

# The Palestine Strategic Report 2018 – 2019



Edited By

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# **Chapter Three**

*The Land and the Holy Sites*



# The Land and the Holy Sites

## *Introduction*

President Donald Trump's decision to move the US embassy to Jerusalem in December 2017 marked the beginning of a potentially decisive battle over the fate of Jerusalem, nearly a 100 years after its occupation by Israel began. Unprecedentedly deep US cover granted Israel an opportunity to determine the city's identity through aggression, imposition of facts on the ground, and the expulsion of Jerusalemites. For what had been impossible before the decision has now become possible, and what was thought to arouse international rejection has become doable, or least that is the belief the Israeli government relied on.

The two years following Trump's decision saw US-backed Israeli attempts to resolve Jerusalem's identity, which was met by popular confrontations that had limited Palestinian government support. The result was Israeli retreating on some fronts but achieving breakthroughs on other fronts.

## *First: Islamic and Christian Holy Sites*

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

#### **a. Control of the Mosque's Administration**

Since the year 2000, the attempt to control the administration of *al-Aqsa* Mosque has become a general Israeli policy. In 2001, the then Prime Minister Ariel Sharon formed a ministerial committee to study admitting tourists, as well as settlers, under the direct management of the Israeli police, while this authority was originally that of the Jordanian Ministry of Awqaf, Islamic Affairs and Holy Places.<sup>1</sup> Sharon's plan was followed by settlers storming into the Mosque on 20/8/2003, and allowing the admittance of tourists, under direct police supervision.<sup>2</sup> In 2005, a network of thermal sensors and cameras to control the vicinity of *al-Aqsa* Mosque was installed,<sup>3</sup> and a judicial decision allowing collective storming of the Mosque in "non-Muslim prayer times," was issued. In 2010, a force for rapid intervention in *al-Aqsa* Mosque called the "Temple Mount Unit" was formed, which conducted

exercises.<sup>4</sup> Israel also obstructed construction work and prevented the entry of building materials into the mosque, without prior approval of the municipality in Jerusalem pursuant to the recommendations of the report by State Comptroller presented in 2010.<sup>5</sup> In September 2015, there were attempts to impose complete temporal division by preventing Muslims from entering *al-Aqsa* Mosque on Jewish holidays, and in July 2017, there were moves to impose electronic gates to control Muslims' entry to the Mosque.

This trend continued throughout 2018–2019, with the usurpation of Awqaf's exclusive restoration authority for the first time since the occupation of *al-Aqsa* Mosque, as well as other Israeli attempts to complete the process of controlling the Mosque administration as set out below.

### 1. Endeavors to Take over Gate of Mercy<sup>6</sup>

On 17/2/2019, Israeli police put a new lock on the external gate of the Gate of Mercy (*Bab al-Rahmah*), the culmination of a 16-year-old plan to isolate the building and its surroundings on the eastern side of *al-Aqsa* Mosque from the rest of it. On 9/2/2003, Israeli authorities issued a decision to criminalize the Islamic Heritage Committee affiliated with the Administration of Jerusalem's Awqaf, which worked from its offices at the Gate of Mercy in restoration and endowment projects. Thus, the Israeli army closed the Committee's offices there<sup>7</sup> as if it was closing down any other building.

Under the pressure of this decision, the Administration of Jerusalem's Awqaf dealt with the Gate of Mercy—whose construction dates back to the Umayyad era—as a “hall of honor.” The Awqaf wanted to prevent the complete closure of the building and to avoid a confrontation with the Israeli police. Hence, the building was opened annually twice; every year for Al-Aqsa Islamic Schools to hold examinations, as well as to receive official delegations including from Jordan.<sup>8</sup>

The last time Gate of Mercy was used, before the Israeli police locked it, was for the meeting of the Administration of Jerusalem's Awqaf, which was reconfigured and expanded on 14/2/2019 to include Palestinian figures such as Sheikh 'Ikrima Sabri, head of the Supreme Muslim Council in Jerusalem; Hatim 'Abdul Qadir, former Jerusalem Minister who is responsible for the Jerusalem dossier in Fatah; 'Adnan al-Husseini, the-then Jerusalem Minister; Mazen Sinokrot, a Jerusalem businessman and Minister of National Economy in the first Hamas government under Isma'il Haniyyah (29/3/2006); and Sheikh Muhammad Hussein, the PA

Mufti of Jerusalem.<sup>9</sup> Apparently, the Israeli authorities considered the expansion of the Awqaf council as a hostile move against them, and thus locked the gate and took it over, a goal that had been sought by Israel for a long time.

On 18/2/2019, a day after the gate's closure, the public response began<sup>10</sup> with the Gate of Mercy uprising, which led to the reopening of the building on Friday 22/2/2019, a development that will be discussed later in this chapter.

The Gate of Mercy uprising dealt a serious blow to Israel's intention of spatially dividing *al-Aqsa* Mosque, a long-term plan that started in 2003 with the security closure decision and continued with Israel allocating the eastern region of the Mosque for settlers' raids and biblical rituals. Then, in 2013, a spatial division scheme was proposed by the ruling Likud party, based on the annexation of the Gate of Mercy and its immediate vicinity, so that it would become a center for Jews in *al-Aqsa* Mosque, while closing an adjacent area during Jewish holidays for prayers and rituals,<sup>11</sup> in addition to the draft proposed the same year by the Yishai Association to build a domed synagogue to the south of the Gate of Mercy.<sup>12</sup> Other measures to enforce spatial division included the ban imposed by the Israeli police on the eastern side of *al-Aqsa* Mosque from July 2018,<sup>13</sup> and a new Border Police post atop the Gate of Mercy in retaliation to Jerusalemites' presence in the region during the month of Ramadan.<sup>14</sup>

This long-term process was disrupted by the Gate of Mercy uprising, when the huge Islamic presence returned to the *Musalla* (area allocated for prayer) of the Gate of Mercy and its environs. This scene was more clear in the month of Ramadan of 2019, when the *Musalla* was carpeted, Qur'an lockers were placed in it and wooden boards were installed to separate men and women during joint prayers, while shoe cabinets were placed at the entrance.<sup>15</sup>

The Israeli authorities could not approve the opening of the Gate of Mercy, hence they made attempts to isolate the building and close it once again. These endeavors can be divided into the three stages below:

- **Preventing the daily opening of the *Musalla*:** Israeli police wanted to prevent Palestinians from keeping the Gate of Mercy open, hence they launched an arrest campaign against the guards, who on 22/2/2019 had started opening the *Musalla* daily. The police claimed that the guards had violated a court order. Simultaneously, Israeli wanted to reaffirm the court's closure order, so on 17/3/2019 the Magistrate's Court in Jerusalem extended its temporary order

to close the Gate of Mercy for another 60 days,<sup>16</sup> a rule that was rejected by the Administration of Jerusalem's Awqaf and the Jordanian government.<sup>17</sup> The Israeli authorities wanted to weaken *al-Aqsa* guards' apparatus by arresting its members and banning their daily entrance. Amidst this situation, and after the arrest of 14 guards, on 3/3/2019, *al-Aqsa* guards appealed for support,<sup>18</sup> and the Jerusalem community responded where young volunteers showed up for several days to open the Gate of Mercy in the morning. Remarkably, Jerusalem families pledged that their youths would open the *Musalla* on specific days,<sup>19</sup> forcing the Israeli police to abandon their policy.

- **Preventing its dedication as a *Musalla*:** Ramadan was a turning point in restoring the Gate of Mercy to its original status; i.e., being an inseparable part of *al-Aqsa* Mosque, for it was furnished with all the *Musalla* requirements amid the heavy presence of worshippers. After Ramadan, the Israeli authorities sought to prevent the dedication of the building as a *Musalla*, and thus targeted the simplest symbols of a place of worship, such as shoe storage units, removing the Qur'an lockers and as shoe cabinets from the *Musalla* repeatedly,<sup>20</sup> as well as removing the dividers used to demarcate women's prayer spaces during daily prayers. In return, worshippers would put back the removed furniture, benefitting from heavy Muslim presence.
- **The attempts to reclose the Gate of Mercy before its opening anniversary:** The Israeli police tried to keep Muslim worshipers away from the Gate of Mercy and its vicinity, taking advantage of the long Jewish holiday season, which begins every year with Jewish New Year (*Rosh Hashanah*) followed by the Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*) and ending with the Feast of Tabernacles (*Sukkot*). Thus, it announced that Muslims were prohibited from approaching the terraces facing the building and the olive tree there.<sup>21</sup> This move was countered by the determination of a few *Murabitun* (*al-Aqsa* Mosque defenders), who stood in front of the Gate of Mercy and read Qur'an there, thus the yard facing the gate turned into a hotbed of confrontation.<sup>22</sup> In return, old Jerusalemite women began inviting each other to eat breakfast there in the mornings, where the police would arrest them to keep them away. Also, collective iftars were held for the youth, elderly and women, who fasted on Mondays and Thursdays, and whom the police would forcibly disperse, beat and arrest.<sup>23</sup> The very next day, youths would respond with an increased presence in the *Musalla* for the Maghrib and Isha' prayers. As of the time of writing, the Gate of Mercy is still a potential flashpoint, and is likely to explode amidst Israeli attempts to close the place and popular efforts to counter these endeavors. These confrontations have

been a major motive for launching the Great Dawn campaign, which started in *al-Aqsa* Mosque, on 10/1/2020,<sup>24</sup> and is expected to be one of the major means for defending the Mosque's identity in the next two years.

## 2. Usurping Restoration Powers

Interference in the restoration of *al-Aqsa* Mosque has been an Israeli policy since 2000. The first attempts aimed to prevent the restoration of the Mosque's southern wall near al-Khutniya School, and the southeastern wall near the huge gates of al-Marwani Mosque, which were reopened a few years ago. In 2000, cracks appeared in them, but since it was the same year in which *al-Aqsa Intifadah* started, Israeli authorities delayed the restoration until 2003. Only then did the Administration of Jerusalem's Awqaf begin the restoration, which needed four years to finish due to repeated Israeli obstruction.

In 2003, the Israeli authorities placed umbrellas based on metal pillars and concrete foundations on the Moroccan Hill, while preventing its restoration or reinforcement; consequently, the Hill collapsed on 15/2/2004 during a snowstorm. Since then, and from that spot, the Israelis intervened in the reconstruction of the entrances and walls of *al-Aqsa* Mosque. They put up, in place of the Hill, a wooden ramp and then emptied the sand of the Moroccan Hill,<sup>25</sup> and proposed building an iron or stone bridge in its place to link the Western Wall Plaza to *al-Aqsa* Mosque. However, Ayyubid stone arches forming the basis of the Moroccan Hill were discovered, and the bridge project was suspended. This crisis established a new dynamic in which Israel's opinion is to be sought regarding the reconstruction of the entrances to *al-Aqsa* Mosque.

Attempts to intervene in the reconstruction of *al-Aqsa* Mosque continued through Temple Mount organizations, which objected to the reconstruction of the Dome of the Chain and the Dome of the Rock, and demanded the Israeli government stop it, claiming that some of the works "damaged some...archaeological evidence."<sup>26</sup> The internal restoration of the Dome of the Rock saw similar objections by Temple Mount groups and the Israeli authorities, with the latter repeatedly arresting restoration workers. The Jerusalem municipality authorities wanted to oversee all restoration works in *al-Aqsa* Mosque, by compelling the Administration of Jerusalem's Awqaf to submit their restoration plans in advance to the municipality for approval.<sup>27</sup> Such restoration disruptions continue, unless "proper permits" from the municipality are granted, and the most prominent developments during the period covered by this report are outlined below:



- **The restoration of the southwestern wall from the outside:** On 23/7/2018, Israeli cameras installed to the south of the destroyed Moroccan Hill documented the fall of a large stone from the center of *al-Aqsa*'s southwestern wall. The stone fell on a temporary wooden ramp installed to establish a wide upper plaza for Jewish worshippers, located beside the Moroccan Gate, which is part of Natan Sharansky's plan.<sup>28</sup>

The Israeli authorities took advantage of incident and sent Israeli engineering crews to transport the stone and examine the location, while the Waqf engineering team was prevented from inspecting the site.

On 16/1/2019, the Jerusalem municipality installed a five-level scaffold and restored the site where the stone fell, marking the first time an Israeli authority had taken direct responsibility for restoration work in *al-Aqsa* Mosque since its occupation in 1967. Thus, this could be the most dangerous incident concerning the taking over of the restoration authority of the Administration of Jerusalem's Awqaf. It was a further step in the Jerusalem municipality intervention, which might not remain limited to the walls and the surrounding of the Mosque.<sup>29</sup> The walls of *al-Aqsa* Mosque are an integral part of the site, hence Israel may be tempted to reach inside.

Jordan issued just two statements of condemnation; one by Minister of Awqaf, Islamic Affairs and Holy Places,<sup>30</sup> 'Abdul Nasser Abu al-Basal, and the other by the Foreign Ministry.

#### **The Five-Level Scaffold Installed by the Israeli Authorities at *al-Aqsa* Southwestern Wall from the Outside on 16/1/2019**



- **The restoration of the Jumblatt Solitude Place:** Israeli police occupied the Jumblatt Solitude Place near the Dome of the Rock, and transformed it into a police headquarters to support its forces in storming *al-Aqsa* Mosque and monitoring the *Murabitun* and worshippers from inside the Mosque. During the month of Ramadan, on 25/7/2014, in the Night of Power, the solitude place was completely burned,<sup>31</sup> and the police could not use it until after one month. In the interim, the staff of the Administration of Jerusalem's Awqaf restored the site, since it is an integral part of *al-Aqsa* Mosque, before the Israeli police reopened it as its headquarters on 19/5/2015.<sup>32</sup>

During the Gate of Mercy uprising, on 12/3/2019, the area was burned,<sup>33</sup> so the Israeli forces immediately closed *al-Aqsa* Mosque, and their teams entered to make necessary restorations, then the Mosque was reopened for Muslims the following day. This was the second time Israeli forces usurped the restoration authority, where the first happened inside the Mosque. On 29/5/2019, the Israeli police carried out new restoration work in the Jumblatt Solitude place<sup>34</sup> by installing a firefighting sprinkler system in it and its lower storage.

- **The restoration of the southern wall:** On 5/1/2020, restoration authority was again usurped as Israeli forces installed scaffolds at the southern wall of *al-Aqsa* Mosque, and kept them for 10 days. However, the reasons for their removal or what was done remained unclear.<sup>35</sup> The Jerusalem Waqf condemned the incident on the same day.
- **Disrupting restoration works in al-Aqsa Mosque:** Throughout 2018–2019, the Israeli policy of disrupting restoration works and trying to ban them completely continued. On 16/1/2018, the Israeli police informed the construction official Taha 'Uwaida that all restoration work in the Dome of the Rock was prohibited.<sup>36</sup> On 7/11/2018, the Administration of Jerusalem's Awqaf began restoration work south of the Gate of Mercy to repair the corridor's tiles in that area;<sup>37</sup> however, the Israeli authorities halted work the following day.<sup>38</sup> The renovation was eventually completed in April 2019 thanks to the initiative of a group of *Murabitun*, which also included the insulation of the dome of the Gate of Mercy. On 25/9/2019, the Israeli police raided the office of *al-Aqsa* Reconstruction Committee and arrested its head and some engineers, in an attempt to stop the restoration of the

Dome of the Rock from the inside.<sup>39</sup> Prior to that, on 13/6/2019, Israeli police arrested the director of the Reconstruction Committee and three of its engineers for replacing a broken tile in the steps leading to the Cotton Merchant's Gate, west of *al-Aqsa* Mosque.<sup>40</sup>

### 3. Weakening the Role of *al-Aqsa* Mosque Guards

*Al-Aqsa* guards are the human shield of the Mosque. After banning the Ribat (defense of Islamic land) institutions and the Islamic Movement of the 1948 occupied territories, on 17/10/2015, the role of guards in defending *al-Aqsa* Mosque from Israeli aggression became even more vital. Subsequently, the Jordanian Ministry of Awqaf, Islamic Affairs and Holy Places increased their number; however, the situation became difficult for Jordan, because Israeli pressure increased at a time it was seeking to avoid any confrontation with Israel. As a result, Israel was able to weaken the role of the guards, preventing them,<sup>41</sup> in September 2018, from walking beside the settlers raiding the Mosque, and urging them to stay at ten meters away from the special units walking behind the settlers to protect them. It also launched successive campaigns of arrests and bans, and on 20/1/2019, it prevented five guards from entering the Mosque for 4–6 months.<sup>42</sup> Arrests and bans then began on 22/2/2019 targeting activists, who opened the Gate of Mercy, and on 23/2/2019 targeted the guard Samer Qabbani, who was arrested and prevented from entering the Mosque after opening the *Musalla* that day.<sup>43</sup> On 24/2/2019, the Israeli authorities took things a step further with a ban imposed on Sheikh 'Abdul 'Azim Salhab, head of the Administration of Jerusalem's Awqaf, as well as Sheikh Najih Bkeirat, the deputy director,<sup>44</sup> in addition to the arrest and ban of Sheikh Raed Dana, the then director of preaching and guidance, on 26/2/2019.<sup>45</sup> The campaign of banning guards continued and included Mohammad al-Salhi on 3/3/2019,<sup>46</sup> Samer Abu Quwaider on 4/3/2019,<sup>47</sup> and Ihab Abu Ghazaleh on 5/5/2019. Ban orders continued on daily basis until April 2019.

The Israeli police benefitted from the long Jewish holiday season in October 2019, imposing new restrictions on *al-Aqsa* guards, and preventing them from escorting and photographing groups of settlers raiding the Mosque.<sup>48</sup> These conditions gave settlers unprecedented freedom of movement, manifested in performing public biblical rituals and prayers in *al-Aqsa* Mosque, while pictures and videos documenting these developments could only be captured from afar.

#### 4. Raiding *al-Aqsa* Mosque in Muslim Holidays

The year 2019 saw a rare crossover of the Hebrew and Hijri calendars, as the Hebrew year is based on lunar months and solar years, and thus adjusts itself by adding a month approximately every three years. After adding a month to the Hebrew year, which ended in early October 2018, this rare coincidence became clear with two major Jewish holidays related to the Judaization of *al-Aqsa* Mosque, coinciding with Islamic holidays in 2019, 2020, and 2021.

Temple groups and extremists benefit from four Jewish religious and national Zionist holidays as peak seasons to Judaize *al-Aqsa* Mosque. These holidays include the Passover, which occurs between March and April in the Gregorian calendar; Jerusalem Day, celebrating the occupation of East Jerusalem in 1967, occurring between May and June; and the Jewish holiday known as *Tisha B'av*, commemorating the destruction of the Temple, which occurs between July and August. There is also the long holiday season starting with the Jewish New Year then the Day of Atonement and ending with the Feast of Tabernacles; this season lasts three weeks and occurs between September and October.

In 2019, Jerusalem Day was on 2/6/2019, coinciding with the 28th of Ramadan. Despite the heavy presence of worshippers on Friday 31/5/2019, or the 26th of Ramadan, and on Saturday eve 1/6/2019, or the 27th of Ramadan (the Night of Power), only few *Murabitun* were present in the Mosque on the morning of Sunday 2/6/2019, or the 28th of Ramadan. As a result, the Israeli police were able to secure a long incursion where settlers toured the *al-Aqsa* Mosque and repeated religious chants and public prayers, while the police attacked the *Murabitun*, among whom were women and children.<sup>49</sup> This incursion was a blow to the Jerusalem popular movement which, at the beginning of 2019, had been able to re-open the Gate of Mercy.

The second occasion was *Tisha B'av*, commemorating the destruction of the Temple. It coincided with the first day of *al-Adha* Eid when approximately 100 thousand worshippers went to the Mosque according to the estimates of Administration of Jerusalem's Awqaf.<sup>50</sup> Yet, despite repeated calls and public threats of a raid on the Mosque by Temple organizations and Israeli Minister of Public Security Gilad Erdan, and despite the decision of the Islamic committees

in Jerusalem to postpone Eid prayers until 7:30 a.m.,<sup>51</sup> the masses soon dispersed. This situation was exacerbated by a psychological war led directly by the Israeli Prime Minister's office, which issued official news, reported by various Arab media outlets, saying that Netanyahu had decided to prevent incursions on that day. Apparently, Temple activists knew that such news was issued to spread confusion, hence they did not move from the wooden bridge at the Moroccan Gate and remained determined to raid the Mosque.

The number of *Murabitun*, who stayed in *al-Aqsa* Mosque until late at night was estimated at 1,500, who performed *Duha* (forenoon) prayers and faced the Israeli police,<sup>52</sup> who in their turn soon attacked the *Murabitun* with tear gas and sound bombs, injuring a number of people. Ultimately, the police allowed Temple extremists to raid the Mosque entering from the Moroccan Gate and leaving from the Chain Gate, a distance of 60 meters.<sup>53</sup> This symbolic incursion was considered a moral victory for the Israeli government and the police over the defenseless *Murabitun*, as it was the first raid of *al-Aqsa* on a Muslim holiday since the occupation of the Mosque in 1967. However, it simultaneously provided proof of the *Murabituns*' steadfastness, making Israeli forces use hundreds of bombs to secure a 60-meter long incursion.

In the overall scheme, the storming of *al-Adha* Eid was a second moral blow to the Jerusalemite popular movement. It gave moral support to the Temple groups, the government and the police, after the blow dealt to them during the Gate of Mercy Uprising.

This course is expected to persist and develop in 2020 and 2021, as in 2020 Jerusalem Day coincides with the final Friday of Ramadan on 22/5/2020, while *Tisha B'av* will be on Thursday 30/7/2020, coinciding with the Day of '*Arafah* or the first day of *al-Adha* Eid. In 2021, Jerusalem Day will be on 10/5/2021, which is expected to coincide with 28 Ramadan, while *Tisha B'av* will be on Sunday 18/7/2021, and could coincide with the Day of '*Arafah* or the day preceding it.

### **5. Performing Biblical Rituals in *al-Aqsa* Mosque**

Since the concept of division was first introduced, when Ariel Sharon stormed *al-Aqsa* Mosque in 2000, Temple groups' actions were taken in harmony with Israeli courts, which have gradually changed the interpretation of the Protection of

Holy Places Law. This law was enacted by the Knesset in 1967 after the occupation of east Jerusalem, its wording was made loose, making the government of the day relatively free to act as it deems necessary.

With the rise of the Temple groups and their moves to Judaize *al-Aqsa* Mosque, changing the interpretation of the law was the starting point. In 2003, the Israeli Magistrate's Court allowed Jewish settlers to enter the Mosque, thus changing the role of the Israeli police there. In 2005, a court ruling was issued allowing collective incursions during "non-Muslim prayer times," but without Jewish religious symbols; however, this situation changed in 2013, after meetings were held between the Knesset speaker and the police leadership, upon the requests of the Temple groups. They also tried to legalize presenting sacrifices in *al-Aqsa* Mosque on Passover, however, their attempts failed as the court feared the repercussions of the case and dismissed it.<sup>54</sup>

In 2018, this course gained momentum again as Temple groups filed a suit demanding that they be allowed to conduct Passover rituals at the gates of *al-Aqsa* Mosque, the court ruled in their favor on 25/3/2018.<sup>55</sup> Consequently, Jewish extremists can perform their rituals yearly, every holiday, at the gates of the Mosque, notably at the Ghawanima, Chain and Moroccan Gates in the Feast of Tabernacles. On 4/12/2018, they lit a candlestick and performed rituals and dances around al-Ghazali Square in front of the Lion's Gate to celebrate Hanukkah.<sup>56</sup> On 17/4/2018, an Israeli court approved settlers praying loudly and shouting while storming *al-Aqsa* Mosque,<sup>57</sup> which they did on 10/10/2019, when Israeli police told *al-Aqsa* guards that they had permitted Jewish public and collective prayers in *al-Aqsa* Mosque.<sup>58</sup> Since then, these prayers were documented dozens of times, and some had even taken place some time before that.

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

### **1. Constructions in the Vicinity of the Mosque**

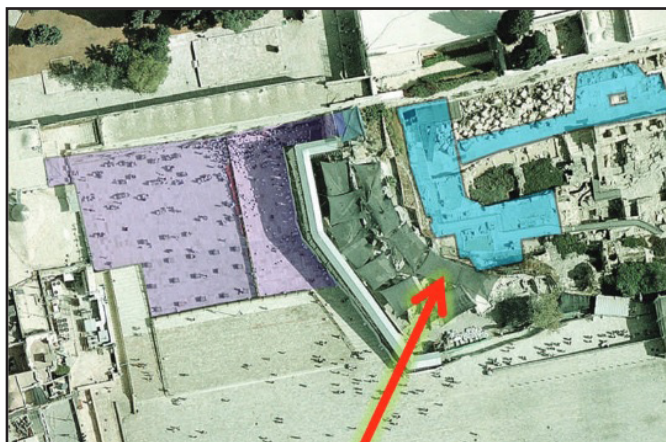
There are many Israeli construction sites in the vicinity of *al-Aqsa* Mosque, the most prominent of which is *Beit Haliba* (Heb. Core House), a structure the foundations of which are being built in the far west of al-Buraq Plaza. On

10/2/2019, a synagogue was approved to be added to the site.<sup>59</sup> Another project was the new co-ed prayer space at the Western Wall, also known as the Sharansky Project, still in the approval stages due to continuous disagreement between Orthodox and Reform Jews about the permissibility of the mixed prayer section.<sup>60</sup> There is also the elevator between the Jewish Quarter and al-Buraq Plaza aiming to facilitate access for the largest number of Jews to the Plaza from inside the Old City; the work on this project has begun and the elevator is expected to be operational in 2022.<sup>61</sup> A new development was witnessed regarding the Tiferet Yisrael Synagogue, located in the Jewish Quarter about 200 meters west of *al-Aqsa* Mosque, whose foundation stone for its renovation was laid on 27/5/2014 by Uri Ariel, the Minister of Housing and Construction from the Jewish Home Party. However, on 31/12/2018, a new ceremony for laying the cornerstone of this synagogue was also held with the participation of Minister of Jerusalem Affairs Ze'ev Elkin, then Minister of Construction Yoav Galant besides the new Jerusalem Mayor, Moshe Lion. A total of 50 million shekels (\$15 million) were allocated to rebuild the synagogue, whose total height is expected to be 25 meters. Apparently, works there to date focused on excavations and archeological digs, and for the past four years, its construction works have not started in earnest.<sup>62</sup>

### Work Development in *Beit Haliba* Biblical Compound



### Site of Co-Ed Prayer Site



In 2018–2019, there were two significant developments related to the construction projects in the vicinity of *al-Aqsa* Mosque:

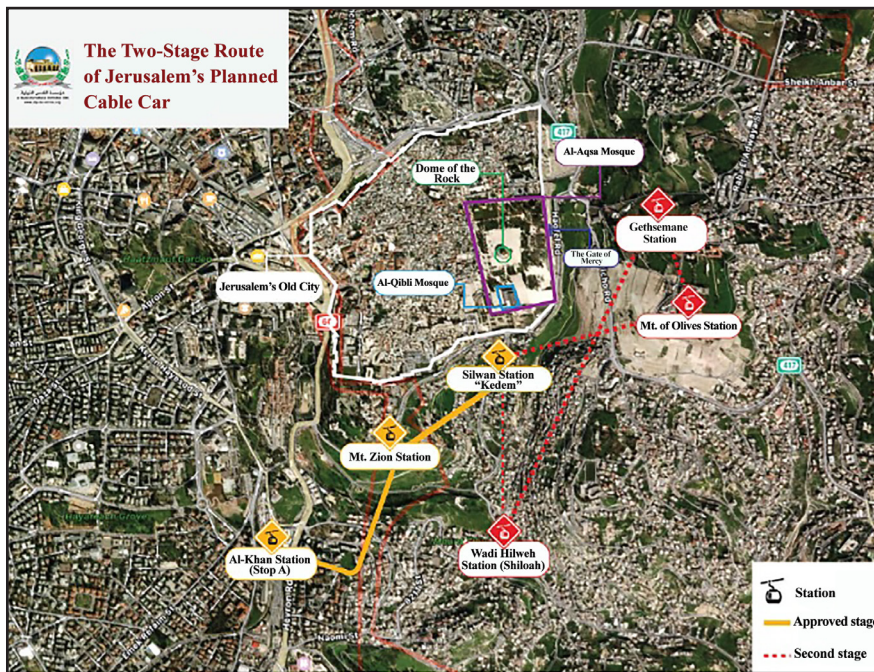
#### **Approval of Jerusalem Cable Car Project**

The cable car project was first presented in 2007 in Jerusalem’s Old City Project “Kedem Yerushalayim.” In 2013, it was presented to the planning committees but not approved. Ultimately, a legal amendment was introduced, to make it a national priority project, whose first phase was approved in January 2019. It was then approved by the ministerial housing committee on 4/11/2019 after a delay imposed by an internal Israeli political crisis. According to the plan’s first stage, the cable car will depart from the Ottoman railway station in west Jerusalem to the Kedem Center supervised by the right-wing Ir David Foundation (Elad) on confiscated land in Silwan. The cable car covers 1.4 kilometer and has 40 cars running on 15 large concrete pylons. Its construction will be carried out by either the Austrian company Doppelmayr or the Italian company Leitner.<sup>63</sup>

The cable car project would sabotage the Old City skyline and marginalize the history and identity of its streets, buildings and sanctuaries, in addition to expelling the people of Silwan, thus it is the most dangerous project threatening to change the identity of Jerusalem since the occupation of the city. However, and despite internal and external opposition, the transitional government, led by Netanyahu and endorsed by extremist right-wing parties and Temple groups, has approved the project, and is apparently determined to implement it, making it a stage for political and field confrontations throughout the next two years.



**Map 1/3: The Two-Stage Route of Jerusalem’s Planned Cable Car**



### **Launching the Jewish Yemeni Heritage Center in Silwan**

On 1/8/2018, the Jewish Yemeni Heritage Center in Silwan was launched in a big celebration attended by Israeli Culture Minister Miri Regev, Jerusalem Affairs Minister Ze’ev Elkin and a number of their supporters. The center was established on property seized by the Israeli authorities in 2015, and aims to commemorate the alleged cultural heritage of Yemeni Jews,<sup>64</sup> who resided in Silwan as refugees between 1881 and 1929. Yemeni Jews were rejected by the emerging settler community, whose first immigrants came from Europe.

### **Security Structures in the Vicinity of Damascus Gate**

The Damascus Gate and the plaza that faces it were an important meeting point for Jerusalemites, a vital public space playing an important role in strengthening the Jerusalem community’s fabric and expressing its aspiration for liberation. Attempts to control the plaza and Judaize it remain a major part of the conflict over the identity of Jerusalem; and with Trump’s declaration of the city as the capital of Israel, the Damascus Gate Plaza became an important space for public movement, which the Israeli forces interrupted and dispersed. During Ramadan

and Muslim holidays, Jerusalemites gather in the same square especially in the evenings; while for the settlers, the Damascus Gate plaza is the central meeting point for the annual flag march. This march takes place on “Jerusalem Day,” a celebration of the occupation of East Jerusalem in 1967.

In early 2018, Israeli authorities consolidated their hold on the Damascus Gate and the plaza by establishing three major security facilities: on 16/2/2018, a security monitoring room based on iron platforms was installed at the Gate; on 16/3/2018, three watchtowers in the plaza were completed and on 19/6/2018, a fourth was installed, in addition to the observation post atop the Damascus Gate.<sup>65</sup>

### **New Security Installations in the Vicinity of the Damascus Gate in 2018<sup>66</sup>**



## **2. Excavations**

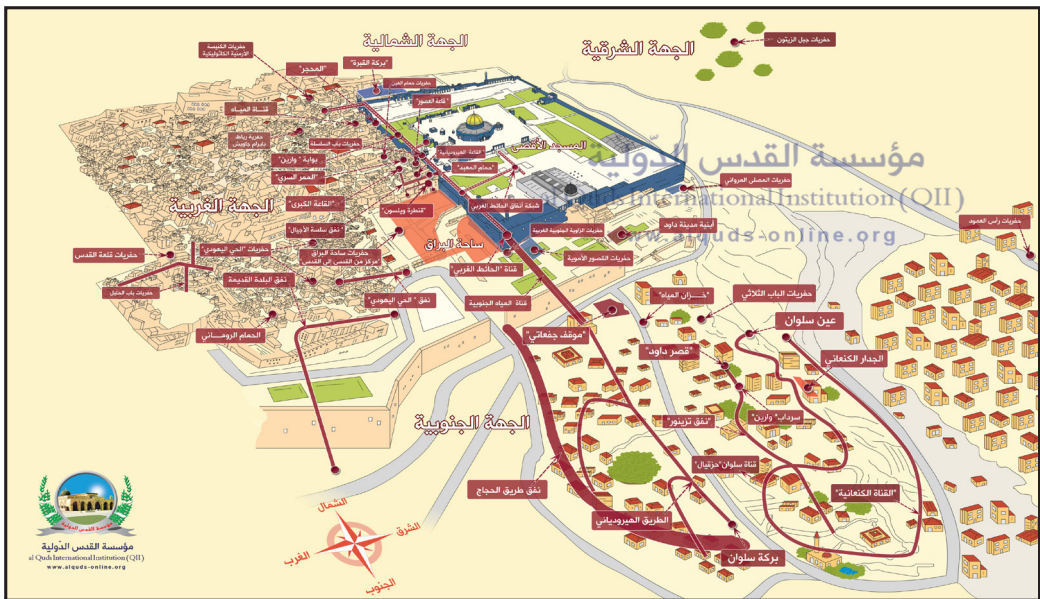
Numbers have become insufficient for describing the size of excavations under *al-Aqsa* Mosque. Since the supervision of the excavation works moved from the Hebrew University (as a partner with the Israel Antiquities Authority—IAA) to the Ministry of Tourism and the Company for the Reconstruction and Development of the Jewish Quarter in the Old City of Jerusalem Ltd. in 2001, the goal of excavations has shifted. At first, the goal was to dig deep and excavate antiquities, whereas now excavation sites themselves are being renovated and linked together to form a network of multiple entrances and exits; the goal has become the projection of the Israeli narration of the history of the site. The Israelis took advantage of the form of

the stones and tunnels and their revelations, in addition to showing new collection of exhibits displayed in these tunnels, such as the Gallery of Glass and Light called the “The Chain of Generations Center” on the western side of *al-Aqsa* Mosque.

Another factor that changed the aims of these excavations was the introduction of the right-wing Ir David Foundation (Elad), which seeks to establish the “City of David” in Silwan according to biblical conception. It is one of the executive arms directly undertaking tenders for the rehabilitation of excavations and the establishment of Judaization centers, funded by the government and municipality. Today, Elad is a direct party in the construction of Kedem Center and the funding of multiple sections of the Herodian Road, most notably the Pilgrims’ Road.

In total, there are 47 known excavation sites, some of which include several sections such as the Herodian Road, which will connect the Silwan Pool to the southwestern wall of *al-Aqsa* Mosque. The Western Wall tunnels’ three level network, starts from the northeastern corner of *al-Aqsa* Mosque to the farthest northwestern side of the Mosque while being divided into sections. Hence, some sources count 64 excavation sites,<sup>67</sup> where every renovated section of these tunnels is considered a separate excavation.

### Excavations Under *al-Aqsa* Mosque and its Vicinity<sup>68</sup>



A Map of the Excavations Under *al-Aqsa* Mosque and its Vicinity until 1/8/2019 (in Arabic).

The most important development among these excavations was the opening of the Pilgrimage Road, part of the Herodian Road, connecting the Silwan Pool in the south to the Wadi Hilweh neighborhood in the north. The opening of the tunnel ceremony took place on 30/6/2019, and was attended by the Israeli Prime Minister's wife, Sara Netanyahu, the White House envoy Jason Greenblatt, the US Ambassador to Israel David Friedman, and the right-wing casino mogul and Trump donor Sheldon Adelson. During the inauguration, Friedman said: "This place is as much a heritage of the United States as it is a heritage of Israel."<sup>69</sup>

This was the second time this tunnel had been opened, as Israel Culture Minister Miri Regev previously opened the same section of the tunnel on 31/12/2016, while criticizing outgoing President Barack Obama.<sup>70</sup> On 23/12/2016 Regev requested that the US refrain from vetoing UN Security Council Resolution 2334 condemning settlement building. Apparently, the Ir David Foundation (Elad) and Jerusalem's municipality considered the inauguration a political opportunity to reinforce their claims of legitimacy of the tunnels under *al-Aqsa* Mosque and in its vicinity following Trump's decision, so they decided to reopen the tunnel with high-level US participation.

Despite this inauguration, the Herodian Road tunnel still needs around 13 years to be completed. At the time of writing, work is focused on the section passing under Wadi Hilweh neighborhood and reaching beneath the Old City walls. Alarming, the digging and rehabilitation works in this huge tunnel have devastating effects on Palestinian properties above it, and the Wadi Hilweh Information Center documented damage to 70 houses there during the winter of 2018–2019.<sup>71</sup>

## 2. Jerusalem's Islamic Holy Sites

Cemeteries are the second goal of the occupation in Jerusalem, after *al-Aqsa* Mosque, and for two main reasons. Firstly, they represent vast real estate that used to be located on the city outskirts, which is why cemeteries surround the four sides of Jerusalem's Old City. However, with the expansion of the borders of Jerusalem and urbanization beyond the Old City, ancient Islamic cemeteries became located in the heart of Jerusalem. This applies to four major cemeteries: Mamilla to the west, Mercy to the east and to its north the Yusufiyah, and al-Mujahidin adjacent to Herod's Gate to the north. Secondly, these cemeteries bear witness to the historic identity of the city's inhabitants. That is why Israel is establishing a large Jewish

cemetery on the Mount of Olives, parallel to its obliteration of neighboring Islamic cemeteries, trying to erase Jerusalem's identity even at the level of graves and tombstones.

#### **a. The Mercy Cemetery**

Targeting cemeteries throughout 2018–2019 was mainly focused on the Mercy Cemetery, where the Israelis started to execute the plan published by the municipality in December 2017 aiming to appropriate a large segment of the cemetery and convert it to a national park. On 15/3/2018, Israel Nature and Parks Authority took measurements of the area,<sup>72</sup> then on 29/4/2018, it destroyed a grave belonging to al-‘Abbasi family in the north of the cemetery,<sup>73</sup> and uprooted olive trees in its vicinity the following day.<sup>74</sup> On 2/5/2018, it started placing iron partitions, separating some areas of the cemetery, and on 9/5/2018, it tried to prohibit visitors.<sup>75</sup> The Jerusalemites, especially from Silwan, countered this aggression by cleaning and weeding the cemetery, and restoring the tombstones, in addition to destroying the iron partitions every Friday, starting on 11/5/2018.<sup>76</sup> This reaction made the Israelis targeting the cemetery retreat gradually.

Israelis have focused on Mercy Cemetery, since it is part of the spatial division plan 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. Indeed, targeting the cemetery made Jerusalemites realize that the real target was the opposite side, inside *al-Aqsa* Mosque, and this could be considered one of the drivers of the Gate of Mercy uprising nine months later.

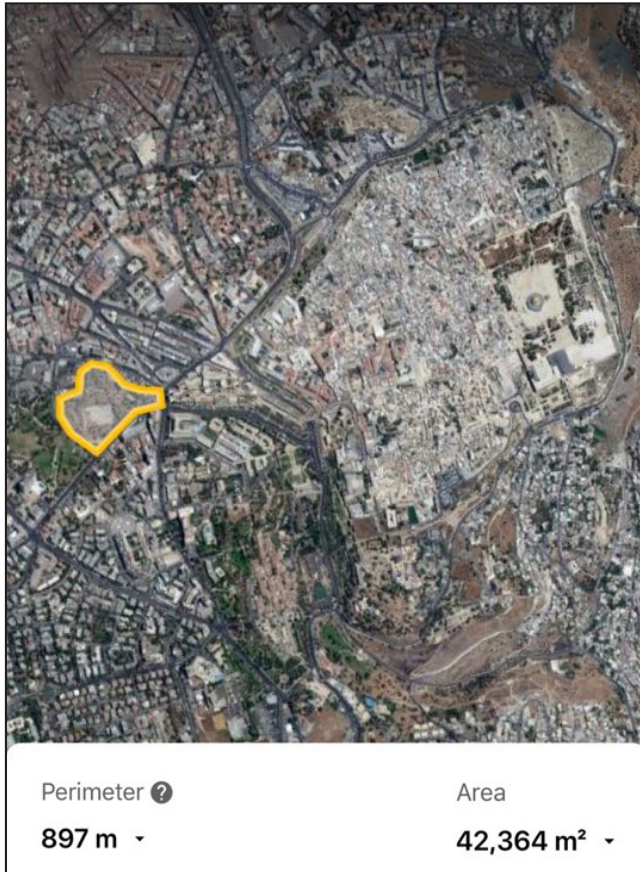
Temple extremists joined the confrontations, raiding the cemetery and performing biblical rituals when celebrating their holidays. Such aggressions occurred on 10/12/2018, in April 2019 and on 29/11/2019.<sup>77</sup>

#### **b. The Mamilla Cemetery<sup>78</sup>**

On Monday 11/2/2019, media outlets and activists on social media platforms circulated an advertisement posted by the Jerusalem municipality, revealing the municipality's intention to widen a pedestrian walkway in the cemetery to become a street for cars, giving a 60-day notice for any objection starting 11/1/2019. This expansion was a prelude to the inauguration of the Center for Human Dignity—Museum of Tolerance (MOT), which was built on the cemetery and is expected to be inaugurated in 2020.

Although Arab sources say that the remaining part of the cemetery is 20 donums only, area calculation via Google Earth after accurate identification of the corners of the cemetery shows that the remaining area is 42 donums,<sup>79</sup> including the Mamilla Pool, which covers six donums of Waqf property dedicated for the cemetery. These remaining donums are likely to be the target of repeated aggression as Israel views the cemetery as land in a strategic location, on which it would establish important commercial, governmental and touristic facilities.

**Map 2/3: The Remaining Part of the Mamilla Cemetery Including the Mamilla Pool**



**c. Al-Mujahidin Cemetery**

Al-Mujahidin Cemetery is less frequently targeted than other Jerusalem cemeteries. However, it witnessed an incident on 12/3/2018, when Israeli forces raided the cemetery and destroyed the headstones of the graves of those killed in

the 2015 Knives *Intifadah*, in an attempt to obliterate such symbols of the *Intifadah*, while imposing continuous siege on their families and neighborhoods.<sup>80</sup>

#### **d. Attacks on Mosques**

During the period covered in this report, settlers attacked many mosques, among which was Sheik Makki Mosque in the Old City in the end of February 2019, repeating the attack on 11/3/2019.<sup>81</sup> Also, on 12/9/2019, Israeli forces launched tear gas in al-Arba'in Mosque in 'Isawiyyah, where a number of worshippers suffocated.<sup>82</sup>

### **3. The Islamic Holy Sites in the Rest of Palestine**

#### **a. The Ibrahimi Mosque**

Israel considers the division of the Ibrahimi Mosque a successful model to be emulated in *al-Aqsa* Mosque. The Protocol Concerning the Redeployment in Hebron (aka the Hebron Protocol) signed on 17/1/1997 between the PLO and Israel, frustrated the Palestinian resistance and divided Hebron into two areas; H-1 and H-2. Area H-2 is completely under Israeli control, and it includes al-Shuhada Street, al-Hisba, Tel Rumeida, the Old City and the Ibrahimi Mosque all the way to the settlements of Kiryat Arba and Givat Harsina.<sup>83</sup> Area H-1 is under Palestinian administration and includes the rest of the city's neighborhoods. In fact, this agreement was a reward for the settlers, even after the massacre they committed in 1994, as it has placed the Mosque on their side of the city.

Although the Ibrahimi Mosque and the Old City were among the main axes of confrontation during *al-Aqsa Intifadah*, a lull prevailed from 2006 to 2019. However, during the 2017–2019 period, the media exposed developments in the Ibrahimi Mosque especially settlers escalating their attacks on the Mosque during Jewish holidays such as Passover, the Day of Atonement and the Feast of Tabernacles. In return, on 31/5/2018, the Hebron Municipality Community Center launched a campaign to support the popular initiative "Resist with your Prayers," which started in 2012 and was held annually during Ramadan despite attracting limited numbers.<sup>84</sup> This media awakening was followed by the emergence of a youth movement in October 2019 under the name "Protectors of the Ibrahimi Mosque," inviting people to gather for Friday dawn prayers, while reassuring the participants that there were measures to prevent the recurrence of a massacre against them. The youths stood around the worshippers in the Mosque and outside

as they performed prayers.<sup>85</sup> This initiative was launched on Friday 22/11/2019, and was titled the Great Dawn campaign.<sup>86</sup> Eight weeks later, on Friday 10/1/2020, the campaign was emulated in *al-Aqsa* Mosque,<sup>87</sup> and in the tenth week, on Friday 24/1/2020, it spread throughout the WB mosques as well as outside Palestine.<sup>88</sup> The Great Dawn campaign continues as of the time of writing.

Throughout 2018–2019, the Ibrahimi Mosque was targeted by 1,429 Israeli attacks, shown in the table below:<sup>89</sup>

**Table 1/3: Israeli Attacks Against the Ibrahimi Mosque 2018–2019<sup>90</sup>**

Attacks	2018	2019
Worshippers entry obstructions	57	43
Intrusions and performing biblical rituals	28	27
Constructions altering its surrounding features and excavations	15	20
Mosque Closure	17	16
Arrests inside the Mosque	12	4
Beating worshippers	3	3
Against the infrastructure	5	13
Interfering in crews' work	3	5
Preventing popular events	n/a	5
Adhan Ban	631	522
<b>Total</b>	<b>771</b>	<b>658</b>

Note: The data here is for the Jan-early Dec 2019 period.

### **b. Attacks in other Regions of Palestine**

Attack statistics on holy sites are unavailable due to the Israeli closure of concerned specialized institutions, including the International Solidarity Foundation for Human Rights in Nablus and Al-Aqsa Association for Waqf and Heritage which were closed in 2014 and 2015.



Alternative statistics were published by the Palestinian Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, which stated that the holy sites in the GS and WB, including East Jerusalem, were subjected to 1,300 attacks in 2018,<sup>91</sup> while figures for 2019 had not been published at the time of writing. Most attacks outside Jerusalem and the Ibrahimi Mosque were focused on two sites: Joseph's Tomb in Balata, which witnessed repeated raids and the performance of biblical rituals, and Bilal bin Rabah Mosque in Bethlehem, which Israelis claim is Rachel's Tomb.

#### **4. Christian Holy Sites in Jerusalem and Palestine**

The historic case of Orthodox Christians in Palestine still affects their presence and holy sites. The Israeli authorities have taken advantage of the rift between national Orthodox Christians and the religious leadership of Greek clergy, to seize vital Church properties throughout Palestine. This rift has been the main reason for the depletion of the Christian presence in Palestine as it pushes lots of Orthodox Palestinians towards migration to escape the Israeli occupation and the Greek hegemony over the Patriarchate.<sup>92</sup>

##### **a. Final Ruling on Real Estates at Omar Square**

On 29/5/2019, the Israeli Supreme Court issued its ruling concerning the selling of the Petra and Imperial Hotels in Omar Square facing Jaffa Gate, to the west of the Old City, and the shops in al-Malik al-Mu'azzam 'Issa Street, to the north of the Old City, referred to as "al-Mu'azzamiya Palace" in the case documents. It ruled in favor of the settlers who have bought the properties.<sup>93</sup>


The ruling has cast doubts on the seriousness of the vows by the Patriarchate and Patriarch Theophilos III to annul the deal. Indeed, the National Orthodox Movement has always questioned that seriousness saying that the way the Patriarchate was managing the judicial course was doomed to failure. For its part, the Patriarchate responded by refuting the accusations and questioning the intentions of the Movement; it even employed an Israeli PR company to defend it in the media.<sup>94</sup>

Ultimately, matters reached the point the national Orthodox activists had long warned against; and, strangely, the Israeli judge who pronounced the ruling expressed his surprise at the way the Patriarchate managed this case, stating that the latter did not challenge the signatures of its agent, Nikolas Papadimos, even

though it has accused him of signing the deal without its knowledge or approval. Nor did it take the initiative to return the sums it received from the front companies representing settlement organizations in exchange for leasing these properties for 99 years. Here, the judge said in his decision that “the Patriarchate cannot hold both ends of the rope claiming, on the one hand, the invalidity of the deals, and on the other hand keeping the funds for itself.”<sup>95</sup>

Patriarch Theophilos III had previously signed a pledge to nullify the Omar Square deal as a condition for his assumption of the Patriarchate as successor to Patriarch Irenaios I, who was dismissed after the disclosure of that deal in 2005. With the issuance of the final ruling in this case, Theophilos III has failed to fulfill that pledge, 14 years after his signature before the Jordanian government, which means that he violated the condition that enabled him to take charge of the patriarchate.<sup>96</sup>

### The Document Signed by Theophilos




بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم  
في شهر ربيع الثاني سنة ١٤٣٥ هـ  
١٨ / ١٢ / ٢٠١٥ م

أعهد والتزم بإصدار تعليماتنا لجرد ومسح هندسي للأماكن غير المنقولة والتي تعود لبطريركية الروم الأرثوذكس المقدسية مع إرسال تفريغها عنها للحجرات الرسمية الأردنية وكذلك لتقديم بيان واضح لها عن الأماكن المنقولة وغير المنقولة التي تعود للبطريركية .

رئيس أساقفته طابور  
ثيوفيلوس  
*Theophilos III*

تمت في عمان بتاريخ ١٨ / ١٢ / ٢٠١٥ م



**تعهد والتزام**  
**بتنفيذ أحكام قانون بطريركية الروم الأرثوذكس المقدسية**  
**رقم (٢٧) لسنة ١٩٥٨ م**

نظراً لتكون قانون بطريركية الروم الأرثوذكس المقدسية رقم (٢٧) لسنة ١٩٥٨ م السند القانوني والمرجعية القانونية لبطريركية الروم الأرثوذكس المقدسية في جميع أعمالها ومهامها فأن الموقع أدناه...  
١. أتعهد والتزم بتنفيذ جميع أحكام قانون بطريركية الروم الأرثوذكس المذكور بحدوده إذا انتخبت بطريرك .  
٢. أتعهد والتزم بالعمل على إلغاء كافة الوكالات التي صدرت من قبل الراهب إيريسوس (البطريرك السابق) لأي شخص كان والمتعلقة بموضوع التصرف بالأماكن المنقولة وغير المنقولة التابعة لبطريركية الروم الأرثوذكس المقدسية .  
٣. أتعهد والتزم بالعمل على اتخاذ كافة الإجراءات القانونية اللازمة لإبطال أية عقود أو صفقات بيع أو إيجار تمت بموجب هذه الوكالات المشار إليها أعلاه أو غيرها تتعلق بالأماكن المذكورة .  
٤. أتعهد والتزم بالتمسك بأحكام قانون بطريركية الروم الأرثوذكس المقدسية رقم (٢٧) لسنة ١٩٥٨ م وتطبيقه وخاصة فيما يخص المجمع المقدس كما تشير المادة الرابعة منه .

Following the decision, the United Orthodox Organization and the Movement of Truth, led by national Orthodox activists, issued a statement saying that “The Orthodox public’s concerns about all Theophilos III’s actions during this case, which lasted for nearly 14 years, were validated. Theophilos III, who has sold thousands of donum [...], cannot be faithful to Jaffa Gate endowments, which are in the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict.” Theophilos III and his legal team tried to make a case in front of the Supreme Court, by presenting new evidence, so that the case would be reviewed.<sup>97</sup> Only time will tell if these endeavors will succeed.

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

#### **The Case of the Monastery of Sultan:**

On 23/10/2018, Coptic monks carried out a sit-in in protest at the Israeli attempt to carry out restoration work in the Monastery of Sultan, which is the historical share of the Copts in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. The following day, Israeli police used force to suppress the peaceful monks and arrested several of them.<sup>98</sup> The Israeli police started the renovation of the monastery, effectively assuming the role of supreme authority over the Church or the guardian of Christian holy sites in Jerusalem. These actions served Israel in its endeavors to reinforce its sovereignty over the city and consider itself an inherent authority.

The Monastery of Sultan is a monastery located on the roof of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher,<sup>99</sup> and was dedicated as the share of the Copts according to the status quo established by the Treaty of Berlin between the Ottoman State and the European powers signed after the Russian-Ottoman War in 1878.<sup>100</sup> The monastery is usually headed by the bishop of the Metropolitan of Jerusalem.

The dispute over this monastery is between the Coptic Church and the Ethiopian Church, two churches that were separated in 1959. Their dispute began in 1820, when restoration works required its evacuation,<sup>101</sup> and the Ethiopian monks feared that the Copts would not allow them to return. Although they were allowed back, the plague of 1837 ended their limited presence in Jerusalem.<sup>102</sup> Since then, they have sought to maintain a permanent presence in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher by claiming eligibility in the Monastery of Sultan. Britain used this situation as an appropriate opportunity to change church administration arrangements that were confined to the three Orthodox sects: the Romans, the Armenians, and the Copts,

and since then a long period of conflict began which intensified with the separation of the Ethiopian Church from the Coptic Church.

For the Israeli authorities, this conflict was deemed an important opportunity to limit the Arab Christian presence in Jerusalem, especially as the Coptic Church was one of the three Churches of the East, which were historically entrusted with managing the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. Thus, Israel sided with the Ethiopians and broke into the Monastery in 1970, installed new keys and handed them over to the Ethiopian monks.<sup>103</sup> Israel still uses this dispute as an excuse for its direct intervention in the administration, maintenance, and reconstruction of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, thus adding points of strength in its relationship with the West and the Christian world in general.

### **Closing the Church of the Holy Sepulcher Crisis:**

In addition to the issue of the Monastery of Sultan, a crisis erupted when the heads of the three churches: the Greek Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox and Roman Catholic, announced the closure of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher on 25/2/2019. Their step was to object to Israel's imposition of Arnona tax on church properties. Israel wanted to benefit from Trump's decision and enforce Israeli sovereignty on Jerusalem and its Christian holy sites. However, the Israeli government had to back off three days after the churches took their stance.<sup>104</sup>

In 2019, churches were attacked twice: first on 14/5/2019 when unidentified assailants broke into the Church of God in 'Aboud, west of Ramallah;<sup>105</sup> and the other on 25/12/2019 when a knife-wielding settler stormed the Church of the Holy Sepulcher during Christmas Mass causing panic among worshippers.<sup>106</sup>

### **c. Decrease in the Number of Arab Christians in Jerusalem**

By the end of 2017, the number of Arab Christians in Jerusalem was 12,600, comprising 4% of Arab Jerusalemites and 2.2% of the residents of eastern Jerusalem. Adding 3,200 non-Arab Christian residents, the total number was 15,800. If this number is compared to the total population of Jerusalem, Christians would comprise 1.8%, the lowest rate of Christian presence in Jerusalem since the emergence of the church in the city 2000 years ago.<sup>107</sup>

## *Second: Population Under Occupation*

### **1. The Reality of the Demographic Battle**

By the end of 2017, the demographic balance in Jerusalem was as follows:

**Table 2/3: Demographic Balance in Jerusalem as of 2017<sup>108</sup>**

Area	Arabs		Jewish settlers*		Total**
	Number	Percentage (%)	Number	Percentage (%)	
<b>East Jerusalem (occupied in 1967)</b>	337,400	61	215,900	39	<b>553,300</b>
<b>West Jerusalem (occupied in 1948)</b>	3,900	1	343,900	99	<b>347,800</b>
<b>Total</b>	341,300	38	559,800	62	<b>901,100</b>

\* Since 1995, this number represents the “Jews and others” category in Israeli statistics. It includes non-Arab Christian residents and those not classified in terms of religion, such as Buddhist, Hindu, and non-Jewish immigrants, in addition to the Lahd army agents who fled to Israel after the liberation of southern Lebanon in 2000.

\*\* Numbers are from the source, however, there might be slight differences in the hundredths as a result of rounding.

The demographic concern has been essential in shaping Israeli expulsion policies since the formation of the Inter-ministerial Committee to Examine the Rate of Development in Jerusalem (the Gafni Committee) in 1972, which determined that the demographic balance should be maintained at 30% Arabs and 70% Jews, but it is clear that those goals were not attainable. In the beginning of the current millennium, Sergio DellaPergola, an Israeli demographer and statistician, conducted studies on the population balance in Jerusalem, which became an official part of the Jerusalem Master Plan 2020. DellaPergola predicted, using statistical models, that the population balance would reach 40% Arab and 60% Jew. Thus, the Plan aimed to prevent these percentages being realized by 2020 using all possible means of planning,<sup>109</sup> including organization, construction, mass displacement, increasing financial burdens, spatial pressure, controlling public space for the benefit of settlements, settlement roads, and transportation projects. However, it is obvious that this percentage will be reached despite all these measures, and even if it is not fully realized, keeping it in favor of Jewish

settlers will be in measuring to the decimal tenths, unless the Israeli government modifies Jerusalem's borders before 2020.

## **2. Attempts to Expel the Palestinian Population**

In the period covered in this report, Israel pursued the mass expulsion of Palestinians from the Khan al-Ahmar and Batn al-Hawa neighborhoods in Silwan, and the appropriation of property in other areas of Silwan and in the Old City. As for ID withdrawal, on 29/4/2018, blue residency cards were withdrawn from Jerusalem MPs and its former minister: Muhammad Abu Tair, Ahmed 'Atun, Muhammad Totah and Khaled Abu 'Arafah. This was after the Knesset approved a legal amendment authorizing the Minister of Interior to revoke the permanent residency of Jerusalemites.<sup>110</sup> Previously, on 13/9/2017, the Israeli Supreme Court overturned a decision by the Minister of Interior to withdraw permanent residency cards from the Jerusalem MPs and its former minister, since it fell outside his jurisdiction.<sup>111</sup>

### **a. Attempts to Evacuate Khan al-Ahmar**

Since 2012, Israel has sought to evacuate Khan al-Ahmar while facing popular resilience and steadfastness from several gatherings, whose residents reconstructed them every time they were destroyed. This was despite the fact they had witnessed the army's destruction of a number of communities of the Jahalin Bedouins, who populated that area after a previous displacement. Foreign solidarity and Jerusalemite public sympathy with the cause of the Jahalin Bedouins helped their steadfastness, which was one of the reasons the completion of the Separation Wall from the eastern side of Jerusalem was disrupted.

Following Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, Israeli authorities deemed it an opportune moment to expand the geographic scope of this decision. They tried to evacuate Khan al-Ahmar to complete the Separation Wall around the Adumim settlement bloc, to the east of Jerusalem, and announce extended borders of the city which coincide with the Separation Wall, at an estimated area of 290 kilometers square. This ultimately meant that Trump had not only recognized Jerusalem but "Greater Jerusalem" as well.

The evacuation attempt, however, faced two major difficulties: The first was international rejection, mainly by the Russians and Europeans, and even by the US Democratic Party, who deemed the expansion of Jerusalem to the Jordan Valley

would mean an end to the two-state solution and any political process based on it, especially as the expansion was based on a geographical barrier, the Separation Wall.

The other difficulty was the popular movement, especially in the Abu Nawwar community, whose residents (only 180 persons) spearheaded the resistance,<sup>112</sup> despite the area threatened with demolition having a population estimated at 2,400 people. This popular movement benefitted from two factors: the first was that the PA considered the evacuation of Khan al-Ahmar an existential threat, so it adopted the popular action and Fatah activists widely participated, thus encouraging activists from other movements to participate; and the other was the participation of foreign solidarity activists, who have been concerned with Khan al-Ahmar since the evacuation project started in 2012.

On 24/5/2018, the Israeli Supreme Court approved the destruction of Khan al-Ahmar communities,<sup>113</sup> and on 23/6/2018, Israeli forces announced their readiness to carry out the destruction and popular activities began in response. On 3/7/2018, the Israeli authorities ordered the closure of the roads leading to Khan al-Ahmar and the sealing of its entrances, and on 4/7/2018, Israeli forces raided the community and clashed with protestors leaving 35 injured. The raids were renewed on 11/7/2018 but the occupation forces could not carry out the destruction. On 15/7/2018, Israeli forces installed iron gates at the entrance of Abu Nawwar community to besiege it, but when they tried to destroy it on 16/9/2018, after two months of siege, they were faced with the same protests. Israel's attempts were repeated on 23/9/2018 through the distribution of demolition notices to the Abu Nawwar community in Khan al-Ahmar,<sup>114</sup> and on 17/10/2018 and 19/10/2018.

On 17/10/2018, a new international development emerged in the case of Khan al-Ahmar, as the International Criminal Court (ICC) Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda announced that the demolition of Khan al-Ahmar constituted a war crime, and that she would not hesitate to take any appropriate action.<sup>115</sup> This announcement was the major point that urged the Israeli government to retreat, and Netanyahu declared on 20/10/2018 the indefinite postponement of Khan al-Ahmar demolition.<sup>116</sup>

This postponement dealt a major blow to the US recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital, for amending the borders of the city was the first official Israeli

step to transform that recognition into a reality. This made the retreat an important setback which the Israelis could not easily accept, and they are likely would try again at the earliest favorable opportunity. However, it would necessarily be in a sudden and swift manner in order to prevent an accumulation of popular movements. Nevertheless, if international support and media coverage are maintained, the return of the Israelis will be difficult. In addition, providing the Khan al-Ahmar communities, who rely on grazing and dairy production, with reasons to stay would undermine Israel's strategic reliance on their slow migration, and perhaps this last element has been the most misunderstood in this issue.

### **b. Appropriations of Jerusalemites' Houses**

In 2018, major Jerusalem properties were taken over by Israel, mainly in Silwan and the Old City, which had been part of the Judaization goals since the beginning of the twentieth century. Remarkably, the Israeli authorities disclosed these properties in October 2018:

- **Fteiha property in Silwan:** On 3/10/2018, media outlets disclosed the transfer of a plot of land with two apartments built on it, owned by the Fteiha family and located near Silwan Spring.<sup>117</sup>
- **Joudeh al-Husseini property in Aqaba Darwish:** On 4/10/2018, it was announced that a transfer occurred of a three-story property owned by Joudeh al-Husseini, located in Aqaba Darwish on the road to King Faisal Gate, one of the most important gates of *al-Aqsa* Mosque. What was striking about the circumstances of this loss was that it was the result of an internal Fatah dispute. Fadi El-Salameen, a Palestinian activist living in the US and an associate of ex-Fatah leader Muhammad Dahlan, tried to buy a Joudeh al-Husseini property in 2015, and signed a preliminary contract with the owners before the PA intelligence services led by Majid Faraj interfered, according to El-Salameen's narrative, and prevented the money transfer. After a year, Muhammad al-'Attari, a businessman said to be close to Faraj, stepped in to buy the property and transfer its ownership to a settler-owned company registered in one of the international tax havens. Al-'Attari, in turn, denied his involvement in the leak and accused the landlords of being responsible for it.<sup>118</sup>
- **Al-'Alami property in Aqaba Darwish:** On 24/10/2018, news emerged about the transfer of a property, 60% of which is owned by al-'Alami family and 40%



by al-Halabi family. It was revealed that the property was sold to Palestinian organizations by a broker named ‘Issam ‘Akel, the Director of the Association of Palestinian Local Authorities of the Ministry of Local Government. Palestinian security forces arrested ‘Akel, and, after an investigation committee confirmed his involvement, a PA court sentenced him on 31/12/2018 to life imprisonment.<sup>119</sup> During ‘Akel’s detention, Israel and the US pressured the PA to free him, and the Israeli forces arrested a number of PA leaders, including Jerusalem Governor ‘Adnan Ghaith. They also prevented the Minister of Jerusalem Affairs ‘Adnan al-Husseini from traveling for three months, and withdrew the VIP card of Ahmad Barak, the PA Prosecutor who ordered the apprehension of ‘Akel.<sup>120</sup> Ultimately, US pressure led to handing ‘Akel over to the US on 17/1/2019, after 17 days of his life imprisonment sentence.<sup>121</sup> On 5/3/2019, the issue of al-‘Alami property came to an end as settlers seized it with Israeli police protection.<sup>122</sup>

- **Abu Sbeih property in Silwan:** Late on 22/10/2018, the Israeli police stormed a three-story apartment building in the Batn al-Hawa neighborhood in Silwan, to seize it. Later, it was revealed that the person involved in the property transfer was Yusuf Abu Sabei, a broker who has previously transferred the property of a family in Bab al-Hadid in Jerusalem’s Old City. The next day, Yusuf’s family issued a statement that disavowed him and confirmed that any sale by any family member must be presented to the Family Council.<sup>123</sup>

This synchronization in the transfer announcements, each of which takes many years of preparation and processing, was probably not accidental. Rather, it was planned to affect Jerusalemites’ morale and make them believe that their resilience was futile and that their fortifications would collapse from within at the hands of traitors.

The transfer of property in Jerusalem has led to major losses in recent years, including 53 housing units in Batn al-Hawa in Silwan, and 21 housing units in al-Hara al-Wusta in 2014, in addition to strategic real estate in the Old City, such as al-Yuzbashi property in al-Sa‘adiya neighborhood in 2016, and the aforementioned al-Husseini property. Still, the percentage of transfers remains limited, estimated at 73 housing units in the Old City, and 114 housing units in Silwan.

### 3. Demolition of Houses and Structures

The total number of structures demolished in Jerusalem between 2000 and 2019 was 1,688 structures, mostly residential buildings. This number was reached after adding those destroyed in 2018–2019 to the 1,352 residential structures demolished throughout 2000–2017.<sup>124</sup>

**Table 3/3: Demolition of Structures in Jerusalem in 2018<sup>125</sup>**

Neighborhood	Silwan	Shu‘fat RC	Beit Hanina	‘Isawiyah	Mukabbir Mount	Other neighborhoods	Total
Number of structures	30	21	19	18	17	38	143

**Table 4/3: Demolition of Structures in Jerusalem in 2019<sup>126</sup>**

Neighborhood	Mukabbir Mount	Silwan	Sur Baher	Beit Hanina	Shu‘fat and Shu‘fat RC	Other neighborhoods	Total
Number of structures	47	42	29	23	23	9	173

The period following Trump’s Jerusalem decision witnessed unprecedented demolition, not witnessed since *al-Aqsa Intifadah*. On 20/11/2018, Israeli forces broke into the Shu‘fat RC with six bulldozers destroying 16 commercial shops and their contents in two days.<sup>127</sup> On 22/7/2019, they demolished 100 apartments in six buildings in Wadi Hummus, east of Sur Baher, most of which were under construction and were intended to be populated by around 350 Jerusalemites, while many apartments were populated by a total of 24 Jerusalemites. Thus, this was the largest demolition in Jerusalem since the demolition of the Moroccan Quarter in 1967.<sup>128</sup>

### 4. The Field Situation in Jerusalem

Since 2013, Jerusalem has experienced confrontations, which waxed and waned, but did not stop. During this period, confrontations passed through four peaks: Abu Khdeir uprising in July 2014; the Knives *Intifadah* in October 2015; Lion’s Gate uprising in July 2017; and the Gate of Mercy uprising in February 2019. With the beginning of 2020, the situation seemed to be heading to a fifth peak with the Great Dawn campaign.

The general pattern of these peaks shows a state of unrest, but fall short of an overall *Intifadah*, with an average of 18 months separating one peak from the other. Significantly, the uprisings were popular movements, which erupted in response to attacks against individuals or against *al-Aqsa* Mosque, and in the latter case, the three movements succeeded in forcing the Israeli forces to retreat.

Location wise, the uprisings were concentrated in neighborhoods in Jerusalem's center: the Old City, Silwan and al-Tur, in addition to 'Isawiyyah and the Shu'fat RC in the north, and Mukabbir Mount to the south, albeit to a lesser degree. Although the Shu'fat RC and Mukabbir Mount were at the heart of confrontations in the first years of these uprisings between 2013 and 2015, they maintained calm in later years, whereas Jerusalem's central neighborhoods and 'Isawiyyah remained the hotbed of confrontations until 2020. Apparently, the isolated locations of Beit Safafa and Sur Baher to the south of Jerusalem and Kafr 'Aqab to the north influenced their connection with the city's fabric and its confrontations. As for Beit Hanina, the suburb housing of the richer Jerusalemites, it continued to be the calmest throughout those years, even though it connects different northern neighborhoods.

In 2018 and 2019, Jerusalem witnessed the following attacks:

**Table 5/3: Attacks in Jerusalem 2018–2019<sup>129</sup>**

Year	Stabbing and stabbing attempt	Car ramming	Shooting	Explosive device	Total
2018	17	0	4	7	28
2019	13	1	2	15	31

In Jerusalem, five persons were killed in 2018, and six others in 2019.<sup>130</sup>

### **5. 'Isawiyyah: A Hotbed of Confrontations**

In addition to its academic role, the Hebrew University was a central starting point in northeastern Jerusalem, for the northern settlements were built around it after 1967, the French Hill is to its north, Ramat Eshkol to its northwest and Ma'ale Adumim parallel to it from the East. Consequently, 'Isawiyyah became located in the middle of these settlements and thus has been the location receiving a heavy share of attacks in all uprisings, and the one affected most by the policies of land grabbing, building prevention and home demolitions. The construction of

the Border Police Base in the far north of Sheikh Jarrah increased the exposure of ‘Isawiyyah to land grab, as it became the closest Arab neighborhood to that base, and the suppression of its residents turned into one of the basic training rounds of its members.

On 24/1/2018, Israeli forces broke into ‘Isawiyyah, supported by helicopters, and on 27/1/2018, they imposed a closure which lasted for several days. On 30/1/2018, six commercial stores were demolished, and on 1–2/2/2018, clashes took place due to the siege, where 20 Jerusalemites were injured. On 13/2/2018, two commercial stores were demolished, and on 18/2/2018 the siege was still intact while four youths were arrested. In response, on 9/3/2018, the ‘Isawiyyah people held their Friday prayers at the eastern entrance of their town and the confrontations resumed the following week, where 15 young men arrested.

On 15/4/2018, the clashes returned to ‘Isawiyyah as Israeli forces stormed the town with municipality crews to carry out new demolitions, but seemingly did not; and on 8/5/2018, they destroyed a gas station in the town. This targeting declined for a while, when the Israeli forces tried to evacuate Khan al-Ahmar given the geographical proximity of the two areas. When the evacuation was postponed, the forces stormed ‘Isawiyyah on 6/11/2018, warning that they would demolish a stadium there. Raids recurred on 12–13/11/2018, during which a *Musta‘aribeen* (*Mista‘arvim*— an elite Israeli undercover unit) unit arrested two children, and on 20/11/2018 and 7/12/2018, the town was stormed and clashes took place.

‘Isawiyyah experienced a peak of Israeli aggression during May-August 2019. On 15/5/2019, Israeli forces stormed the town and handed over 20 demolition notices, imposing a security curfew the next day. Confrontations escalated as the curfew continued until 27/6/2019, when Israeli forces shot the youth Muhammad Samir Obeid at point blank range in the head, killing him. After that, ‘Isawiyyah expressed its rage and demanded the Israeli forces hand over Obeid’s body, who was buried on 1/7/2019. Israeli forces wounded 56 Jerusalemites on the day of the funeral, and 80 the following day, while the security curfew remained intact. Israeli raids of the town and confrontations continued throughout July and August 2019, and in August the Israeli Army arrested the father of Muhammad Samir Obeid.

## 6. Targeting Symbols of Palestinian Sovereignty in Jerusalem

In 2018–2019, Israel continued disrupting the work of Jerusalem Governor ‘Adnan Ghaith by arresting him, placing him under house arrest and banning him from entering Jerusalem. The same policy was pursued towards Fadi Hidmi, the Minister of Jerusalem Affairs who was appointed when the Palestinian government was formed on 13/4/2019. The situation escalated on 20/11/2019 when Israeli forces closed the headquarters of the Education Directorate, which operated under the Administration of Jerusalem’s Awqaf, as well as the headquarters of the Arab Health Center and the Palestine TV office in the city.<sup>131</sup> Thus, Israel disrupted the political, educational, and media presence of PA institutions in Jerusalem despite their limited effectiveness. Such was Israel’s policy in 2018–2019, through which Netanyahu’s government tried to capitalize on Trump’s decision.

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

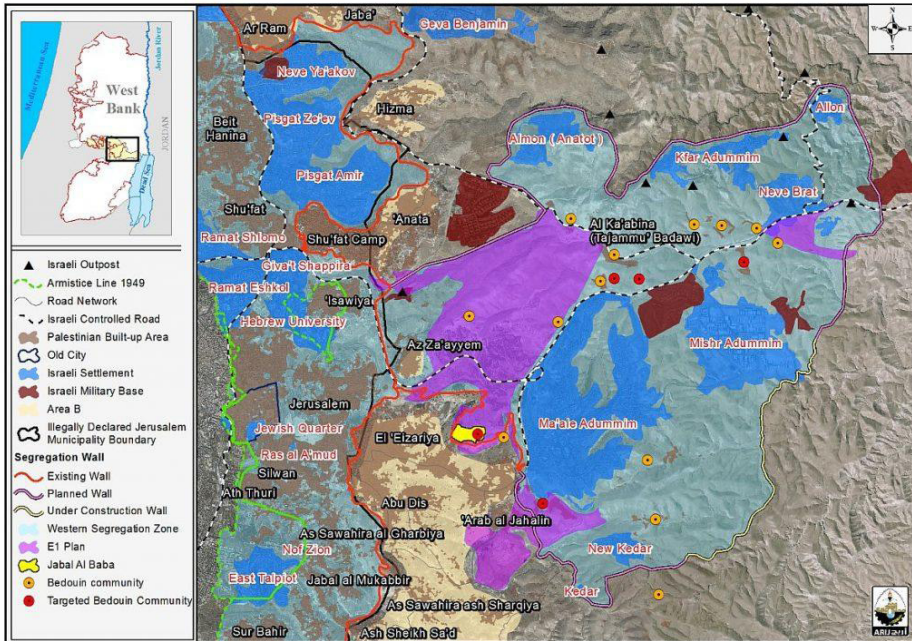
#### **The Return to Expansion Based on the Geopolitical Role of Settlements**

Over the past decade, Israel’s settlement expansion was based on their demographic function and their ability to attract more settlers to East Jerusalem, however, Trump’s decision apparently brought geopolitical considerations back to the forefront. Therefore, when drawing city boundaries was being taken into consideration, most of the expansion went in two directions:

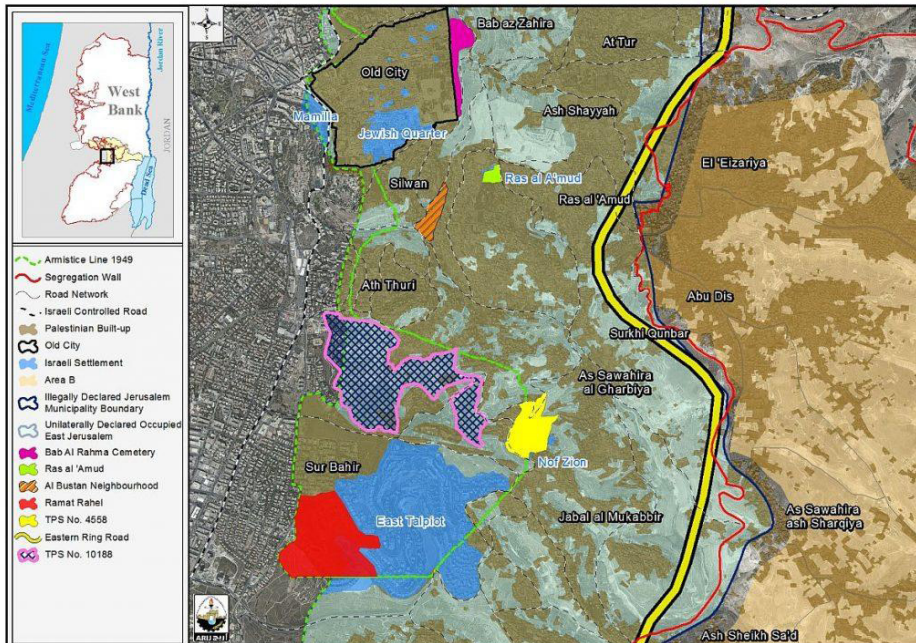
The first direction was expansion in the outer ring of settlements, especially the eastern and northern settlements, including Giv’at Ze’ev, Neve Ya’akov and Pisgat Ze’ev, besides the Ma’ale Adumim settlement bloc, juxtaposed with the plan to evacuate Khan al-Ahmar and promote east Ramallah settlements. This course reflected Israel’s determination to link Jerusalem to the slopes of the Jordan Valley, and prevent southern and eastern suburbs of Ramallah from expanding in this direction, while dividing the WB into northern and southern blocs (see map 3/3).

The second direction was the strengthening of the settlement presence in the center of Jerusalem, through the expansion of Talpiot bloc including Talpiot and East Talpiot settlements, and linking it to Nof Zion settlement built on Mukabbir Mount. This would isolate Sur Baher from the Arab fabric of Jerusalem, transforming it into a besieged suburb like Sharafat and Beit Safafa south of Jerusalem (see map 4/3).

**Map 3/3: East Jerusalem Settlements and Bedouin Communities at Risk of Eviction**



**Map 4/3: Expansion of Talpiot – Nof Zion Bloc to Promote Israeli Presence in the Center of Jerusalem**



Other expansion was mostly in Ramot bloc in the north, and to a lesser extent in the Gilo settlement to the south, since they were witnessing settler population growth contrary to other blocs, which developed on a geopolitical basis. These have historically succeeded in spatial annexation but fallen short of attracting settlers. The statistical tables below reveal the central trends throughout 2018–2019:

**Table 6/3: Approved Residential Units in the Settlements of Jerusalem  
2018–2019<sup>132</sup>**

Location	Settlement	2018		2019		Total
		No. of units approved or proposed for construction	Total units	No. of units approved or proposed for construction	Total units	
Jerusalem	Ramat Shlomo	1,243	3,357		5,720	9,077
	Ma'ale Adumim			1,303		
	Pisgat Ze'ev	250		1,070		
	Giv'at Ze'ev	196		110		
	Alon	325		325		
	Beit Orot			36		
	Geva Binyamin (Adam)	370		180		
	Neve Ya'akov			235		
	Har Adar	70				
	Kfar Adumim	92				
	Ma'ale Mikhmas	48				
	East Talpiot	711		603		
	Talpiot			641		
	Mukabbir Mount	48		100		
	Shepherd Hotel (Sheikh Jarrah)			13		
	Ramot			640		
Gilo	4	464				

**Table 7/3: Approved Residential Units in Outer Ring Settlements and Talpiot – Nof Zion Bloc Compared to Other Parts of the City 2018–2019<sup>133</sup>**

Settlement units	Number*	Percentage (%)	Expected household capacity
Approved in the outer ring	4,610	52.5	15,670
Approved in Talpiot–Nof Zion Bloc	2,103	22.5	7,150
Approved in other Jerusalem settlements	2,364	25.1	8,020
<b>Total approved units</b>	<b>9,077</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>30,840</b>

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

Note: Figures are based on table 6/3.

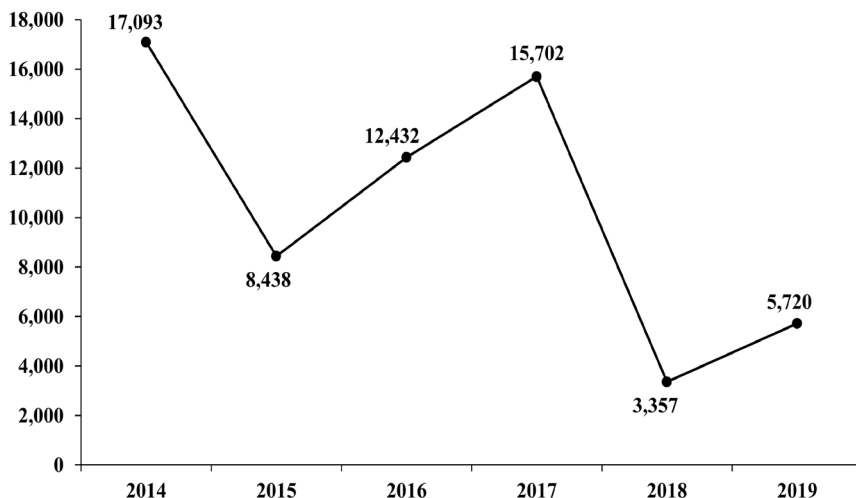
It is noteworthy that the number of units that witnessed development in planning or building throughout 2018–2019 saw growth at lower than previous rates, where 2018, the year after Trump’s decision, recorded the lowest number of settlement units to progress in their approval and construction stages (see table 8/3).

**Table 8/3: Approved Residential Units 2014–2019<sup>134</sup>**

Year	Settlement units
2014	17,093
2015	8,438
2016	12,432
2017	15,702
2018	3,357
2019	5,720



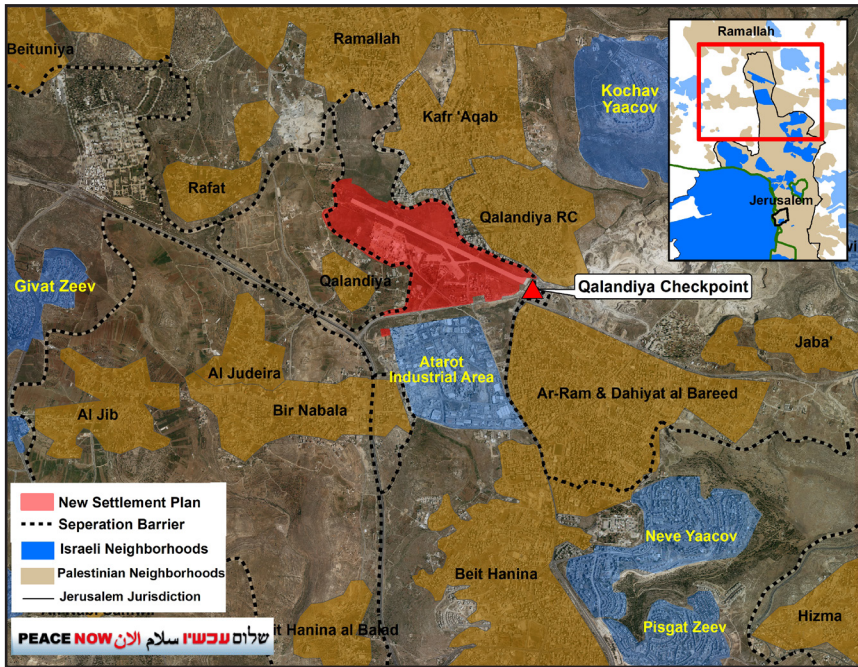
### Approved Residential Units 2014–2019



### Atarot Settlement Project on the Site of Qalandiya Airport

On 11/2/2020, the Ministry of Construction and Housing submitted a building plan to the Jerusalem municipality for the construction of a new settlement at the site of the closed Qalandiya Airport, in order to begin the process of studying it and adopting it in the local and district committees. This would mark the first time in a quarter of a century that the establishment of a new settlement in East Jerusalem began, since the establishment of Har Homa in place of Jabal Abu Ghneim in 1997. Giv'at HaMatos is a similar precedent, however, it was an expansion of an already established settlement nucleus. This settlement is expected to include 9,000 housing units,<sup>135</sup> and forms part of Israel's attempts to establish the final borders of Jerusalem, while being an impediment, alongside the Separation Wall, to prevent the expansion of Kafr 'Aqab and al-Ram and its connection with Beit Hanina. Therefore, it would exclude the possibility of connecting Ramallah and the outskirts of Jerusalem with Jerusalem's outer neighborhoods.

**Map 5/3: Suggested Location of Atarot Settlement Amidst Arab Neighborhoods That are Likely to Become Connected**



## *Fourth: Israeli Settlement Expansion in WB*

### **1. Development of Settlement Expansion in WB**

In 2018, the planning and building of 9,426 residential units in WB progressed, noting that Jerusalem’s residential units were analyzed in detail in the previous section. In 2019, there was progress in 9,413 settlement units, making the total 18,839 units over the two years. Adding the number of approved residential units in Jerusalem during the same period, the total was approximately 30 thousand. Notably, examining the number of units approved over recent years, we see a significant increase since President Donald Trump started his tenure in early 2017, when compared to the final two years of the Obama administration. Nevertheless, these figures are close to those of 2014. Here we stress that in order to understand better the expansion of settlements in WB, it is necessary to analyze the number of residential units and study their general context, while taking into consideration the sources providing these numbers and their methods of calculation.

**Table 9/3: Approved Residential Units in WB Settlements  
(Excluding Jerusalem) 2014–2019<sup>136</sup>**

Year	Settlement units
2014	8,688
2015	2,292
2016	2,655
2017	9,896
2018	9,426
2019	9,413

As for figures concerning settlement expansion, the following should be noted:

- Reports issued by Peace Now movement on settlements, are the main source for the numbers of settlements, which are in turn published by international reports and the media. These figures depend on plans and tenders published by Israeli authorities in approved newspapers.<sup>137</sup> We also need to take into consideration the fact that only 13 of all WB settlements are obliged to publish tenders for building new residential units.<sup>138</sup> Also, the method for counting settlement units results in the magnification of their total number as some units are counted when they are initially or locally approved, and when they are approved at the level of the ministerial committee as well as when they are submitted in construction tenders.
- There is lack of sources regarding the geographic distribution of residential units in various WB settlements. Peace Now relies mainly on the plans published by the settlement councils, which do not provide detailed information, as they are subject to amendment and review, and sometimes for redistribution before approval. Many of the settlement expansion projects also depend on previously approved plans, which extend beyond the covered period. The lack of sources is reflected in the mismatch of the figures in the aggregate tables and the detailed tables presented later in this chapter, as the latter rely almost entirely on media coverage of settlement expansion to compensate for the absence of accurate monitoring of this expansion.
- Despite the fluctuation in the number of housing units, those actually constructed in WB remained fixed during the past two years.<sup>139</sup> This could be a result of

several factors, the availability of logistical supplies and budgets as well as private sector investment, which depends on the demand for housing units. Nevertheless, some projects might be advanced due to funding from religious associations, regardless of regular market laws.

- The publication of construction plans does not necessarily crystallize in actual building in the years following the publication. For example, the period covered in this report saw the construction of 215 units in Avnei Hefetz in Tulkarem and Alei Zahav in Salfit based on plans approved in 1998,<sup>140</sup> which means 22 years between approval and actual construction.
- The rise in approved residential units throughout 2018–2019 was partly due to the bias of the US administration. In late 2019, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo stated that the “establishment of Israeli civilian settlements in the West Bank is not per se inconsistent with international law.”<sup>141</sup> Furthermore, it also reflected the political balances within Israel, for when a transitional government is formed by the Likud and the extreme right, it allows small parties to impose their agendas, and the Israeli prime minister increase his popularity through explicit support for settlement building. However, this might also mean that the approval of expansion plans is less likely to be executed in the near term, due to the fact that settlements are more related to the political climate than to the actual settlement activity.

## **2. Settler Population Growth and its Relation to Settlement Expansion in the WB**

Although the increase in the number of settlement units remained at around nine thousand annually during the past three years, the population growth rate in the settlements decreased from 4.8% in 2017 to 3.1% in 2019, which is the lowest growth rate recorded during the last decade, except in 2016, when it was 2.1%. This confirms that these expansions were governed by geographic control rather than actual population growth (see table 10/3).

Settler population growth is generally characterized by an increase, which has fluctuated in the past five years between 2.1% and 4.8%. This growth depends mainly on natural increase, especially among religious Jews, and on internal migration between settlements, while the numbers of new settlers is the third driver,<sup>142</sup> which raises the question about the real ability of Israel to build and populate all the settlement units it has approved in recent past years.

**Table 10/3: Population Growth in WB Settlements 2010–2019**<sup>143</sup>

Year	Number of settlers	Increase	Percentage of increase (%)
2010	311,100	–	–
2011	325,500	14,400	4.6
2012	341,400	15,900	4.8
2013	356,500	15,100	4.4
2014	370,700	14,200	3.9
2015	385,900	15,200	4.1
2016	394,300	8,400	2.1
2017	413,400	19,100	4.8
2018	427,800	14,400	3.4
2019	441,100	13,300	3.1

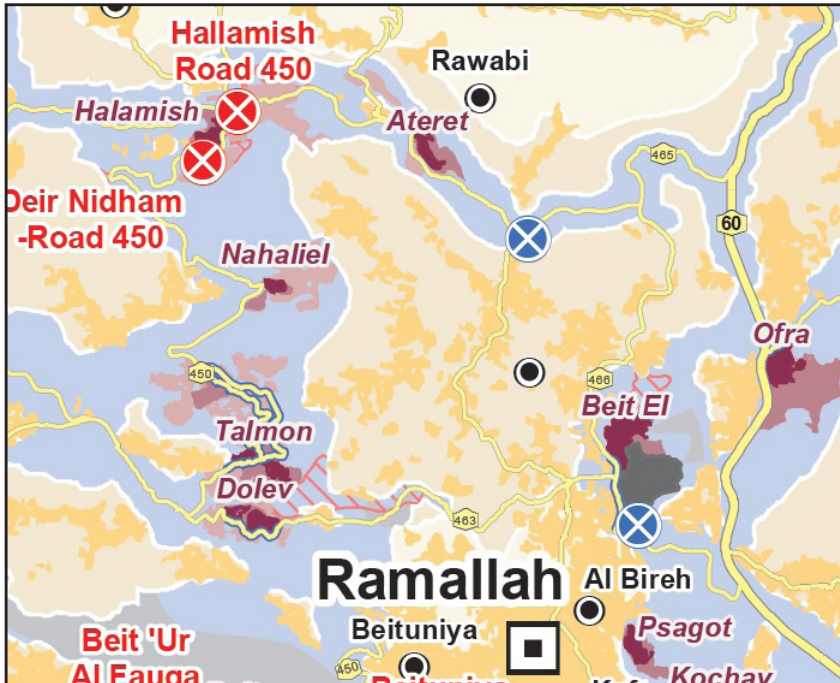
### 3. Analyzing Major Trends of Settlement Expansion in WB

A detailed analysis of settlement expansion, whether in terms of planning or construction, during 2018–2019, shown in tables 11/3 and 12/3 below, leads to the conclusion of the following basic trends:

- Permanently isolating Ramallah from Jerusalem: This is sought through focusing construction in settlements east and southeast of Ramallah, and in the eastern and northern outer ring of Jerusalem from the opposite side.
- Promoting deep settlement fingers starting from the Green Line deep into WB, including Qedumim finger in Qalqilya and Ariel finger in Salfit. Notably, more than two thousand settlement units were constructed in pursuit of this strategy.
- The consolidation of ideological-based settlement in the east Hebron settlements, which have remained stable in size for many years yet became the leading factor, besides Jerusalem, in deciding the Zionist identity according to Israel's vision. This was evident in Netanyahu's repeated visits to Hebron and his visits to the Ibrahimi Mosque in 2019 and 2020. Around 600 settlement units have been allocated for this purpose.

- Tightening Israel's grip over the northern Jordan Valley, and promoting the settlements on the road between Nablus and the Jordan Valley in Gilgal, Tomer, Petza'el and Ma'ale Efraim, at the expense of Duma, Fasayil and al-'Auja.
- Deep settlement incursion: Over the past two years, a large number of residential units were allocated to expand small settlements and outposts, which were established by settlers and had previously not been recognized by the Israeli government. In Ramallah, for example, more than a thousand residential units were allocated to expand the scattered settlements in the west, including Dolev, Talmon, Zayit Ra'anana (see table 11/3) and Halamish, so as to be contiguous and become a bloc, similar to Beit El in the east. This scene, together with limiting Ramallah from the south with Jerusalem envelope settlements, and limiting it from the north with the 'Atara crossing and Ateret settlement, which also disrupts its communication with Salfit, makes it reasonable to deduce that this approach means to prevent the expansion of Ramallah and limit its population within the current geographic sphere.

**Map 6/3: West Ramallah Settlements Sought to Become One Bloc**



- The same approach has been also pursued in Bethlehem. Despite the presence of a coherent bloc isolated by the Separation Wall, which is meant to annex it to Jerusalem from the west, analysis of the figures in table 12/3 shows that half of the expansion allocated to it went to the settlements of Nikodim east of Beit Sahour and Asfar to its south. These settlements are pressuring the towns of Bethlehem from the east and preventing their communication with the towns of north Hebron. In December 2018, the Israeli government approved the allocation of 1,200 donums of Khirbit al-Nahle lands for the Israeli Ministry of Construction and Housing to establish a new settlement called Givat Eitam,<sup>144</sup> thus completing the isolation of Bethlehem from the south of WB. This is part of the E2 project, seeking to entrap the Palestinian presence in the city and give the area a Jewish character, so it can become an Israeli tourist destination, capitalizing on the more than 1.5 million tourists who visit Bethlehem annually.
- The Israeli government resorts to building new types of settlements in areas where it is difficult to establish large population centers, especially in the Jordan Valley and eastern WB areas. These settlements include the construction of horse farms for recreation, where the Israeli leftist Kerem Navot Foundation documented the building of 37 stables and horse farms in Jordan Valley since 2000.<sup>145</sup> They also include the construction of touristic and industrial centers such as a motor park, whose construction is to be located between Central Jordan Valley and Ramallah governorate, and will include 120 hotel rooms.<sup>146</sup>
- Turning Jerusalem into an urban center for WB settlements so that their transportation systems are connected to it. The far-right Minister of Transportation Bezalel Smotric approved the plan and prepared to implement it. This explains why he rejected the comprehensive transportation plan in Israel, submitted on 27/6/2019, because it “discriminated” against WB settlers, ignored the development of transportation in the WB and did not invest enough to connect these settlements to Israeli cities.<sup>147</sup> In 29/11/2019, Smotrich announced a plan for the construction of a section of Highway 60 connecting Gush Etzion settlements to it, considering it the first of a dozen or so roads, which will require investments of money and time to be transformed into an integrated transportation network.<sup>148</sup>

**Table 11/3: Approved Residential Units in Northern WB Settlements  
2018–2019<sup>149</sup>**

Location	Settlement	2018		2019		Total
		No. of units approved or proposed for construction	Total units	No. of units approved or proposed for construction	Total units	
Ramallah	Ofarim	583	1,645		678	2,323
	Beit El	189		296		
	Zayit Ra'anana	503				
	Beit Aryeh	8				
	Halamish	60				
	Talmon	180				
	Psagot	9				
	Dolev	28		382		
	Givat Assaf	85				
Salfit	Peduel	107	1,099		148	1,247
	Alei Zahav	166		40		
	Etz Efraim	108		108		
	Kfar Tapuach	26				
	Bruchin	71				
	Revava	27				
	Ganei Modi'in	194				
	Ariel	400				



Location	Settlement	2018		2019		Total
		No. of units approved or proposed for construction	Total units	No. of units approved or proposed for construction	Total units	
Jericho and Jordan valley	Gilgal	234	764	98	280	1,044
	Givat Sal'it	94				
	Maskiot	27				
	Tomer	55				
	Fasayil	55				
	Ma'ale Efraim	299				
	Vered Yeriho			182		
Qalqilya	Karnei Shomron	85	1,554		130	1,684
	Kiryat Netafim	84				
	Imanuel	208		60		
	Nofim	278				
	Tzofim	435				
	Kedumim	464		70		
Nablus	Allon Shevut	15	71		207	278
	Barakha			207		
	Itamar	56				
Jenin	Tal Menashe	79	159		0	159
	Hinanit	80				
Tulkarem	Einav	81	211		0	211
	Avnei Hefetz	130				

**Table 12/3: Approved Residential Units in Southern WB Settlements  
2018–2019<sup>150</sup>**

Location	Settlement	2018		2019		Total
		No. of units approved or proposed for construction	Total units	No. of units approved or proposed for construction	Total units	
Bethlehem	Ibei HaNahal		841	98	1,502	2,343
	Efrat	106		300		
	Kfar Etzion	464				
	Kfar Eldad	84		105		
	Nikodim	4		770		
	Elazar	68				
	Metzad	100		207		
	Allon Shevut	15		22		
Hebron	Adora	60	1,523		152	1,675
	Ma'on	27				
	Sansana	128				
	Otniel	128				
	Pnei Hever	24		76		
	Tene Omarim	135				
	Hagai	135		76		
	Negohot	102				
	Metsada	61				
	Neve Daniel	180				
	Old City	30				
	Carmel	156				
	Karmeit Tzur	120				
	Sosia	81				
Kiryat Arba'	156					

## ***Fifth: The Separation Wall and Barriers in WB***

### **1. The Separation Wall**

In 2018–2019, there was no major development in the construction of the 708-kilometer-long Separation Wall, with progress not exceeding 0.3%.<sup>151</sup> This does not reflect Israel giving up on the Wall, but rather the fact that its main sections separating Palestinian towns from the 1948 occupied territories had already been completed, and the isolation of WB settlements had largely been achieved. The slow progress of the Wall's construction can also be attributed to the change in Israel's vision of its final borders. During recent years, approvals for establishing settlements and outposts east of the Wall increased, which meant that the original borders of the Wall no longer guaranteed the complete isolation of settlement blocs. The Israeli government continued to promote bypass road network and closing roads that connect Palestinian towns and villages, in order to ensure that Palestinians are unable to reach settlement blocs.

Most progress on the Wall, in 2018–2019, was the section surrounding Beit El settlement built on the lands of Jalazone town in the Ramallah Governorate, and the section surrounding Shaked settlement established on the lands of the village of Dahr al-Maleh in Jenin. The number of checkpoints and barriers along the Wall reached 123 during the period covered by this report.<sup>152</sup>

### **2. The Barriers<sup>153</sup>**

In 2019, the number of barriers in WB disrupting communication among Palestinian governorates, city centers, villages and towns reached 777, including iron gates, concrete roadblocks, earth mounds besides temporary and permanent checkpoints. Checkpoints are mainly found in the Hebron governorate, where 320 barriers exist, then Ramallah and Nablus governorates with 114 and 76 barriers respectively.

During the period covered by this report, the Israeli Army installed 15 new checkpoints in the Hebron governorate, most of which were in its southern villages, and 14 checkpoints in the Ramallah governorate mostly concentrated in its north to separate it from the northern towns.

## ***Sixth: House and Structure Demolitions and Land Confiscations***

### **1. House and Structure Demolitions**

In 2018–2019, the number of houses and structures in WB declined in comparison to 2016–2017. In 2018, 244 houses and structures were demolished in WB excluding Jerusalem,<sup>154</sup> for the latter was addressed previously in this chapter. These demolitions led to the expulsion of 246 people, where most of the demolitions were in Hebron with 72, Ramallah 35, and Salfit 35. In 2019, there were 384 houses and structures demolished, leading to the expulsion of 811 people, with most of the demolitions in Bethlehem with 123, Hebron 123 and Tubas 58.<sup>155</sup>

Field documentation by the Land Research Center (LRC) and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs-occupied Palestinian territory (OCHA-oPt) has shown differences in the numbers of demolition cases due to different methodologies. Yet at the same time, this difference shows the need to support the accurate documentation of demolition of houses and structures, so that it becomes more comprehensive, and hence more effective in bringing support to the owners of the homes and structures destroyed. The following table lists the cases documented by each side, noting that the period covered in this report saw deterioration in the funding of human rights organizations working in the occupied territories, whether these bodies were civil institutions or offices affiliated with the UN or its various bodies.<sup>156</sup> Ultimately, this raises questions about the success of the Israeli foreign policy in undermining efforts to monitor its aggression against the Palestinians.

**Table 13/3: House and Structure Demolitions in WB 2018–2019<sup>157</sup>**

<b>Source of documentation</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>
<b>OCHA-oPt</b>	244	384
<b>LRC</b>	317	171

## 2. Land Confiscation

In 2018–2019, more than 23,197 donums of land were confiscated for security reasons, or for settlement construction or expansion, or construction of bypass roads connecting settlements.<sup>158</sup> Ramallah governorate witnessed the highest cases of land confiscations of 5,965 donums,<sup>159</sup> Tubas governorate 2,444 donums, Salfit governorate 2,081 donums, and Hebron governorate 1,518 donums. These numbers were largely consistent with the settlement activity in the Ramallah Governorate, the northern Jordan Valley (Tubas Governorate), and the Salfit Governorate, which is characterized by low population density, fertility of land, and availability of water resources.

### *Seventh: The Water*

Israel controls about 80% of water resources in the WB,<sup>160</sup> considering them to be its own, while demanding the Palestinians there to obtain prior approval from Israel to use the water, even when collecting rain water or building water tanks. Consequently, it controls not only the use of water resources but also the trends of population growth and exploitation of arable land. Trump's Deal of the Century ignored the reference to the distribution of water resources in the WB, after it had been a basic clause in the Oslo Accords, thus reinforcing a situation whereby Israel deprives Palestinians of using their water resources. This contradicts the plan's own vision regarding the "prosperous Palestinian economy" in the WB.

In 2018–2019, Israeli forces destroyed 82 wells and agricultural ponds in WB, most of which were in Tubas and Hebron, along with over 50 irrigation networks in Ramallah, Nablus, Tubas, Salfit, and Jericho.<sup>161</sup>

### *Conclusion*

As US President Donald Trump announced on 6/12/2017 his administration's recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, the conflict over the city entered a potentially decisive stage. Apparently, Israeli pursuit of obliterating Jerusalem's identity and Judaizing the city will continue to receive unprecedented US support. This stage has been marked by a state of contention: Israeli attempts to impose

major changes, countered essentially with popular Jerusalemite movements and, to a lesser extent, Palestinian, Arab and Islamic action.

In general, Israel was able, in 2018–2019, to make several advances concerning Palestinian institutions and prominent figures of Jerusalem, for they closed the headquarters of the Education Directorate in Jerusalem and the Arab Health Center, as well as suspending and obstructing the work of the Governor and Minister of Jerusalem by repeatedly arresting them and preventing them from performing their duties. Israeli forces also carried out major demolitions in the Shu‘fat RC, Wadi Hummus and al-‘Azzariyah. They approved several projects which, if completed, will change the face of the city, such as the Jerusalem cable car in the vicinity of the Old City and a new major settlement project at the Qalandiya airport site in the north.

At the same time, Israel suffered two major setbacks: the first was in the Bedouin village of Khan al-Ahmar in East Jerusalem, where the Israeli Prime Minister had to announce the postponement of its demolition under international and popular pressure. The other was the opening of the Gate of Mercy following 16 years of Israeli closure, thanks to the Gate of Mercy uprising, which dispelled gradual Israeli efforts to evacuate the region and control it.

As for the aggression against *al-Aqsa* Mosque, it came in three parallel tracks. The first was the spatial and temporal division alongside break-ins, with the focus on gradually imposing public biblical prayers in the Mosque, which reached a peak in October 2019. The second track was depleting the role of the Jordanian Ministry of Awqaf, Islamic Affairs and Holy Places through two important developments: in early 2019, when Israel usurped the authority of Awqaf in the restoration of *al-Aqsa*'s southwestern wall, where the Jerusalem municipality carried out these restorations for the first time since the Israeli occupation of the Mosque; and in October 2019, by preventing *al-Aqsa* guards from accompanying or taking photos of settlers during their raids. The third track was the temporal division of both sides of the Gate of Mercy at the historical adjacent cemetery. Noticeably, 2019 witnessed the exclusive coincidence between Jewish holidays, which are a usual Israeli excuse to storm *al-Aqsa* Mosque, and major Islamic holidays (expected to recur in 2020 and 2021). This coincidence resulted in Israel raiding *al-Aqsa* Mosque on the 28th of Ramadan, and on the first day of *al-Adha* Eid, which marked the first time the Mosque had been raided during an Islamic Eid.

As for Christian holy sites, the Israeli Supreme Court issued a final decision regarding the Omar Square property, transferred in 2005 by the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate, noting that the current Patriarch Theophilos III was appointed to his position after vowing to annul this deal. Yet the opposite happened in 2019, and a blow was dealt to Arab and national Orthodox endeavor to protect the properties, as a result of the bias by the PA and Jordan to Theophilos III, whose legal efforts have ended up in complete failure so far.

The confrontations throughout 2018–2019 were mainly in Jerusalem’s central neighborhoods, in the Old City, Silwan and ‘Isawiyyah in particular. These neighborhoods waged continuous local uprisings for the sixth consecutive year since the summer of 2013. In return, Israeli “strikes” against Jerusalemites were more psychological, as was evident in the deliberate announcements in January 2018 regarding the transfer of Jerusalem property in the Old City and Silwan, although each of the deals has taken years to be completed. There were also major demolitions, unprecedented since *al-Aqsa Intifadah*, which were carried out with massive military reinforcements in the Shu‘fat RC in March 2018 and in Wadi Hummus east of Sur Baher in July 2019.

In 2018–2019, settlement building in Jerusalem, and the WB in general, focused on four central directions. The first was to strengthen the Jewish presence in central Jerusalem through infrastructure projects, such as the cable car in the vicinity of the Old City. The second direction was to connect the settlements of East Jerusalem to the slopes of the Jordan Valley, and isolate Jerusalem from Ramallah, leading eventually to a complete separation of the WB into two northern and southern islands encircled by the Jordan River. This was the original Israeli strategic vision for the WB as expressed by the Allon Plan in 1967. The third direction was to transform Jerusalem into an urban center for settlers living in WB settlements, on which they would depend for services, and to which they would be connected by roads and public transportation. Thus, it would solve the chronic problem of Jerusalem having limited geographic depth, for Jerusalem is relatively far from areas of Jewish concentration on the coastal plain. The fourth direction sought to bolster the east Hebron settlements bloc, which encircles its Old City from the east and put pressure on its neighborhoods, in an attempt to confirm the biblical identity of Israel.

Throughout 2020–2021, the conflict over the fate of Jerusalem will continue. Israel will continue its attempts for advancement under US cover, countered by the Jerusalemite and Palestinian response, along with limited Arab and Islamic support. The re-election of Donald Trump would be the most decisive element in determining the severity of the confrontation. For, in light of an Israeli political crisis, which is likely to entrench, unlimited US support to Israel remains the main driver for deciding the fate of the city. As for *al-Aqsa* Mosque, its role as a symbolic motive for popular uprisings will continue. This role has been renewed for three decades, starting with the Tunnel uprising in 1996 to the Gate of Mercy uprising in 2019. Israeli attempts to reclose the Gate of Mercy are likely to escalate, for the opening of the *Musalla* under popular pressure is still unacceptable to the Israelis. The other pretext for escalation would be storming *al-Aqsa* Mosque and the associated aggression, especially since in the coming two years, major Islamic and Jewish holidays will coincide. Therefore, the popular uprisings in Jerusalem will probably reoccur.

On the ground, the confrontation is expected to be bolstered in three directions: the first is the war on the symbols of the official Palestinian presence in Jerusalem leading to their disruption and marginalization. This would make Israeli approval of holding symbolic elections in post offices in Jerusalem as in previous experiences impossible. The second direction is the escalation of collective demolition, while focusing on the outskirts of major Palestinian neighborhoods in the Shu‘fat RC, Beit Hanina and Silwan. The third is the renewed confrontation related to Khan al-Ahmar.

The emerging popular movement in Hebron would largely determine the fate of the settlement expansion endeavor in the city, and it might even be able to end the experience of the division of the Ibrahimi Mosque, which Israel has considered a model for the division of *al-Aqsa* Mosque. The attempt to encircle Jerusalem and Ramallah from the east might develop into abolishing all potentials for geographic contiguity between the northern and southern parts of the WB; however, the course of popular confrontation will be a key factor in determining the success of this attempt.



## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> On 8/5/2001, Sharon formed this committee, see The Most Prominent Israeli Attacks on al-Aqsa Mosque 2001–2010, Wafa, [http://info.wafa.ps/ar\\_page.aspx?id=9552](http://info.wafa.ps/ar_page.aspx?id=9552) (in Arabic)
- <sup>2</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>3</sup> Ziad Muhammad, *'Ain 'ala al-Aqsa: Taqir Sanawy Yasdur 'an Mu'assasat al-Quds fi Thikra Ihraq al-Masjid al-Aqsa wa Yughatti al-I'tida'at al-Isra'iliyyah 'ala al-Masjid al-Aqsa ma bayna 1/1/2005–21/8/2006* (Eye on al-Aqsa: An Annual Documentary Report Issued by Al Quds Institution on the Anniversary of al-Aqsa Mosque Arson Monitoring Israeli Aggressions on al-Aqsa Mosque During the Period 1/1/2005–21/8/2006) (Beirut: Al Quds International Institution, 2006), p. 16.
- <sup>4</sup> Aljazeera.net, 21/7/2010. (in Arabic)
- <sup>5</sup> Mohsen Mohammad Saleh (ed.), *The Palestinian Strategic Report 2011/12* (Beirut: Al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies and Consultations, 2013), p. 286.
- <sup>6</sup> Research and Information Department, Al Quds International Institution, “The Gate of Mercy Uprising, Where Does it Stop? The choices of the Masses and the Jordanian State,” Situation Assessment, 2019, <http://alquds-online.org/> (in Arabic)
- <sup>7</sup> The Most Prominent Israeli Attacks on the al-Aqsa Mosque, 2001–2010, Wafa, [http://info.wafa.ps/ar\\_page.aspx?id=9552](http://info.wafa.ps/ar_page.aspx?id=9552) (in Arabic)
- <sup>8</sup> Interviews conducted by the researcher with the guards of *al-Aqsa* Mosque, and with the Sheikh Najeh Bakirat when he was managing *al-Aqsa* Mosque in May 2013 in Amman. See also: Mercy Gate: Renewed Confrontations in al-Aqsa, site of Metras, 20/2/2019, <https://metras.co> (in Arabic)
- <sup>9</sup> *Alrai* newspaper, Amman, 15/2/2019.
- <sup>10</sup> Aljazeera.net, 18/2/2019. (in Arabic)
- <sup>11</sup> Mohsen Mohammad Saleh (ed.), *The Palestinian Strategic Report 2012/2013* (Beirut: Al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies and Consultations, 2015), p. 270.
- <sup>12</sup> Mohsen Mohammad Saleh (ed.), *The Palestinian Strategic Report 2014–2015* (Beirut: Al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies and Consultations, 2016), p. 306.
- <sup>13</sup> See The Israeli Police Arrests 3 Women Who Are Relatives of Sheikh Raed Salah, Anadolu Agency, 25/7/2018 (in Arabic); and see also What's Going on at the Gate of Mercy in al-Aqsa Mosque?, Aljazeera.net, 19/6/2018. (in Arabic)
- <sup>14</sup> Arabs 48, 18/6/2018.
- <sup>15</sup> Site of Sanad News, 26/5/2019, <https://snd.ps/>
- <sup>16</sup> *The Jerusalem Post* newspaper, 17/3/2019, <https://www.jpost.com/Breaking-News/The-court-issued-a-closure-order-for-the-Golden-Gate-on-the-Temple-Mount-583694>
- <sup>17</sup> Aljazeera.net, 17/3/2019. (in Arabic)
- <sup>18</sup> Arabs 48, 3/3/2019.
- <sup>19</sup> Site of Al-Quds City, 6/4/2019, <http://www.alquds-online.org/news/30985>
- <sup>20</sup> This has repeatedly happened during the year, see Arabs 48, 21/7/2019; Filastin Al'an, 19/8/2019; and *Alghad*, 10/10/2019.
- <sup>21</sup> A field interview with one of the evacuees, who were evacuated from the vicinity of the Gate of Mercy on 14/10/2019. See also *Alghad*, 14/10/2019.

- <sup>22</sup> For example, on 3/12/2019, the Israeli forces arrested the Murabit (singular of Murabitun) Majd Kabha during his prayer in the upper courtyard facing the Gate of Mercy, and the Murabitah (feminine of Murabit) Muntaha Amarah, see site of El3en, 3/12/2019, <https://www.el3en.com/?app=article.show.36083>
- <sup>23</sup> *Alquds*, 2/1/2020.
- <sup>24</sup> *Al-‘Arabi al-Jadid*, 10/1/2020.
- <sup>25</sup> For more on the Moroccan Hill, see Mohsen Mohammad Saleh, *The Palestinian Strategic Report 2011/12*, pp. 290–293.
- <sup>26</sup> Concerning these claims, the State Comptroller presented an official report in 2011, *Haaretz*, 17/5/2011, <https://www.haaretz.com/1.5013410>
- <sup>27</sup> On 1/6/2016, the Jerusalem Municipality ordered a halt to the construction of additional restrooms at the Ghawanima Gate, because they have begun without the proper permits. These restrooms are still closed as of early 2020, see site of The Times of Israel, 1/6/2016, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/jerusalem-city-hall-orders-halt-to-illegal-waqf-construction-on-temple-mount/>
- <sup>28</sup> Research and Information Department, Al Quds International Institution, “An Information Paper and a Situation Assessment of the Stone Fall Incident on the Western Wall of al-Aqsa Mosque,” 2019. (in Arabic)
- <sup>29</sup> Al-Quds City, 25/1/2019, <http://www.alquds-online.org/index.php?s=news&id=30071>
- <sup>30</sup> Site of AlMamlaka TV, 6/2/2019, <https://www.almamlakatv.com/>
- <sup>31</sup> *Assabeel* newspaper, Amman, 25/7/2014.
- <sup>32</sup> QPress News Agency has covered this story, however, it was banned five months later. See citing the agency: *Assabeel*, 19/5/2015.
- <sup>33</sup> *Al-‘Arabi al-Jadid*, 13/3/2019.
- <sup>34</sup> Arabi21, 29/5/2019.
- <sup>35</sup> Wattan News Agency, 5/1/2020, <https://www.wattan.tv/ar/news/298778.html>
- <sup>36</sup> Aljazeera.net, 16/1/2018. (in Arabic)
- <sup>37</sup> Anadolu Agency, 7/11/2018. (in Arabic)
- <sup>38</sup> *Alquds*, 8/11/2018, <http://www.alquds.com/articles/1541667337286498200>
- <sup>39</sup> WAFA, 25/9/2018. (in Arabic)
- <sup>40</sup> *Al-‘Arabi al-Jadid*, 13/6/2019.
- <sup>41</sup> Quds News Network, 16/9/2018.
- <sup>42</sup> Aljazeera.net, 20/1/2019. (in Arabic)
- <sup>43</sup> Arabi21, 23/2/2019.
- <sup>44</sup> *Alghad*, 24/2/2019.
- <sup>45</sup> Arabs 48, 27/2/2019.
- <sup>46</sup> WAFA, 3/3/2019, [http://wafa.ps/ar\\_page.aspx?id=0eUqmMa850605449925a0eUqmM](http://wafa.ps/ar_page.aspx?id=0eUqmMa850605449925a0eUqmM) (in Arabic)
- <sup>47</sup> Arabs 48, 4/3/2019.
- <sup>48</sup> Arabi21, 9/10/2019.
- <sup>49</sup> For the full video coverage of this storming, see site of Mubasher Aljazeera.net, 2/6/2019, <http://mubasher.aljazeera.net>
- <sup>50</sup> Estimates of the Administration of Jerusalem’s Awqaf published in the morning of Eid, announced by the Waqf spokesman Firas al-Dibbs, and were distributed to the media, see, for example, Euronews, 11/8/2019, <https://arabic.euronews.com/2019/08/11/watch-clashes-between-israeli-forces-and-palestinian-worshippers-in-al-aqsa-mosque> (in Arabic)

- <sup>51</sup> Wafa, 9/8/2019. (in Arabic)
- <sup>52</sup> Interview conducted by the author with eyewitnesses, 13/8/2019.
- <sup>53</sup> Arabs 48, 11/8/2019.
- <sup>54</sup> For more info on the judicial aspect of *al-Aqsa*'s division, see Hisham Yaqoub et al., *'Ain 'ala al-Aqsa: Taqir Tawthiqi Yarsud al-I'tida'at 'ala al-Masjid al-Aqsa fi al-Fatrah ma bayna 22/8/2010 wa hatta 21/8/2011* (Eye on al-Aqsa: An Annual Documentary Report Monitoring Israeli Aggressions on *al-Aqsa* Mosque During the Period 22/8/2010 and until 21/8/2011) (Beirut: Al Quds International Institution, 2011), pp. 42–45.
- <sup>55</sup> Arabs 48, 26/3/2018.
- <sup>56</sup> The most prominent Israeli violations against *al-Aqsa* Mosque during December 2018, see Wafa, [http://info.wafa.ps/ar\\_page.aspx?id=UyNv0Ka27487578393aUyNv0K](http://info.wafa.ps/ar_page.aspx?id=UyNv0Ka27487578393aUyNv0K) (in Arabic)
- <sup>57</sup> Jordan News Agency (Petra), 17/4/2018, [http://www.petra.gov.jo/Include/InnerPage.jsp?ID=16302&lang=en&name=external\\_news](http://www.petra.gov.jo/Include/InnerPage.jsp?ID=16302&lang=en&name=external_news)
- <sup>58</sup> An interview made by the author with eyewitnesses, stated that the police officer Ibrahim Sa'id, of Arabic origin, would escort those storming the Mosque between 7–8 am. When *al-Aqsa* guards objected to having settlers conducting rituals and prayers inside *al-Aqsa*, Sa'id aggressively told them that what the settlers have done is acceptable, and that they themselves have to accept it, and that their objections are useless.
- <sup>59</sup> Hisham Yaqoub et al., *'Ain 'ala al-Aqsa: Taqir Tawthiqi Yarsud al-I'tida'at 'ala al-Masjid al-Aqsa wa al-Tafa'ul Ma'ahu ma bayna 1/8/2018 wa hatta 1/8/2019* (Eye on al-Aqsa: An Annual Documentary Report Monitoring Israeli Aggressions on *al-Aqsa* Mosque and the Interaction with It During the Period 1/8/2018 and until 1/8/2019), 13th Report, Chapter 2 (Beirut: Al Quds International Institution, 2019), p. 98, [http://www.alquds-online.org/userfiles/all/2\\_compressed.pdf](http://www.alquds-online.org/userfiles/all/2_compressed.pdf)
- <sup>60</sup> Mohsen Mohammad Saleh, *The Palestinian Strategic Report 2014–2015*, pp. 300–301.
- <sup>61</sup> Hisham Yaqoub et al., *'Ain 'ala al-Aqsa: Taqir Tawthiqi Yarsud al-I'tida'at 'ala al-Masjid al-Aqsa wa al-Tafa'ul Ma'ahu ma bayna 1/8/2018 wa hatta 1/8/2019*, 13th Report, Chapter 2, p. 101.
- <sup>62</sup> Site of Arutz 7 (Israel National News), 31/12/2018, <http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/256965>
- <sup>63</sup> Ziad Bhies, Sabotaging the Jerusalem Skyline: The Project of the Occupation Government to Put a Cable Car in the Vicinity of the Old City of Jerusalem, Al Quds International Institution, Beirut, 3/12/2019. (in Arabic)
- <sup>64</sup> *Haaretz*, 1/8/2018, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-israel-opens-jewish-heritage-center-in-east-jerusalem-1.6337942>
- <sup>65</sup> Hisham Yaqoub et al., *'Ain 'ala al-Aqsa: Taqir Tawthiqi Yarsud al-I'tida'at 'ala al-Masjid al-Aqsa wa al-Tafa'ul Ma'ahu ma bayna 1/8/2017 wa hatta 1/8/2018* (Eye on al-Aqsa: An Annual Documentary Report Monitoring Israeli Aggressions on *al-Aqsa* Mosque and the Interaction with It During the Period 1/8/2017 and until 1/8/2018), 12th Report (Beirut: Al Quds International Institution, 2018), p. 95, <https://www.alquds-online.org/index.php?s=9&cat=51&id=1114>
- <sup>66</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>67</sup> Hisham Yaqoub et al., *'Ain 'ala al-Aqsa: Taqir Tawthiqi Yarsud al-I'tida'at 'ala al-Masjid al-Aqsa wa al-Tafa'ul Ma'ahu ma bayna 1/8/2016 wa hatta 1/8/2017* (Eye on al-Aqsa: An Annual Documentary Report Monitoring Israeli Aggressions on *al-Aqsa* Mosque and the Interaction with It During the Period 1/8/2016 and until 1/8/2017), 11th Report, Chapter 2 (Beirut: Al Quds International Institution, 2017).
- <sup>68</sup> Hisham Yaqoub et al., *'Ain 'ala al-Aqsa: Taqir Tawthiqi Yarsud al-I'tida'at 'ala al-Masjid al-Aqsa wa al-Tafa'ul Ma'ahu ma bayna 1/8/2018 wa hatta 1/8/2019*, 13th Report, Chapter 2, pp. 40–41.

- <sup>69</sup> *Haaretz*, 30/6/2019, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-u-s-envoys-break-open-tunnel-under-palestinian-village-in-east-jerusalem-1.7424393>
- <sup>70</sup> *Haaretz*, 3/12/2016, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-beneath-jerusalem-israeli-culture-minister-gives-obama-a-lesson-in-history-1.5479138>
- <sup>71</sup> Wadi Hilweh Information Center—Silwan (silwanic.net), 9/12/2018, <http://www.silwanic.net/index.php/article/news/77501/ar> (in Arabic)
- <sup>72</sup> *Alquds*, 16/3/2018.
- <sup>73</sup> Wafa, 1/5/2018. (in Arabic)
- <sup>74</sup> PIC, 30/4/2018. (in Arabic)
- <sup>75</sup> Aljazeera.net, 10/5/2018 (in Arabic); and site of Almadenah News, 9/5/2018, <https://www.almadenahnews.com>
- <sup>76</sup> Arabi21, 12/5/2018.
- <sup>77</sup> PIC, 29/10/2019. (in Arabic)
- <sup>78</sup> Tolerance Through Colonial Eyes, site of Metras, 14/3/2019. (in Arabic)
- <sup>79</sup> The remaining part of the cemetery area was calculated by the author using Google Earth program.
- <sup>80</sup> *Al-‘Arabi al-Jadid*, 12/3/2018.
- <sup>81</sup> *Al-‘Arabi al-Jadid*, 11/3/2019.
- <sup>82</sup> *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 12/9/2019.
- <sup>83</sup> Protocol Concerning the Redeployment in Hebron, site of United Nations Peacemaker, 17/1/1997, Appendix 3 (Article 12), [https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/IL%20PS\\_970117\\_Protocol%20Concerning%20the%20Redeployment%20in%20Hebron.pdf](https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/IL%20PS_970117_Protocol%20Concerning%20the%20Redeployment%20in%20Hebron.pdf)
- <sup>84</sup> Site of Hebron Municipality, 31/5/2018, [http://www.hebron-city.ps/ar\\_page.aspx?id=55OSi5a4299068301a55OSi5](http://www.hebron-city.ps/ar_page.aspx?id=55OSi5a4299068301a55OSi5) (in Arabic)
- <sup>85</sup> Felesteen Online, 9/12/2019.
- <sup>86</sup> According to the Ibrahimi Mosque supervisor Hufthi Abu Snaineh, this was the first Friday in which the mosque was full of 5 thousand prayers, however, invitations actually began 10 weeks before that date, see *Assabeel*, 23/11/2019.
- <sup>87</sup> *Al-‘Arabi al-Jadid*, 10/1/2020.
- <sup>88</sup> That Friday was named: “The Dawn of Hope,” see *Al-‘Arabi al-Jadid*, 24/1/2020. See also Aljazeera.net, 24/1/2020. (in Arabic)
- <sup>89</sup> The researcher would like to thank Kamal Jihad al-Ja‘bari, who documented these aggression and categorized them, and prepared the statistics of Israeli attacks on the Ibrahimi Mosque.
- <sup>90</sup> These numbers were calculated based on the data provided by Wafa news agency, concerning Israeli attacks on the Ibrahimi Mosque.
- <sup>91</sup> Donia al-Watan, 23/1/2019, <https://www.alwatanvoice.com/arabic/news/2019/01/23/1211086.html>
- <sup>92</sup> The Arab Central Orthodox Council in Palestine and Jordan has called Greek domination “The Greek religious colonization,” see for example: Statements of Ra’uf Abu Jaber, *Addustour* newspaper, Amman, 8/8/2008, <https://www.addustour.com>; and the Orthodox scholar Alif Sabbagh conveys a view that Greek domination is one of the reasons for the emigration of Arab Orthodox Christians, and that they suffer from the “neglect” of the Greek Orthodox Archbishop, see Hanadi Qawasmi, Jerusalem Orthodox Patriarchate: A Brief History of Greek Control, site of 7iber, 24/12/2017, <https://www.7iber.com/politics-economics/patriarch-of-jerusalem> (in Arabic)
- <sup>93</sup> *Al-Akhbar*, 13/6/2019, <https://al-akhbar.com/Palestine/271850>
- <sup>94</sup> Mohsen Mohammad Saleh, *The Palestinian Strategic Report 2016–2017*, p. 177.

- <sup>95</sup> Jawad Boulus, Real Estates of Bab al-Khalil and the Theater of Absurdity, *al-Quds al-Arabi*, 13/6/2019. (in Arabic)  
Here, he is reflecting the Israel Supreme Court decision, Section 24, issued on 10/6/2019, where the court in file 17/8398 was a Court of Appeals.
- <sup>96</sup> Document: The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, Ministry of Interior, The Minister's Office: A Pledge and Commitment: To Implement the Provisions of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate Law No. (27) of 1958 AD, 18/8/2005, signed by the Archbishop of Tabor Theophilos.
- <sup>97</sup> The statement of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate, *Alrai*, 11/6/2019, <http://alrai.com/article/10488099>
- <sup>98</sup> Euronews, 24/10/2018, <https://arabic.euronews.com/2018/10/24/israeli-police-attack-coptic-priests-in-holy-sepulchre-church-in-jerusalem> (in Arabic)
- <sup>99</sup> On 24/10/2018, Pope Tawadros explained in a press conference the issue of the Monastery of the Sultan from the Coptic Church point of view, see Youtube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0EAsM7qLDVc>
- <sup>100</sup> Antony Surial 'Abdul Sayyid, *Deir al-Sultan bi al-Quds* (The Monastery of Sultan in Jerusalem) (Cairo: Matbouli Library, 1991), p. 31.
- <sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p.12.
- <sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p.13.
- <sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p.108.
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The writer of this chapter thanks 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.
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<sup>151</sup>United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs –occupied Palestinian territory (OCHA-oPt), West Bank Barrier, <https://www.ochaopt.org/theme/west-bank-barrier>

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<sup>153</sup>Numbers in this paragraph are based on:

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2. News during the 1/1/2019–31/12/2019 period posted on the site of POICA.



## This Report

Al-Zaytouna Centre is pleased to present to its readers the Palestine Strategic Report (PSR) 2018–2019, the 11th PSR to be published.

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Prof. Dr. Mohsen Mohammad Saleh

# The Palestine Strategic Report 2018 – 2019



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