ‘Umar al-‘Abd from Kobar village, north of Ramallah. He planned and executed his own incursion into the Halamish Settlement, entered one of its houses and stabbed three members of the Salomon family, killing three of them. The uprising also witnessed a mass Arab and Islamic movement whose main centers were Amman and Istanbul. Even the Jordanian capital Amman witnessed an individual operation, similar in type and execution, carried out by a Jordanian boy named Muhammad Jawawdeh, who tried to stab an Israeli officer from the Israeli embassy in Amman, before he was killed. This incident reinforced the predicament of the Jordanian government as a direct party in this uprising, but a party who is unwilling to strain relations with Israel or incur a political price.

The comprehensive Israeli retreat over *al-Aqsa* required an equation based on three elements: Effective mass movement at home, painful individual operations, and an foreign supporter, present and interactive. This equation lasted 14 days, during which eight Palestinians were killed. It led later to a comprehensive Israeli retreat without restriction or condition. Perhaps the single most important development in the field for a decade was reaching this equation, which potentially serves as a basis for building towards further achievements, if it finds a political vision to adopt it.

Third: Judaization and Settlement in Jerusalem

1. Continued Expansion Based on the Demographic Function of Settlements

Since 1967, the construction of settlements in Jerusalem has been carried out mainly for the realization of geopolitical functions. As a result, those who studied settlement in Jerusalem have classified these settlements into three rings; the settlements that strengthen the Jewish presence in the city center were classified as the first ring. Those that cut off communication between Arab neighborhoods in Jerusalem were classified as the second ring, while

those that cut the continuity of Jerusalem with the surrounding cities were classified as the third ring. However, this settlement building strategy has failed to attract residents. And with the increasing worry about demographic control of Jerusalem, the Jerusalem settlements began to expand on the basis of achieving the demographic goals; anyone studying this matter can perceive this shift starting in 2010.

The settlements closest to the Jewish center of the city, west of Jerusalem, have proven to possess a strong ability to attract Jewish settlers, as they are directly connected to the Jewish center of the city, and most of the time its residents are not forced to pass through the Arab neighborhoods to reach their workplace west of Jerusalem. Based on this diagnosis, the Israeli authorities began focusing on expanding two main population segments: the first in the northern part of the city consists of the settlements of Ramot Alon, Ramot Shlomo and Ramot Eshkol. These settlements have been expanding towards each other to form a mass known as Ramot. This segment received 28% of the declared expansion operations in Jerusalem during 2016–2017. The second segment is in southern Jerusalem and composed of the settlements of Gilo, Har Homa and Giv'at Hamatos. This segment received 40% of that expansion.

Table 8/3: Approved Residential Units in Various Parts of Jerusalem 2016–2017

Units	Number*	Percentage (%)	Expected Capacity**
Approved units in the southern part	11,298	40	36,154
Approved units in the northern part	7,822	28	25,030
Approved units in in the rest of Jerusalem settlements	9,014	32	28,845
Total	28,134	100	90,029

Note: Figures are based on Table 9/3.

* These statistics reflect approved plans, posted tenders, and issued permits of residential units, hence, overlapping may occur, and their accumulative calculation needs revision.

** The expected capacity is based on the average size of Jewish households in Jerusalem in 2011, which was 3.4 persons, see Maya Chochen and others, *Jerusalem: Facts and Trends 2013* (Jerusalem: JIIS, 2013), p. 26, [http://en.jerusalemstitute.org.il/upload/facts-2013-eng%20\(1\).pdf](http://en.jerusalemstitute.org.il/upload/facts-2013-eng%20(1).pdf)



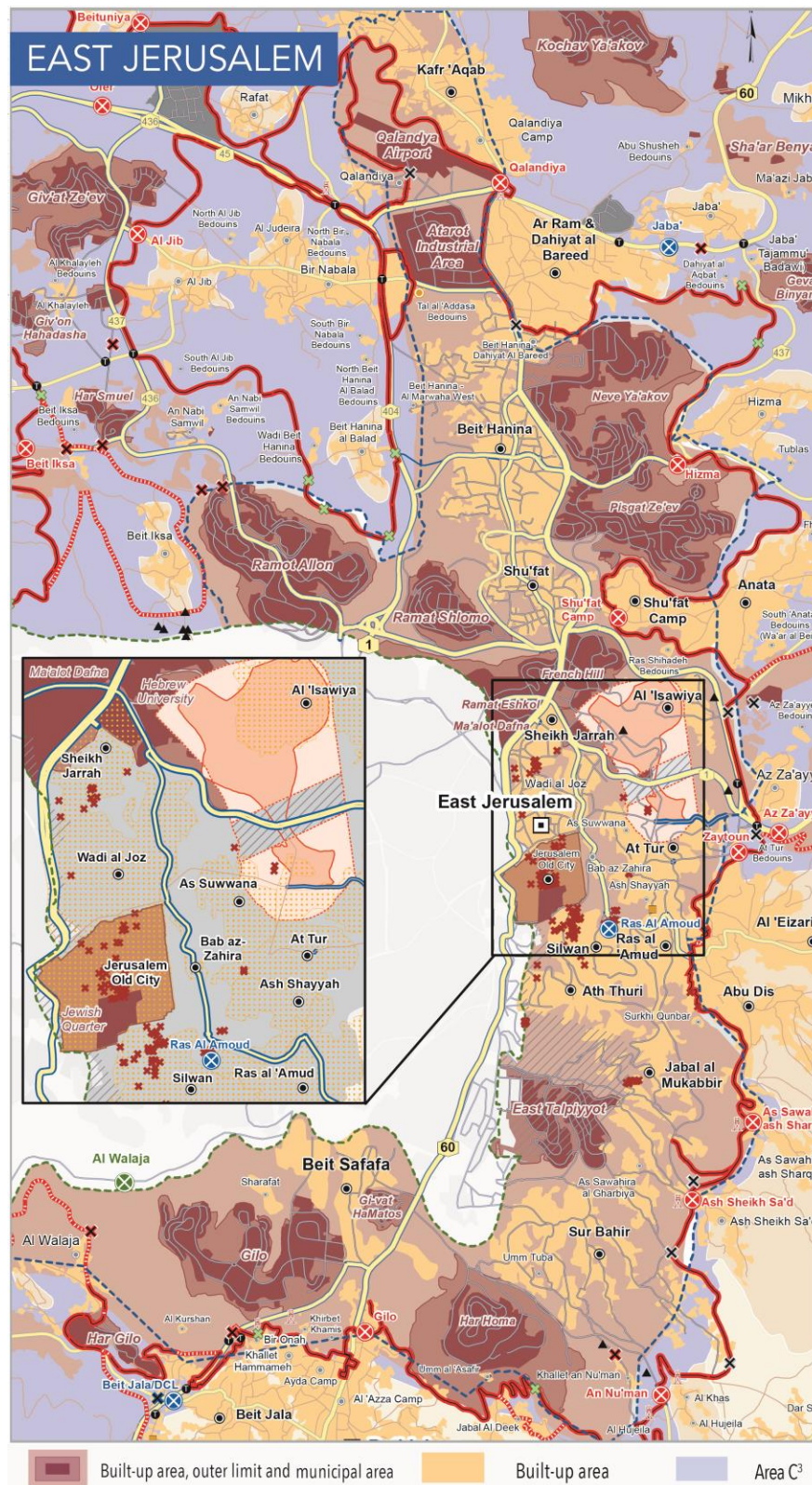
Table 9/3: Approved Residential Units in the Settlements of Jerusalem 2016–2017⁸⁸

Location	Settlement	2016		2017		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	2,494	12,432	572	15,702	28,134
	Ramot	3,956		800		
	Beit Hanina			67		
	Givat HaMatos	2,330		1,600		
	Harhoma	7		252		
	Talpiot	279				
	Ras al-‘Amud			27		
	Ma‘ale Adumim	1,137		1,905		
	Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood	12				
	Gilo	770		6,339		
	Pisgat Ze‘ev	1,041		2,066		
	Neve Yaakov	114		624		
	Mukabbir Mount	18		7		
	Beit Safafa			4		
	Giv‘at Ze‘ev	209		832		
	Ma‘ale David			17		
	Ma‘ale Mikhmas	41		75		
	Kfar Adumim			323		
	Shmuel HaNavi	2		2		
	Nof Zion			176		
	Giv‘at HaHadasha	22				
	Wadi al-Joz			14		

⁸⁸ This table is based on the numbers mentioned in POICA’s daily and monthly reports, <http://poica.org/category/reports> (in Arabic)

It was reviewed while comparing it to the numbers issued by: Colonization and Wall Resistance Commission, *Taqrir Mulakhkhas li al-Intihakat al-Sanawiyyah 2016* (Concise Report on Annual Violations 2016) (Ramallah: Palestine Liberation Organization – Colonization and Wall Resistance Commission, 2016), <http://www.cwrc.ps/file/files/33.pdf>; and Colonization and Wall Resistance Commission, “The Most Prominent Israeli Violations in the Occupied Palestinian Land: Until the First Half of 2017,” July 2017, <http://www.cwrc.ps/file/files/87.pdf> (in Arabic)

Map 4/3: Israeli Settlement Building in East Jerusalem With A Zoom on the Old City



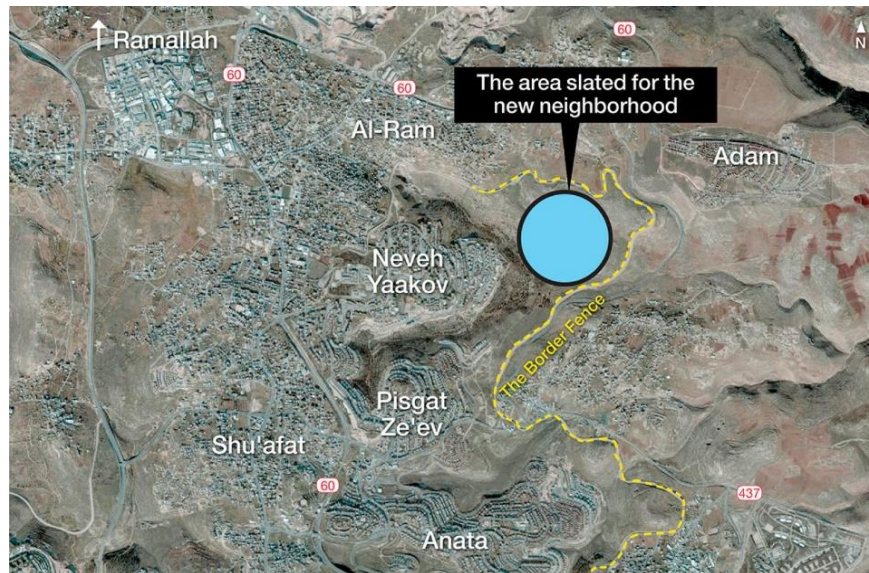
Source: https://www.ochaopt.org/sites/default/files/westbank_2017_draft_6_march_2017.pdf



2. The Plan to Isolate Jerusalem From Ramallah

During 2016–2017, a new trend emerged of reading the figures declared by the Israeli government to strengthen the connection between the settlements of Pisgat Ze'ev and Neve Ya'akov by adding 3,107 housing units, and to expand the settlement of Neve Ya'akov toward the east by adding 738 housing units. This expansion paves the way to connecting it to the Geva Binyamin settlement on the other side of the Separation Wall. Although the Separation Wall that divides the two settlements has been built, the trend here is to attempt to establish a cross partition that prevents the expansion of al-Ram and Dahiyat al-Barid. Perhaps later, the Israeli authorities would demolish this section of the Separation Wall and re-expand it.

Map 5/3: The Settlement of Neve Ya'akov Expansion Map



3. Infrastructure that Enhances the Jewish Character of the City

In 2016–2017, new infrastructure projects continued the quest to give a modern identity to Jerusalem, with Israel hoping it would become a source of attraction for Jewish settlers. Previous experience had shown that Jerusalem, in its historical and heritage form, did not constitute a magnet for them. Proceeding from that, work was oriented toward promoting the commercial character of the city by linking the East Jerusalem settlements to the center in the west; and linking these settlements, one to the other, through a modern transportation network, in a way that prepared it to become the central fabric of the city in the future. In this context, this period witnessed the following developments in infrastructure:

- a. Extending the first built track of Jerusalem Light Rail to the French Hill in order to connect it to the west of Jerusalem, despite the fact that this track was subject to successive disruptions due to protestors throwing stones at it and exposing it to attacks with various instruments when passing the Shu'fat Station, carried out in the context of the Jerusalemites' popular resistance. In March 2016 alone, and because of this resistance, the Jerusalem Light Rail had to make changes in its schedule 13 times.
- b. Construction of the second track of the Jerusalem Light Rail: This track seeks to reinforce the demographic functions of the settlements. Its route is simple and limited. It is restricted to connecting the northern population segment (Ramat segment) to the southern population segment (Gilo segment), through the Jewish commercial center west of Jerusalem. It is clear that this train seeks to enhance the quality of life and the ability to connect these two population segments to the Jewish center in the west of the city.

Map 6/3: Second Track of the Jerusalem Light Rail

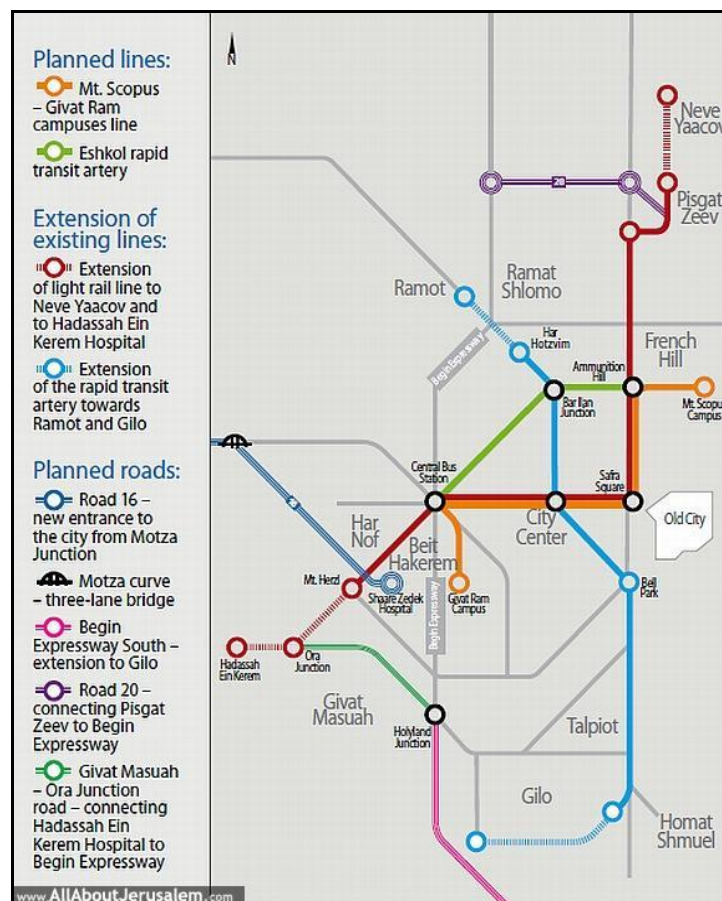


Source: <http://poica.org/2016/02/new-20-km-length-pathisraeli-authorities-approves-the-new-route-of-the-jerusalem-light-rail/>



- c. Development of Road 21 (Begin Highway): It is a highway that seeks to strengthen the connection between the southern sector of Jerusalem settlements and its Jewish center to the west. In its path, it separates the towns of Beit Safafa and Sharfat from each other.
- d. Jerusalem–Tel Aviv Tunnel: The tunnel starts from the commercial center of the west of Jerusalem until the beginning of the highway leading to Tel Aviv in the southwest. This road constitutes one of the vital gambles of the Israeli government to try to stop the phenomenon of internal migration of Jews from Jerusalem. Statistics indicate that more than half of the immigrants who leave Jerusalem head to the purely Jewish center of Israel, which is Tel Aviv and its surroundings. By strengthening the link between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, the government wants the Jerusalem settlers to feel close to Tel Aviv, able to reach it with great ease, thus ending their need to immigrate to it and live in it.

Map 7/3: The Development of Transport Network Until 2025



Source: <http://poica.org/2016/02/new-20-km-length-pathisraeli-authorities-approves-the-new-route-of-the-jerusalem-light-rail/>

Fourth: Political Developments Concerning Jerusalem

Since the conflict began in 1917, Jerusalem had never been at the forefront of political events as it was in 2017. If the year 2015 has seen the understandings of US Secretary of State John Kerry to try to get Israel out of its crisis after the launch of the Jerusalem Uprising, 2017 witnessed the public uprising at Lion's Gate and the US recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. It also saw the proposal to amend the political boundaries of Jerusalem and the annexation of more WB lands, which is the project that overshadowed the developments during the first days of 2018.

1. The Implications of Kerry's Understandings

Kerry's understandings of 24/10/2015 had initiated a phase in trying to tame the Jordanian role in Jerusalem, to reduce it to being a mere manager of the holy sites on behalf of the Israeli authorities. This track led to the Jordanian attempt to install a network of cameras in *al-Aqsa* Mosque before the Jordanian government retreated and abandoned the idea. The Lion's Gate uprising, as well as the pressure exerted by the Jerusalem and Jordanian public forced Jordan to go to the option of protecting *al-Aqsa's* role and existence. This introduction is necessary to understand what is beyond it, because it shows that the transition to the following confrontations was a popular choice, contrary to official direction. It was an option of necessity, which had no prior preparation; it rather came while preparation to do the opposite was in the making. Jordan had signed the Two Seas Canal Agreement (the Red Sea-Dead Sea Conduit) and the Gas Agreement and was exploring the idea of a free trade area with Israel, and the idea of the Haifa highway to bolster Jordan's dependence on this port after the closure of the overland road with Syria. The Jordanians desired greater rapprochement with Israel, as the only constant in a region that had witnessed major turmoil during the preceding seven years. But this political approach overlooked the tendency of the issue of Jerusalem to explode in to life, and its centrality to the conflict. It also neglected the challenge posed by the escalating statements of displacement from the Israeli right. It is clear that Jordan did not have any answer on how to reconcile the two directions.



2. The Lion's Gate Uprising

On 14/7/2017, in one of the worst attacks in the Jerusalem uprising, three 1948 Palestinians from the city of Umm al-Fahm carried out an operation at Lion's Gate that resulted in the killing of two Israeli soldiers stationed at the gate and the death of the perpetrators. Israeli authorities decided to close the mosque completely, impose their direct security management on *al-Aqsa* Mosque, and reduce the role of the Ministry of Awqaf, Islamic Affairs and Holy Places significantly. Thus, they installed electronic gates on the doors of *al-Aqsa* Mosque and took control of the keys to the rooms and offices that were used by the Administration of Jerusalem's Awqaf. These measures were met, over a period of two weeks, with protests by the Palestinian masses and their Muslim scholar leaders, until they managed to force the Israeli authorities to back down from all those measures on 27/7/2017. They also reopened al-Mat-hara Gate on 30/7/2017. (Please check details and indications in Chapter 4 of this *Palestine Strategic Report 2016–2017*, entitled “The Courses of Aggression, Resistance and the Peace Process 2016–2017”)

In the following months, the Israeli authorities focused on trying to empty this victory of its meaning and to impose new procedures at *al-Aqsa* Mosque to say that what was realized at Lion's Gate could change. Although these procedures continued to be focused on what was going on previously, namely harassing worshipers and intervening in the administration; its continuation meant that, during the next two years, the scene is likely to witness a repeat of the confrontation over the mosque's identity.

3. US Recognition of Jerusalem as the Capital of Israel

On 6/12/2017, the US President Donald Trump announced his decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and to begin taking executive measures in preparation of moving the US Embassy to Jerusalem. This decision came in response to an electoral promise that Trump had made when in his campaign. He tried to fulfill this promise months after taking office, but backed down. And although all former US presidents have pledged to relocate the US Embassy to Jerusalem since the passage of the Jerusalem Embassy Act of 1995 in the US Congress, Trump's case had a peculiarity: He relied on fanatic evangelical voters,

wanted to regain the support of that faction in the face of the prospect of his impeachment, which appeared to be looming, through various investigations and ad campaigns at the end of 2017. This peculiarity should not take attention away from the fact that the idea of recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and the transfer of the embassy to it was the subject of agreement in Congress and a permanent subject on the agenda of the executive authority. But the dispute was limited to timing and feasibility, and the interests deriving from this decision.

This decision came on the centenary of the British occupation of Jerusalem to emphasize that the conflict over the identity of the city is still open to the same possibilities as on 9/12/1917, and that direct British colonization followed by the west-backed Israeli occupation could not reach a final settlement on the identity of the city. Steadfastness was the weapon of Jerusalemites in preserving its identity and sanctities despite the encroachment of settlement and Judaization. The US decision declared that the west was directly involved in the conflict over the city; perhaps it can now resolve what has not been resolved for over 100 years.

The most important implications of this resolution can be read in three basic directions:

First: It constitutes a mandate for Israel outside the framework of the United Nations (UN) to use greater force and to impose a faster pace of Judaization and settlement without fear of international condemnation. This means that the Israeli authorities will take this decision into force as they focus their attention on *al-Aqsa* Mosque and its surroundings, on Silwan, on achieving a Jewish majority, and on finishing the building of the Separation Wall around Jerusalem. In other words, this decision will open the door to new field confrontations in Jerusalem, which will become, over the coming years, the fiery center of the conflict with Israel.

Second: The American confidence that this decision will be a locomotive that pulls behind it the rest of the world. In the first stage, it was unable to do so, for the resolution was rejected unanimously in the UN Security Council and with an overwhelming majority in the UN General Assembly. Actually, only Guatemala



followed the US lead. From this perspective, this decision opened the door to the imposition of international isolation on the US and Israel. But what prevented its effective realization was the flaccidity of the Arab political system and its desire to renew the American umbrella that protects Arab leaders, despite the availability of an international motive to isolate or weaken the US, in particular on the part of Russia and China.

Third: America's hope for a limited and temporary Arab and Islamic reaction that can be overcome, after which relations would be resumed as if nothing had happened. In fact, the popular reaction was widespread and extensive in a way that confirmed previous concerns about making such a decision. Perhaps this response is what prompted the US to leak recordings of Arab officials that confirmed their approval of Trump's decision, in an attempt to export the crisis to the interior of the Arab and Muslim world and avoid the continuation of popular action against it. However, this still does not negate the fact that relying on a temporary reaction that will subside in time is still a possibility. This is what poses a vital challenge to Arab and Islamic popular movements to sustain their momentum and turn them into permanent positions.

4. The Plan to Alter the Borders of Jerusalem

Ever since the path of the Separation Wall around Jerusalem was drawn up in 2002, it has become clear that the Israeli authorities aspire to change the city's boundaries on demographic grounds to get three neighborhoods out of Jerusalem. These are Kafr 'Aqab, Shu'fat Refugee Camp and New 'Anata. And to admit to it three settlement blocs: Giv'on Bloc to the north, Ma'ale Adumim bloc to the east, and the western part of the Etzion bloc to the south. Over the past 15 years, the construction of the Separation Wall did away with two of these directions, the north and the south, but stumbled on the eastern direction due to objections made by American Democratic administrations to the route of the Separation Wall in the east of Jerusalem. The wall disrupts the geographical contiguity between northern and southern WB, ending the chance to establish a Palestinian state, and thus ending the ability to drag the Palestinians into American-brokered negotiations.

The end of the northern and southern sections of the Separation Wall, with minor exceptions, was followed by the idea of altering the Israeli borders of Jerusalem to coincide with the course of the Separation Wall, encouraged by the fact that the postponement led to Israel pushing the largest number of Jerusalemites towards the three neighborhoods that would be separated from Jerusalem, due to the persistent Israeli leniency toward unauthorized construction within them. This would drive out of them the largest portion of the population when the separation takes place. Political talk began at the level of Mayor Nir Barakat on the amendment of the borders of Jerusalem in 2014; it became the subject of government discussion during 2016, ending with the passing of the law of unified Jerusalem by the Knesset on 2/1/2018, which paved the way to adding new areas to Jerusalem and banning withdrawing from it except with two thirds of the vote.⁸⁹

As the discussion of amending the borders of Jerusalem comes in the context of US recognition of the city as the capital of Israel, and since the determination of the city's area is considered an act of sovereignty, the Israeli government may see this opportunity favorable for completing the Separation Wall eastward around the Adumim bloc and for annexing it to Jerusalem as part of the decision to amend the borders. This would be done regardless of its impact on the two-state solution resolution, in order to impose a *fait accompli* that subsequent American administrations will be compelled to accept.

The proposed amendment of the borders is expected to exclude 51 thousand Jerusalemites⁹⁰; while withdrawing their blue residency cards will become a source of contention and confrontation during the coming years. This amendment will also admit a large number of Jewish settlers to the city, possibly exceeding 121 thousand in number,⁹¹ if the three blocs are annexed. This would reduce the proportion of Arabs in the city to about 31%.

⁸⁹ Aljazeera.net, 2/1/2018, <http://bit.ly/2Dn6UqX> (in Arabic)

⁹⁰ Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research, *Statistical Yearbook of Jerusalem 2017*, Table III/8, http://www.jerusalemstitute.org.il/upload/yearbook/2017/shnaton_C0817.pdf

⁹¹ Number of Settlers based on what is published by B'Tselem—The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, <https://www.btselem.org/settlements/statistics>



Fifth: Israeli Settlement Expansion in WB

The vision of settlement in the WB crystallized in several stages. It focused initially on the path taken by the Israeli Foreign Minister Yigal Allon in the peace plan he proposed in July 1967, which identified Israel's vital interests in the Jordan Valley with a corridor that reaches Jerusalem and cuts the WB into two parts, north and south. During the tenures of the Labor Party governments, most of the settlement development was concentrated on these two directions. As this vision evolved, it aspired to biting the edges of the WB periphery bordering the Green Line, in particular in the northern region. The second important addition came from Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, who established the settlements around Nablus and Hebron on the basis of encircling these dense population centers, focusing on preventing Palestinian governorates from connecting with one another and controlling vital roads and water resources.

Based on these general trends, whoever studies the settlement map in the WB finds it concentrated in four basic directions:

1. The Jordan Valley: These settlements have a geopolitical task that seeks to deepen the vital geographic range of the state. This is expressed by Israeli politicians' use of the term "defensible borders," considering that the Jordan River is the intended border. These settlements have seen little population activity over the past two years.

2. Jerusalem's Settlements: Already discussed above.

3. The Settlements adjacent to the Green Line: They consist of three pockets and two fingers or enclaves; they are from north to south as follows:

- a. Shaked finger, north of Ya'bad: The Separation Wall isolated the settlements of this enclave from the rest of the WB, keeping with it one Palestinian village, Barta'a al-Sharqiya. This enclave has not undergone any development over the past six years.
- b. Qedumim finger: It starts from the south of Qalqiliya and penetrates deeply to encircle it from the northeast side and separate it from Nablus.

- c. Ariel finger: It separates the town of Salfit from the southwestern countryside of Nablus. It is larger and denser than the Qedumim finger.
- d. Modi'in Illit finger: It is parallel to the western countryside of Ramallah and swallows the entire no man's land that existed between the WB and the 1948 occupied territories. Israeli authorities treat it organizationally and demographically as part of the territories occupied in 1948, although without declaring its annexation of it. It is the most densely populated settlement pocket, after Jerusalem's settlements.
- e. The Etzion pocket: The Etzion bloc is basically divided into two centers, eastern and western. Its deep eastern center is located midway between Bethlehem and Hebron; it is limited in population and in growth. The western center, which is parallel to the Green Line, represents an attempt to expand Jerusalem from the southern direction. This expansion should be read from the point of view of understanding settlement in Jerusalem in particular.

4. The Settlements Established Deep Inside WB: These are concentrated mainly around two cities, Hebron and Nablus. Despite the religious drive of Hebron settlements, the settlement bloc in East Hebron has remained limited in growth and population, despite greater security buildup in its surroundings. However, it performs a vital task, which is to strangle the historic center of Hebron. Apart from that, the settlements of Nablus and Hebron are scattered in the four directions surrounding each city, trying to disrupt the contiguity of each with its surrounding countryside and to prevent it from playing the role of the regional center, on which these dense populations rely. The settlements deep inside WB have played an important role in the armed assault on surrounding villages, reinforcing the rural-to-city migration promoted by the Oslo Accords. Life in the countryside has become of little economic benefit as well as dangerous. Over time, it enabled these settlements to become rural centers capable of expanding into an area, which is slowly being emptied of its indigenous inhabitants.



Source: https://www.ochaopt.org/sites/default/files/westbank_2017_draft_6_march_2017.pdf



1. Northern WB

Over the past two reports covering the period 2012–2015, Salfit ranked second in terms of the number of settlement units, next to Jerusalem, followed by Bethlehem and Qalqiliya. However, the most important development during the period covered by this report is that Ramallah was the focal point for approving new settlement units; for its share reached approximately 11 thousand settlement units in 2016–2017. Notably, this expansion was not concentrated in Modi'in Illit alone; it also included doubling the size of the Kokhav Ya'akov settlement and expanding Beit El. These two alone have gained 4,836 settlement units during 2016. If we add to this trend the eastern expansion of Neve Ya'akov settlement in Jerusalem, the reinforcement of its connection with Pisgat Ze'ev, and the expansion of the Ma'ale Adumim bloc east of Jerusalem, we can conclude that the Israeli government sees in Trump's election an opportunity to achieve the geographical connection between the settlements of the two blocs of the Jordan Valley and Jerusalem, which is the remaining part of Allon's plan yet to be implemented. The number of approved settlement units in this direction reached 9,754 housing units during 2017 alone, constituting 35% of the total housing units approved that year.

If this trend continues over the next two years (2018–2019), the next challenge facing the Palestinian people, on the level of the battle over geography, will be the separation of the northern WB from its south, a complete geo-political separation. In a way that the territories occupied in 1967 will consist of three geographical blocs, which are GS, the northern WB bloc with Ramallah as its center, and the southern WB bloc with Hebron as its center; with Jerusalem and the Jordan Valley being blocs that Israel wants to annex in full. The only chance available to thwart this endeavor is to bolster the Palestinian presence in Jerusalem so that the achievement of this separation becomes unsustainable, and the opportunity for communication between the north and south of the WB is maintained.

After Ramallah comes Salfit with 1,603 housing units; most of them concentrated in Ariel, which is in the forefront of the settlement enclave that bears its name. During the past six years, it has expanded by about two thousand settlement units. Qalqiliya comes next; the addition in it was concentrated in the



settlements of Alfe Menashe, Karnei Shomron and Nofim. In other words, settlement activity in the direction of East Ramallah and Jerusalem was the most active, followed by the Modi'in pocket, then the Ariel finger, and finally the finger of Qedumim. As for the Shaked's pocket, it was idle during the reporting period.

Table 10/3: Approved Residential Units in the Settlements of Northern WB 2016–2017⁹²

Location	Settlement	2016		2017		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	
Salfit	Etz Efraim	34	563	92	1,040	1,603
	Elkana	324				
	Rechalim	31				
	Revava	17		68		
	Ariel	157		880		
Ramallah	Kokhav Ya'akov		5,193	3,860	5,806	10,999
	Modi'in	4,416		100		
	Shilo	98		98		
	Ofarim	209				
	Nirya	98				
	Talmon	50		353		
	Ofra			60		
	Matityahu			2		
	Kokhav HaShahar	292				
	Migron			86		
	Halamish			56		
	Beit El			976		

⁹² This table is based on the numbers mentioned in POICA's daily and monthly reports. It was reviewed while comparing it to the numbers issued by: Colonization and Wall Resistance Commission, *Taqrir Mulakhkhas li al-Intihakat al-Sanawiyyah 2016*; and Colonization and Wall Resistance Commission, "The Most Prominent Israeli Violations in the Occupied Palestinian Land: Until the First Half of 2017." (in Arabic)

	Amona			42		
	Beit Aryeh	30		164		
	Psagot			9		
Nablus	Rehalim	97	566	106	598	1,164
	Kfar Tapuach			13		
	Amichai			102		
	Elon Moreh			60		
	Alei Zahav	317		317		
	Har Brakha	54				
	Shilo	98				
Tubas & the Rift Valley	Rotem	164	242		13	255
	Shadmot Mehola			3		
	Hamdat	78				
	Nuway'im ah			1		
	Yafit			9		
Tulkarem	Tzofim	42	42	260	273	315
	Enav			13		
Qalqiliya	Oranit	14	92	365	1,030	1,112
	Shavei Shomron			69		
	Alfe Menashe	24		314		
	Nofim	48		228		
	Sha'arei Tikva	6		2		
	Karnei Shomron			52		



Source: https://www.ochaopt.org/sites/default/files/westbank_2017_draft_6_march_2017.pdf



2. Southern WB

The Etzion bloc in Bethlehem is divided into two directions: a western direction parallel to the Green Line, with Beitar Illit settlement as its center; and a much smaller eastern direction, with the Tko'a settlement as its center. Settlement development in 2016–2017 focused on the western center of the Etzion bloc, which grew by 2,941 housing units; while its eastern center grew by 549 settlement units.

Although the Etzion bloc is located in the Bethlehem Governorate, the settlement development in it is read in connection with the battle over the population majority in Jerusalem. This is because the Etzion bloc and the Giv'on bloc to the north constitute two settlement reservoirs that the Israeli government will seek to annex to Jerusalem in the upcoming amendment of its borders. Its aim is to achieve two main goals: first, expanding the limited geo-political depth of the Jewish center of Jerusalem west of the city, and the second is achieving demographic majority, regarding which the settlement of Beitar Illit constitutes the best bet, having the same specifications as Modi'in Illit in Ramallah, being open to a population depth inside the Green Line adjacent to it.

In Hebron, settlement expansion over two years totaled 806 settlement units, of which 254 units are in the Beit Yatir settlement to the southeast of the town of al-Samu'. It is the center of a small settlement enclave that bites through a part of the WB and attaches it to the Green Line through the Separation Wall, along the lines of Modi'in Illit and West Etzion. Perhaps the most important recent development in terms of type is the addition of 163 settlement units to the settlement of Shuhada Street in the heart of Hebron, within the area classified H2 according to the Hebron agreement, which placed it under total Israeli control, even though it is surrounded by a dense Palestinian population.



Table 11/3: Approved Residential Units in the Settlements of Jerusalem 2016–2017⁹³

Location	Settlement	2016		2017		Total
		No. of approved or proposed units for construction	Total no. of Residential Units in the Governorate	No. of approved or proposed units for construction	Total no. of Residential Units in the Governorate	
Hebron	Kiryat Arba	66	157		649	806
	Carmel	28				
	Tene/ Teneh Omarim	35				
	Shuhada Street			163		
	Ma'ale Hever			5		
	Beit Yatir			258		
	Netiv Ha'avot			17		
	Negohot			102		
	Adora			18		
	Petza'el			55		
	Inside Hebron	28		31		
Bethlehem	Tko'a	234	405		3,490	3,490
	Beitar Illit	2		2,524		
	Efrat	32		33		
	Kfar Etzion			300		
	Nokdim	77		238		
	Alon Shvut	60				

⁹³ This table is based on the numbers mentioned in POICA's daily and monthly reports. It was reviewed while comparing it to the numbers issued by: Colonization and Wall Resistance Commission, *Taqrir Mulakhkhas li al-Intihakat al-Sanawiyyah 2016*; and Colonization and Wall Resistance Commission, "The Most Prominent Israeli Violations in the Occupied Palestinian Land: Until the First Half of 2017." (in Arabic)

Sixth: The Separation Wall and Barriers in the WB

By the end of 2016, the total number of roadblocks in the WB and Jerusalem was 572, with 100 checkpoints and other obstacles tearing the city of Hebron apart; in addition to 107 flying checkpoints⁹⁴ that are moved to wherever the Israeli army deems appropriate. These figures have remained almost the same over the past years. Most of the changes made in these barriers were related to certain aspects such as fixing them in place and reinforcing their security and were not focused on increasing their numbers. As they are extremely dense, with one checkpoint per ten square kilometers, which makes them sufficient to restrict and widely monitor the movement of WB citizens.

As for the Separation Wall, which has a total length of 712 km, work on it has not seen significant development. The active parts in it were the surroundings of the Etzion and Adumim blocs in Jerusalem. The percentage of the completed part of the Separation Wall is 65%, which constitutes its complete outer edge on the north and center.⁹⁵ The unfinished parts are those deep inside the WB that surround the fingers of Qedumim in Qalqiliya and Ariel in Salfit, and the Adumim bloc east of Jerusalem, in addition to the southeastern part that surrounds the villages of the Hebron district. The reason for the disruption in the sections of the wall that are deep within the WB is primarily political, stemming from the successive objections of the PA to the US and the Europeans, as these sections prevent the natural geographical connection of the WB, and thus effectively end the two-state solution.

Concerning demolitions, the year 2016 witnessed the height of demolitions in the WB. For after the average number of demolished establishments annually since 2012 was about 600, their number in 2016 reached 1,094 facilities of various kinds, causing the displacement of 1,601 Palestinians. While by the end of November 2017, the number of destroyed establishments reached 411, causing the displacement of 654 Palestinians.⁹⁶

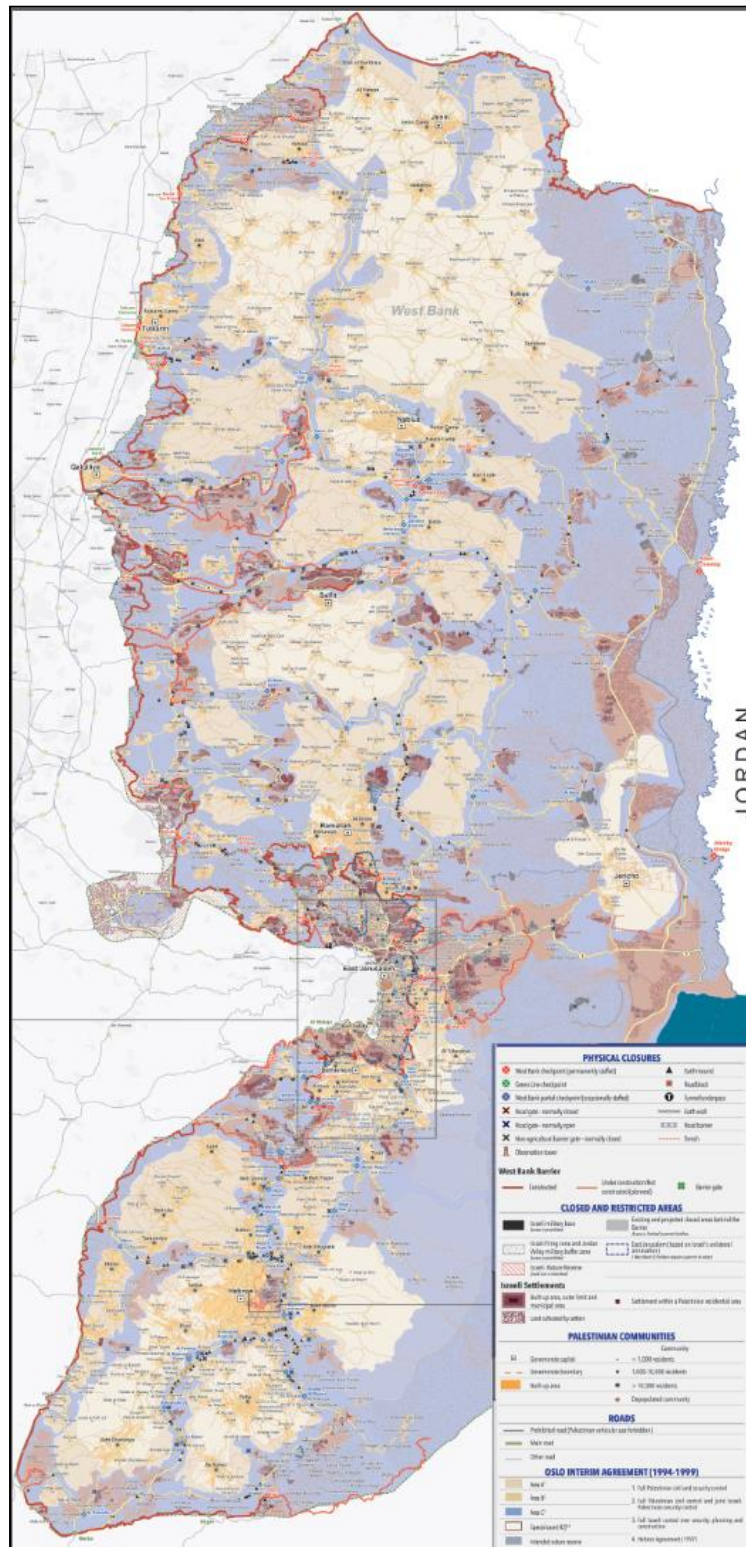
⁹⁴ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs—occupied Palestinian territory (OCHA opt), *Occupied Palestinian Territory: Humanitarian Facts and Figures* (OCHA opt, 21/12/2017), p. 10, <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/humanitarian-facts-and-figures>

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ OCHA oPt, Monthly Figures, <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/monthly-figures>



Map 10/3: Development of Israeli Settlement Building and the Separation Wall in WB 2017



Source: https://www.ochaopt.org/sites/default/files/westbank_2017_draft_6_march_2017.pdf

Conclusion

During 2016 and 2017, the increasing importance of Jerusalem in the conflict with Israel continued. The status of Jerusalem as a center from which popular confrontations are launched has been strengthened; extending to the Western Wall tunnel riots of 1996, *al-Aqsa Intifadah* of 2000 and the Jerusalem *Intifadah* of 2015. The year 2017 witnessed the Lion's Gate uprising in rejection of Israel's attempt to impose its direct administration on *al-Aqsa* Mosque, and the capital's uprising at the end of 2017 in response to the US decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

As for the Islamic holy sites, the attempt to control the administration of *al-Aqsa* Mosque was an essential goal during the period documented in this report, starting with an attempt to impose the role of an intermediate administration on the Jordanian Ministry of Awqaf, Islamic Affairs and Holy Places through the cameras project, which Jordan withdrew in April 2016. Then there was the Israeli installation of alternative cameras at the Moroccan, Ghawanmeh, and Lion's Gates, and above al-Tankaziyya School in May of 2016, and ending with the complete closure of the mosque in the face of worshipers following the operation by the three Jabarin on 14/7/2017 and the installation of electronic gates to inspect the entrants to the mosque.

The second Israeli targeting of *al-Aqsa* Mosque was the Judaization of the buildings surrounding it, which aimed at changing the city's skyline around it. Israeli authorities continued to present the plans and foundations of the basic Judaization buildings that they announced in 2014 and 2015 in the vicinity of the mosque: Spring Tower and Kedem Center in the south, Beit Moreshet HaKotel, the synagogue the Glory of Israel (Tiferet Yisrael) and the upper expansion of the Western Wall Plaza from the southwest of *al-Aqsa* Mosque. In 2016–2017, two new projects were developed. The first was the cable car, which will extend from the Mount of Olives to Mount Zion, passing through Silwan south of *al-Aqsa* Mosque. And the second was the al-Buraq elevator, an ascending stone corridor connecting the Jewish Quarter with the Western Wall Plaza to enhance the presence of Jewish visitors.



The third line of targeting *al-Aqsa* Mosque was the excavations, which remained at the limit of 47 in number, but the work of rehabilitating them, opening them for visitors, and connecting them to each other is ongoing. Besides *al-Aqsa* Mosque, Islamic graveyards were the second Israeli target, considered as an important land resource.

As for the Christian holy sites, in 2017 the issue of Orthodox Church properties returned to the forefront. During this year seven cases of real estate deals with Israeli parties were revealed. These have reaffirmed the depth of the Orthodox Patriarchate crisis with its Greek elite, which are largely disconnected in their interests from the nationalist people of their denomination.

Settlement building in Jerusalem continued to expand on the basis of the demographic role of settlements, and of connecting them to each other and to the Jewish center west of Jerusalem within two segments; the southern segment that received 40% of the total housing units, and the northern sector that received 28% of the total expansion. This is part of the project to amend the borders of the city, a subject tackled by Israeli circles since 2014. It is expected to keep 51 thousand Jerusalemites out of the 324 thousand who carry blue residency cards out of the city.

In 2016–2017, the concentration of building settlements was in Ramallah, ranking immediately after Jerusalem, whereas the usual trend of the preceding five years was the fact that Salfit was the second focus point after Jerusalem. If we take into consideration the strengthening of settlement blocs in East Jerusalem, it is clear that the Israeli authorities consider the separation of the northern WB from its south as a priority.

For the next two years, two issues are expected to be at the forefront: First, the management of *al-Aqsa* Mosque, with a continued Israeli attempt to impose direct administrative control over it, or parts of it. Indicators suggest the possibility of temporal division by targeting the eastern part of *al-Aqsa* Mosque plaza, which makes the cemetery of the Mercy Gate vulnerable to removal. The second is to change the boundaries of the city, try to remove the Kafr ‘Aqab, Shu‘fat Refugee Camp and New ‘Anata beyond the city limits, and withdraw the blue residency cards from their residents in order to make it hard for them to enter the city. In

addition, two or three settlement blocs surrounded by the Separation Wall would be annexed. Settlement building in Jerusalem is expected to continue on the basis of the demographic role of settlements in the northern and southern suburbs and in the Adumim settlement bloc. The US president's decision to recognize Jerusalem as the Israeli capital will enhance the chances of Judaization, aggression and confrontation at all levels in Jerusalem. As for settlement building in WB, and if our reading of the Israeli behavior during these two years is correct, it is likely that it would be concentrated in settlements east of Ramallah and the outer perimeter of Jerusalem, to devote the geographical separation of northern WB from its south. This may pave the way, in the long term, for a political separation between them.



التقرير الاستراتيجي الفلسطيني

2017-2016

الفصل الثالث

الأرض والمقدسات

2017-2016

