

The Palestine Strategic Report 2020 – 2021



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Chapter Three

The Land and the Holy Sites

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The Land and the Holy Sites

Introduction

US President Donald Trump attempted to resolve the issue of the identity of Jerusalem by declaring it the capital of Israel, which coincided with the centenary of the British occupation of Jerusalem, and the start of conflict over the land of Palestine and Jerusalem's identity, since the city is considered the religious and cultural center of this conflict. Over the past four years, the battle for Jerusalem took a meandering course, with Israel able to advance on certain fronts but forced to retreat on others.

In 2018–2019, the period covered by the previous Palestine Strategic Report, Jerusalem witnessed the progress of the Judaization plan on three fronts: targeting symbols of the Palestinian sovereign presence in Jerusalem; major demolitions took place in Wadi Hummus and Shu'fat RC; and major Judaization projects were approved, such as the cable car project surrounding the Old City. This progress was countered by Israeli withdrawal on three tracks: the retreat from modifying the borders of Jerusalem due to the failure to evacuate Khan al-Ahmar, east of the city, under international and popular pressure; the failure to take over the Gate of Mercy building and to impose the spatial division of *al-Aqsa* Mosque, under the pressure of the popular uprising that managed to restore the building as a *Musalla* (area allocated for prayer); and the failure to control the Mercy Cemetery, which is the necessary gateway to control the *Musalla* and paving the way for opening the gates closed with stones.

This meandering path between progress and setbacks continued in 2020 and 2021, as Israel managed to advance on five fronts: utilizing the COVID-19 pandemic to suppress the popular will and prevent even small gatherings; continuing its demolition policy at a high rate with relative decline compared to 2019; imposing biblical rituals in *al-Aqsa* Mosque and using courts to grant them legal legitimacy; imposing and starting to implement the “land registration” project, which would make the Jerusalem municipality a partner in most of the Jerusalem properties under the “Absentee Property Law”; and controlling the entrance of the Yusufiyah Cemetery, bulldozing Muslim graves and turning part of the cemetery into a park. In



return, the Israeli occupation was forced to retreat on three major tracks: reversing the attempt to close Damascus Gate Plaza under the pressure of the popular will; reversing the displacement of the families of Karm al-Ja‘ouni area in Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood; and the failure of the major attempt to storm *al-Aqsa* Mosque on 10/5/2021, the 28th of Ramadan.

The outcome of the four years was Israeli progress on eight fronts and regression on six, in addition to the inability to resolve the most important issues, namely: the identity of *al-Aqsa* Mosque, the displacement of Jerusalem’s central neighborhoods, and the modification of the borders of Jerusalem. The Israelis were able to inflict greater costs on the Jerusalemites, namely: demolishing homes and settling property. The battle over the past four years has been between Israel’s attempts to resolve the identity of Jerusalem and the will to prevent this resolution, as demonstrated by the popular action, armed resistance, and international solidarity movements. The following pages will present the details of this confrontation.

First: Islamic and Christian Holy Sites

1. *Al-Aqsa* Mosque

The Zionist right and Temple groups target *al-Aqsa* Mosque with a religious replacement agenda aspiring to remove the Mosque from existence and to establish the alleged temple in its place and over its entire area, as is evident in the literature, drawings and models of the Temple Institute.¹ With the rise of the right-wing and its dominance, especially over the past 20 years, the activities, programs and pressures of Temple groups escalated to achieve the temporal and spatial division of *al-Aqsa* Mosque, and impose control over it, benefitting from US support, especially during the Trump term. However, such attempts faced strong resistance from the Jerusalemites, which thwarted or impeded many of their plans.

Since 2019, Temple groups have sought to formulate a phased plan focusing on the establishment of the intangible temple, by performing the entire biblical rituals in *al-Aqsa* Mosque and dealing with the Mosque as if it had become the alleged Zionist temple. These have happened although its buildings are still Islamic and the spatial division failed to allocate a private space for biblical rituals, however, in 2020–2021, the Temple groups tried to continue with their plans.

a. Control of the Mosque's Administration

• Strengthening the Political Ascent of Temple Groups

The period covered by the report witnessed two elections, the first was in March 2020, during which the Temple groups won a weighty bloc of 21 seats in the Knesset, which means that they acquired 17.5% of its seats, and 29% of the 73 seats on which the government coalition was forged between Netanyahu and Gantz, on 17/5/2020.² Since the government was a coalition, and it is based on a wide parliamentary base, the bloc of Temple groups declined from 19 ministers in Netanyahu's second caretaker government to 13 in this coalition government.³

The second elections came in March 2021, after the government alliance between Netanyahu and Gantz broke up, and this round resulted in the extremist Temple groups gaining 25 seats in the Knesset, the largest parliamentary bloc these groups have ever had.⁴ However, the formation of the government on 13/6/2022, according to what is known as the "Norwegian law," led to the decline of that bloc to 23 seats, after some Knesset members who entered the government resigned to make room for other members of their parties who came from outside Temple groups. Thus, the bloc reached its second-largest number, like that recorded in the 22nd Knesset of the September 2019 elections.⁵ The most important change here is that for the first time since their participation in the 33rd government (March 2013), most of the Temple bloc members joined with the opposition. For 19 of its members, who are in the Likud and Religious Zionism, moved to the opposition, while four joined the coalition government, they belong to two parties: Yemina headed by Naftali Bennett, and New Hope, a dissident party from Likud led by Gideon Sa'ar.

The analysis of the governmental influence of extremist Temple groups reveals two paradoxes. The first relates to the structure of the government itself, as its president, Bennett, recorded a precedent being the prime minister with the smallest bloc in the history of Israel. His bloc doesn't exceed 10% of the coalition government,⁶ which was mostly formed from central nationalist forces headed by a small rightist force falling—more right than the Likud. This makes the government susceptible to quick dissolution and any attack against *al-Aqsa* Mosque is considered one of the primary causes for its contradictions to appear. The second paradox is the contradiction of quantity and quality as this government witnessed the most important qualitative development in the political history



of Temple groups with one of their members assuming premiership. Yet, it was through a coalition that was not approved by most of their representatives, who still consider Netanyahu their most important ally and the sponsor of their political rise. Consequently, Temple groups got five portfolios only.

Table 1/3: Political Ascension of Extremist Temple Groups in the Knesset and the Government⁷

Date	Knesset	Temple bloc	Percentage (%)	Government	Temple bloc portfolios	Percentage (%)
2003	16	2	1.7	30	–	–
2006	17	3	2.5	31	–	–
2009	18	7	5.8	32	–	–
2013	19	13	10.8	33	5	17
2015	20	17	14.2	34 – original	15	47
April 2019	21	13	10.8	34 – first caretaking period	16	50
Sept. 2019	22	23	19.2	34 – second caretaking period	19	60
2020	23	21	17.5	35	13	35
2021	24	23	19.2	36	5	15

• Foundation of the Intangible Temple: The Third Phase of the Plan

Israel covered up the storming of *al-Aqsa* Mosque during *al-Adha Eid*, on 11/8/2019, with several political stances focusing on the Jews’ performance of religious rituals in the Mosque. In an interview with a local radio station, Minister of Public Security Gilad Erdan called for a change in public policy toward *al-Aqsa* Mosque “so in the future Jews... can pray at the Temple Mount,” and that such a change “needs to be achieved by diplomatic agreements and not by force,”⁸ adding that Jews’ prayers should be permitted individually or collectively, whether in an open or closed place.⁹ Then, Netanyahu reassured Yehuda Etzion, founder of the Alive and Well organization (*Chai V’Kayam* in Hebrew) which is an advocacy group concerned with “restoring the rights of Jews” in *al-Aqsa* Mosque, where he said:

The right of the Jewish people to their holy place, the Temple Mount, is unquestionable... I believe that the right of prayer for Jews in this place should be arranged, and even more so that we should provide for the freedom of worship for all religions in Jerusalem... It is clear that we should do this with the proper sensitivity... I believe we can do this properly after we return to the leadership of the state.¹⁰

In response to a question about allowing Jews to pray in *al-Aqsa* Mosque, during his visit to Ukraine at the end of August 2019, Netanyahu said, “Don’t worry, it will happen, and before the arrival of the Messiah.”¹¹

The first time this transition to the imposition of rituals was demonstrated as an interim priority was in the Hebrew New Year (*Rosh Hashanah*) and Feast of Tabernacles (*Sukkot*) holiday in 2019, when an Israeli police officer informed *al-Aqsa* guards on 10/10/2019, in threatening language, that Jewish prayer in the Mosque had become acceptable, and any objections by the guards would not be answered.¹² Indeed, that season witnessed dozens of collective public prayers, which were documented by audio and video.

Throughout 2020–2021, Jewish holidays witnessed peak escalation in imposing biblical rituals on *al-Aqsa* Mosque, and the extremist Temple groups tried on each holiday to impose the biblical rituals designated for that holiday or to call for their performance to pave the way for their imposition in the following years. However, this phased plan was interrupted by closures to prevent the spread of COVID-19, which accumulated frustration among extremists, who tried to compensate for delays by escalating aggression on *al-Aqsa* Mosque as soon as the restrictions were lifted. These events in 2020 were as follows:

The Jewish Passover (*Pesach*) (8–15/4/2020) and the anniversary of the occupation of the eastern side of Jerusalem according to the Hebrew calendar (22/5/2020): The period of comprehensive closure due to the COVID-19 pandemic included the two occasions, and *al-Aqsa* Mosque was closed for Muslims as well.

“*Tisha B’Av*” (Temple destruction anniversary) (30/7/2020): It was the first Jewish holiday after the wave of closures, and it coincided with the Day of ‘*Arafah* or the first Day of *al-Adha Eid*. According to Temple groups, Member of Knesset Ariel Kallner called the Minister of Public Security Amir Ohana demanding that settlers be allowed to publicly and collectively¹³ perform the *Shema* prayer in *al-Aqsa* Mosque.¹⁴ Raiding the Mosque on the Day of ‘*Arafah* witnessed the entry



of more than 50 groups, each comprising 20 Jews, where almost all groups publicly and collectively performed the *Shema* prayer, while dozens of extremists performed complete prostration. However, only part of the aggression was documented,¹⁵ probably due to a circular issued two days earlier by ‘Azzam al-Khatib, Director General of Jerusalem Awqaf Department, preventing *al-Aqsa* guards and Awqaf employees to publish news of *al-Aqsa* Mosque on social media or in any media, except with his official permission,¹⁶ which circular is still in effect as of the time of writing.

Hebrew New Year and Sukkot (September–October 2020): Temple groups identified trumpet-blowing as the next objective of the rituals to be enforced in this season; and on 25/8/2020, extremist Rabbi Yehudah Glick began blowing the trumpet in front of the gates of *al-Aqsa* Mosque to mobilize Zionist extremists towards this goal.¹⁷ However, the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic and the accompanying closure disrupted the desires of these groups, as the Israeli government announced the second closure starting Friday 18/9/2020, and for three weeks.¹⁸ Thus, the longest Jewish holiday season came amid this closure from the Hebrew New Year to the end of the eighth day of Sukkot.

The Festival of Lights (*Hanukkah*) (10–18/12/2020): Although this holiday is secondary in religious standing and the observed practice of “temple groups,” those groups have mobilized and employed it as an alternative to the most important holiday season they missed. Temple groups launched a campaign entitled the “Jewish Winter” in *al-Aqsa* Mosque and allocated a day for each of their rabbis to lead the incursions,¹⁹ which is the practice they devoted in all the following incursions in 2021, where their members were keen to perform religious rituals in *al-Aqsa* Mosque. Yet, this holiday came amidst the partial lifting of restrictions, and before the return of the third wave of closures which began on 27/12/2020 until 7/2/2021, the longest of closures. Temple groups have considered moving the menorah inside *al-Aqsa* Mosque as their utmost goal for this holiday, they started in 2018 to light it at al-Ghazali Square near Lions’ Gate. Temple Forum addressed a letter to Prime Minister Netanyahu asking him to sponsor the ritual of lighting the menorah inside *al-Aqsa* Mosque. Then, the menorah was lit directly in front of the Lions’ Gate twice; the first on the evening of 13/12/2020, and the second on the evening of 14/12/2020.²⁰ Notably, this is the closest point to *al-Aqsa* Mosque the ritual of igniting the menorah took place since the occupation of the Mosque.

**Lighting the Hanukkah Menorah at the Lions' Gate on the Evening of
14/12/2020**



In 2021, closures were less frequent and intense, and did not reach total closure at any time, which enabled the increase of Jewish rituals in *al-Aqsa* Mosque:

The Jewish Passover (28/3/2021–1/4/2021): This holiday, which marks the start of the successive Hebrew holiday seasons, came during the phase of the relative easing of the closure procedures between 7/3/2021 and 18/4/2021, following the third wave of closures and when restrictions limited gathering in public places to no more than 50 people.²¹ Temple groups were keen to benefit from the easing of measures as much as possible, hence, announcing a schedule of storming led by their rabbis and historical leaders to mobilize their audience. They were also keen to perform public collective rituals at *al-Aqsa* Mosque within these groups, and even their members and rabbis celebrated their ability to perform these public collective prayers without the objection of the Israel Police or the Jerusalem Awqaf Department as they claimed.²²



Anniversary of the complete occupation of Jerusalem according to the Hebrew calendar (10/5/2021): The storming of 10/5/2021 (the 28th Ramadan) and the repercussions of Ramadan events and the Sword of Jerusalem Battle:

By April 2021, it was clear that Israel was heading toward restoring normal life, as it seemed that the early massive vaccination campaign will allow a return to open all facilities and restore full normalcy, which took place on 18/4/2021.²³ Therefore, Temple groups dealt with the storming of “Jerusalem Day” on 10/5/2021, the 28th of Ramadan, as the milestone to regain the impetus for the agenda of imposing biblical rituals in *al-Aqsa* Mosque. They believed that it would compensate for all the frustrations they experienced on previous religious occasions, which were celebrated during closure and thus disrupted the momentum of founding the intangible temple.

Based on that, Temple groups organized on 4/4/2021, a preparatory conference for raiding *al-Aqsa* Mosque on 10/5/2021. This was the first time these groups have held a preparatory conference for their incursions,²⁴ which shows how much the incursion was relied upon as a milestone for the foundation of the intangible temple. The importance of the event was demonstrated by announcing the participation of their senior rabbis and historical leaders, and mobilizing the efforts of their political leaders, such as Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich, in advocacy and mobilization, in addition to the direct coordination with Minister of Public Security Amir Ohana to facilitate it. As a result, Temple groups confirmed to their audience that the storming was in progress and on time.²⁵ They even set up a daily countdown to the date of the storming,²⁶ and the Temple groups ensured that the storming of *al-Aqsa* Mosque would take place in early Ramadan to the first days of its last ten days.²⁷

The Israeli government was a full partner in the storming attempt on the 28th of Ramadan, as Israeli forces stormed the Mosque and attacked the worshippers and forcefully dispersed them three times throughout 7–9/5/2021, the 25th–27th of Ramadan. On Ramadan 28, Israeli forces tried over hours to secure raiding the Mosque, and they insisted to hold the March of Flags according to its designated route passing through the Old City, on the same day of the incursion. Then the authorities were forced to change the route under the pressure of the street, and the march dispersed with the sound of sirens in Jerusalem and the involvement of the Palestinian armed resistance in the confrontation from GS.

With the failure of raiding the Mosque and the frustration of Temple groups, they moved confrontations to the Lod area, hoping to vent their anger and frustration against the Palestinians of the 1948 occupied territories. The Lod Mayor Yair Ravivo, who is close to Ben-Gvir, contributed to transmitting the spark and so did the Israeli police who killed Musa Hassouna on 11/5/2021.²⁸ Also, the spokesman for Temple groups Asaf Farid published a picture of him carrying a weapon in Lod with his companions, and he invited supporters of the extremist Temple groups to engage in the confrontation.²⁹ Once again, the outcome of the escalation in Lod was contrary to what Temple groups desired, as the Palestinians of the city rose to defend their existence and their lives, and the entire 1948 occupied territories launched a massive uprising, which gave the Palestinian resistance a boost. Consequently, the attempted aggression against *al-Aqsa* Mosque in Ramadan 2021, and the efforts to make up for the accumulated frustration among Temple groups made Israel face successive failures.

These events led to the extension of the announced prevention of *al-Aqsa* Mosque incursions, which started on Tuesday 4/5/2021 until 23/5/2021,³⁰ of which Israel tried to exclude 10/5/2021 but failed. Netanyahu reallocated incursions two days after the cease-fire³¹ to try to belittle the achievements of the Sword of Jerusalem Battle. However, preventing incursions for 19 days, under the pressure of the street and the resistance, was the longest period of preventing settler incursions since they were allowed in June 2003.

“Tisha B’Av” (18/7/2021): It coincided with the Day of *Tarwiyah* (which precedes the Day of *‘Arafah*). The foundation of the intangible temple remained a central goal for Temple groups on this holiday despite the fragmentation of the political bloc supporting them. Most of its members moved to the opposition, while Naftali Bennett, one of the closest political allies to those groups, became prime minister. This raid was closer to a “compensation” for what happened on the 28th of Ramadan. Temple groups, led by their rabbis and senior activists, performed collective religious rituals in *al-Aqsa* Mosque, which was considered an unprecedented change in the Jewish prayer there,³² while Israeli media celebrated the “great change” that took place.³³

On the eve of this raid, Bennett disclosed the tacit intention to impose biblical rituals in *al-Aqsa* Mosque, a first by a prime minister. His office issued a statement in Hebrew and English saying that Bennett “thanked the public security minister



and the Israel Police [chief] for managing the events on the Temple Mount with responsibility and consideration while maintaining freedom of worship for Jews on the Mount.”³⁴ Notably, the statement contradicted Israeli practice for years, which sought to impose changes in *al-Aqsa* Mosque parallel to verbal emphasis on respecting the status quo after each change and using this tactic as a smokescreen to avoid a reaction. This statement drew a protest by Jordan, a threat by the resistance and an internal opposition by the leaders of the Israeli government coalition. Foreign Minister Yair Lapid made it clear directly that “There is no change to the status quo on the Temple Mount,” and Bennett’s office issued a clarification stating that “There is no change in the status quo,” where the “status quo” refers to allowing non-Muslims to visit, but not to pray.³⁵

Jewish New Year, the Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*), and Sukkot (7–8/9/2021, 16/9/2021, and 21–28/9/2021): This holiday season constitutes the longest period of escalation against *al-Aqsa* Mosque, and historical observation indicates that it is usually the fiercest and most severe.³⁶ This season witnessed an unprecedented dedication to the biblical rituals in *al-Aqsa*, as *al-Aqsa* guards and the *Murabitun* (*al-Aqsa* Mosque defenders) reported hearing the trumpet blowing inside the Mosque. After the end of the Jewish New Year holiday, the extremist Returning to the Temple Mount foundation (*Beyadenu*)³⁷ confirmed that its members blew the trumpet during the two days, and the leaders of the extremist Temple groups, such as Arnon Segal and Tom Nissani, celebrated this development.³⁸ This is the first time the trumpet was blown in *al-Aqsa* Mosque since the attempts of Judaizing the Mosque and changing its identity started in 1996. Before that, the blowing of the trumpet in *al-Aqsa* Mosque happened upon its occupation and during the Israeli military presence in it from 7–15/6/1967,³⁹ when the chief rabbi of the Israeli army Shlomo Goren and of several soldiers blew the trumpet more than once.⁴⁰

This season witnessed a simulated performance of the “atonement sacrifice” on 16/9/2021, and the trumpet was blown again in the synagogue located in al-Tankaziyya School building—occupied by Israel—overlooking *al-Aqsa* Mosque square from the side of the western portico.⁴¹ The *lulav* consisting of palm fronds, willow branches, and citron were taken to the Mosque on Sukkot, which saw the participation of 2400 settlers in its two peak days.⁴² As these biblical rituals were imposed in *al-Aqsa* Mosque in this unprecedented way, *al-Aqsa* guards and the

Murabitun could not document the aggression, and even what they could document was captured from long distances, which shows the extent of the decline in the role of Jerusalem Awqaf Department and the progress made by the Israeli police in the Mosque, as was documented in a detailed statement by Al-Quds International Institution.⁴³

Based on the above positions and practices, it can be concluded that the extremist Temple groups and the Zionist right have considered the imposition of the biblical sacrificial rites in *al-Aqsa* Mosque as the third phase of their plan, after temporal and spatial division. They are moving on with the third phase while trying to implement the spatial and temporal division whenever possible. The decision of the Magistrate's Court in Jerusalem on 5/10/2021 agreed with such intentions, as it ruled that Jews have the right to "quietly pray" in *al-Aqsa* Mosque. This was in the context of a ruling to stop the distancing by the Israel Police of Rabbi Aryeh Lipo, Secretary of the religious organization "The New Sanhedrin" from entering the Mosque campus, given that he did "not violate police instructions."⁴⁴ After accepting an appeal by the Israel Police, the Jerusalem District Court considered Rabbi Lipo's act a violation of the rule that forbids "religious/ritual activities having external, visible characteristics" and that his prayers were noticeable.⁴⁵

• Hijri-Hebrew Calendar Crossover

The Hebrew calendar is based on solar years and lunar months, which requires a realignment between months and years according to the solar calendar. This is achieved through cycles known as "Metonic cycles," where one cycle consists of 19 years. To fix the discrepancy, leap years (pregnant years in Hebrew) are added where an almost complete crossover between the lunar months and the solar calendar is achieved in the 19th year of each cycle.⁴⁶ This leads, in sum, to the movement of the Hebrew holidays back and forth within 33 days compared to the solar calendar.

As for the Islamic Hijri year, it is lunar in years and months, which makes it move in a complete circular motion against the solar calendar, which is completed once every 33 years. The difference between these two calendars leads to frequent correspondences in holidays, noting that these analogies are difficult to calculate and predict due to the hybrid nature of the Hebrew calendar. With the beginning of the Hebrew year 5779 on 10/9/2018, it was clear that a Hijri-Hebrew crossover would occur at two specific points; the first is the crossover between



Ramadan 28th and the completion of the occupation of Jerusalem according to the Hebrew calendar, known as “Jerusalem Day,” which led to storming *al-Aqsa* Mosque on Ramadan 28 in 2019 and 2021; and the other is the crossover between *al-Adha* then the Day of ‘*Arafah* and the Day of *Tarwiyah* with the religious holiday known as “*Tisha B’Av*,” which led to storming *al-Aqsa* Mosque on *al-Adha Eid* on 11/8/2019, then on the Day of ‘*Arafah* on 30/7/2020, and the Day of *Tarwiyah* on 18/7/2021.

With the entry of the Hebrew year 5782 on 7/8/2021, a month is added to the current Hebrew year, thus creating a new crossover that continues over 2022 and 2023, and includes four important occasions on both sides, namely:

Table 2/3: Hijri-Hebrew Crossover Over 2022–2023

Islamic holiday	Hijri date	Hebrew holiday	Gregorian crossover
Mid-Sha‘ban	15 Shaban	Purim	17–18/3/2022 7–8/3/2023
Ramadan	1 – 30 Ramadan (Intersection: 3rd week)	Passover	16–22/4/2022 6–12/4/2023
‘Ashurah	10 Muharram	<i>Tisha B’Av</i>	7/8/2022 27/7/2023
Birth of the Prophet	12 Rabi‘ Awwal	Between the Day of Atonement and Sukkot in the long holidays season	8/10/2022 27/9/2023

Examining the expected Hijri-Hebrew crossover over 2022–2023, the following can be concluded:

1. The increase of crossover, as there will be four annual occasions rather than two. However, these crossovers come on Islamic occasions less central than *al-Adha Eid*, which is no longer a point of intersection.
2. The crossover during Ramadan will increase, as the seven days of the Hebrew Passover intersect with the third week of Ramadan. If one day of crossover in 2019 and 2021 was enough to trigger a comprehensive confrontation, then the seven days of the Ramadan intersection may be enough to renew the confrontation, especially since the factors towards confrontations are increasing in various parts of historical Palestine, albeit in varying degrees.

The Hijri-Hebrew crossover has previously played a role in launching al-Buraq Revolution in 1929, which witnessed a similar intersection between the Hebrew “*Tisha B’Av*” and the Hijri birthday of the Prophet Muhammad.

• **Employing the Covid-19 to Target *al-Aqsa* Mosque**

On 22/3/2020, the Council of Jerusalem Awqaf Department issued a statement saying that it has held an emergency meeting and that after “being informed of the developments of the health conditions that Jerusalem and the rest of the country is going through,” it decided to “suspend the entry of worshipers from all gates of *al-Aqsa* Mosque, starting from the dawn of Monday 23/3/2020” with the continued presence of *al-Aqsa* guards and employees, stressing that it “feels bitterness about making this decision.”⁴⁷ This closure of the Mosque continued until Sunday 31/5/2020, the longest closure of *al-Aqsa* Mosque since the end of the Crusades. As a result of this closure, the following setbacks were revealed:

1. Negotiating the administration of *al-Aqsa* Mosque: These negotiations included implicit acknowledgment of the legitimacy of the occupation over the Mosque, as *Haaretz* newspaper reported on 22/3/2020 that there were talks between the Jerusalem Awqaf Department and the Israeli authorities to close *al-Aqsa* Mosque to worshipers, and at the same time prevent Jewish incursions through the Moroccan Gate which is controlled by the Israeli forces.⁴⁸ On 29/4/2020, al-Monitor website published an article in which it quoted Temple groups activists rejecting the political agreement between Israel and Jordan which prevented Jews from entering *al-Aqsa* Mosque, stating that “Netanyahu sold us out as part of a deal with Abdullah.”⁴⁹ On 11/5/2020, Arabi21 website quoted a senior source in the Jordanian government saying that there was an agreement between the Jordanian and Israeli ministries of foreign affairs to close the Mosque, justifying this by “protecting worshipers from the transmission of the virus to them from the Israelis.”⁵⁰ The response of the Israel government to the High Court of Justice on 13/5/2020 regarding the existence of this agreement confirmed the validity of these statements, as the state requested a closed-door hearing with the High Court to respond, “due to the sensitivity [of the matter]... which has implications for the national security and foreign affairs of the state.”⁵¹

2. New restrictions on the endowments: The Israel Police took advantage of the decision to close *al-Aqsa* Mosque to impose new restrictions on the Jerusalem Awqaf Department. Thus, it took over the authority to open and close the Mosque gates, and allowed the entry and exit through two gates only during the closure period, namely the Lions’ Gate and the Chain Gate, while reinforcing the presence of the police in their vicinity. The police closed the Council Gate as well, which



leads to the headquarters of the Jerusalem Awqaf Department in Jerusalem located in al-Manjakiyah School, and obligated the Awqaf to hand over a list of its employees and their work shifts to allow them to enter *al-Aqsa* Mosque. Thus, the police acted as if they were the “original administration” of the Mosque putting the Awqaf under their supervision, while the list was indeed handed over to the police by the Department.⁵²

3. The scene of simultaneous entry upon opening the Mosque: The long closure of *al-Aqsa* Mosque has been the subject of widespread controversy and opposition, especially since the Mosque is mostly an open area, and achieving distancing in it is feasible. It was even the first mosque to witness distancing at the initiative of worshippers starting from 18/3/2020. Yet, it remained closed under Israeli pressure until after the Eid and the month of Ramadan, even though the Jerusalem municipality lifted all movement restrictions in Jerusalem markets starting from 10/5/2020.⁵³ The decision to open *al-Aqsa* Mosque on a Sunday came as a practical implementation of a promise made by the Israel Police to Itamar Ben-Gvir, after rejecting the petition he submitted to the High Court of Justice demanding the opening of *al-Aqsa* Mosque to Jews on 22/5/2020, which coincided with the “Jerusalem Day” in the Hebrew calendar. In the response, the Israel Police pledged to “open Temple Mount to Jews once it is opened to Muslims,”⁵⁴ and this is what happened as *al-Aqsa* Mosque was opened to worshipers at dawn prayer on Sunday 31/5/2020, while the Moroccan Gate was opened for intruders two hours later and Rabbi Yehudah Glick raided the Mosque, along with 150 intruders.⁵⁵

With the start of the second wave of closure, the Israeli authorities tried to impose this closure on *al-Aqsa* Mosque. They tried to pressure the Jerusalem Awqaf Department to announce the closure of the Mosque on 16/9/2020, thus perpetuating the opening and closing of *al-Aqsa* Mosque per the decisions of the Israeli government. They wanted to reiterate Israeli sovereignty over the Mosque and absorb the pressure of the Temple groups who were opposing this closure that coincided with the long season of Jewish holidays. Therefore, the attempt to close *al-Aqsa* Mosque came as a sort of “compensation” for these extremist groups that the Mosque would be closed to Muslim worshipers as well. Indeed, Hatem ‘Abdul Qader announced the decision of the Jerusalem Awqaf Department to “suspend” worshipers’ entry to *al-Aqsa* Mosque for three weeks,⁵⁶ but the strong popular and media opposition to this decision led to its reversal.⁵⁷

After failing to impose the closure of *al-Aqsa* Mosque on Muslims, the Israel Police intensified the use of closure procedures against worshipers, while imposing fines on those who move away from their places of residence more than the permitted distance. They also imposed fines on worshipers who were not wearing masks, maintaining social distancing, or hosting gatherings, whether throughout the second wave of closures, where only 1,200 worshipers performed Friday prayers on 25/9/2020,⁵⁸ or during the third wave of closures.⁵⁹

• The Usurpation of the Powers of Restoration and the Speaker Parallel System

Since 2003, the Israeli courts have been renewing the decision to close Gate of Mercy, while the police rely on this decision in its aggression against the *Musalla* (area allocated for prayer) of the Gate of Mercy. On 26/1/2021, Al-Quds International Institution, relying on inside sources from the Jerusalem Awqaf Department, revealed that Israeli Police were disrupting reconstruction teams in the Dome of the Rock and for several days to exchange reconstruction for the re-closure of the Gate of Mercy.⁶⁰ The Israeli Police continued arresting and deporting those who insisted on being at the *Musalla*, and one of their main targets was Nizam Abu Ramouz of the Jerusalemite *Murabitun*, who was arrested at the *Musalla* on 7/2/2021, then deported for six months.⁶¹ A few days after his return to *al-Aqsa* Mosque, on 17/8/2021, the police forces re-arrested him at the Gate of Mercy.⁶² The occupation authorities have not yet accepted the final opening of Gate of Mercy, and it seems that they will reclose it as soon as there's an opportunity.

At the same time, the Jerusalem municipality continues to monopolize the repairs of the southwestern wall of *al-Aqsa* Mosque for the third year in a row, without informing the Awqaf of the ongoing work, which is originally the exclusive competence of the Jerusalem Awqaf Department, and not of Israel.

An extremely dangerous development during the period monitored by the report was the installation of a speaker system that qualifies the Israeli Police to direct the crowds of worshipers in *al-Aqsa* Mosque in parallel to the original speaker system of the Mosque. On 6/9/2020, the Israel Police installed a loudspeaker on the roof of *al-Aqsa Shariah* High School, west of the minaret of the Lions' Gate.⁶³ On 9/9/2020, a second speaker was installed on the roof of the Ablution Gate above the western hallway in *al-Aqsa* Mosque,⁶⁴ added to a previously installed sound system on the roof of al-'Umariya School south of the Mosque in August 2017.



Thus, the Israeli authorities now had a sound system capable of reaching the northern and western sides of *al-Aqsa* Mosque.

The system was activated on 19/2/2021 under the pretext of the COVID-19 pandemic and “instructions” were given to worshipers about social distancing, so it became clear that these three sound systems were connected, and that they were linked to the police station at al-Tankaziyya School. The Israel Police intentionally gave these instructions interrupting the Friday *adhan* and also during prayers.⁶⁵ Also, with the intersection of Israel’s “Independence Day” celebration in the Western Wall Plaza with the Tarawih prayers on the first night of Ramadan in 2021, the Israeli forces stormed *al-Aqsa* Mosque on 13/4/2021 and broke the minarets’ doors of the Moroccan and Chain Gates, then cut the audio and electric wires there.⁶⁶ All of this indicates that Israel is dealing with *al-Aqsa* Mosque as a place it manages.

• Undermining the Role of *al-Aqsa* Guards

Targeting the role of *al-Aqsa* guards is a constant Israeli practice, because it undermines the managing role of the Jerusalem Awqaf Department and weakens the Islamic presence in the Mosque, especially after banning the institutions that organized Ribat in *al-Aqsa* (defense of Islamic land) in 2013–2014, then banning the Islamic movement of the 1948 occupied territories completely in 2015, which led to a decline of the number of full-time *Murabitun*. Hence, *al-Aqsa* guards, counting around 283,⁶⁷ according to Jordanian official data, became almost the only full-time human mass in *al-Aqsa* Mosque, which led to increased Israeli pressure on them.

Throughout 2020–2021, deportation and physical assault against *al-Aqsa* guards continued, and the Israel Police continued to oblige the guards to stay away from groups of intruders and maintain more than 60 meters distance in some cases, which prevented them from documenting what these intruder groups were doing. Notably, important changes in the situation of the guards developed during this period:

1. Submission of indictments and long prison sentences: The guards Fadi ‘Alyan and Lu’ay Abu al-Sa’d were arrested and transferred to prison, then they were brought to court.⁶⁸ The arrest of Abu al-Sa’d was because he stood against the Israel Police during an extremist group raid of the Mosque.⁶⁹ While not new, enhancing this approach increased in 2020–2021.

- 2. House demolitions:** During the reporting period, the Israeli authorities demolished the homes of two guards because of their work at *al-Aqsa* Mosque, despite invoking the usual pretext of “building without permit.” An Israeli intelligence officer threatened the guard Fadi ‘Alyan to demolish his home because of his stances at *al-Aqsa* Mosque.⁷⁰ Three months after the demolition of his home, ‘Alyan was removed from the Mosque,⁷¹ then he was arrested and referred to the court. The Israeli authorities expedited the file of demolishing the home of the guard Ahmad Dallal, in al-Ashkariya neighborhood in Beit Hanina,⁷² and after the demolition of his home, he was arrested and expelled from the Mosque.⁷³ Further, the National Insurance of Israel (NII) suspended the allowances of his sick son, which confirms the systematic targeting of Dallal to break his will.
- 3. Decline in the number of *al-Aqsa* guards:** In addition to these mounting pressures, *al-Aqsa* guards face living dilemmas exacerbated by the rise in the exchange rate of the Israeli shekel against the dinar by nearly 20% in five years, which led to the erosion of their salaries amounting to minimum wages before this rise. Indeed, most of the guards are forced to work in other jobs besides their work in *al-Aqsa* Mosque, which has led with time to taking long leaves without pay to be able to work outside the Mosque and provide income. This makes the number of guards in some shifts limited to barely 20.⁷⁴ While the Jordanian government decided to raise their salaries, the final instructions for this increase stipulated its distribution over two years and were only for the basic salary,⁷⁵ which makes it a very limited increase, because their basic salaries are very low.

The Jerusalem Awqaf Department tried to appoint 50 new guards to make up for this shortage in their actual number, but the Israel Police prevented them from starting their work.⁷⁶ This led to the unveiling of another hidden fact, although known to those following up the issue, which is that Israel has been preventing the Awqaf from appointing any new guards since 2017.⁷⁷

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

• Constructions in the Vicinity of the Mosque

Since 2007, Israel has put successive plans to change the skyline of the Old City of Jerusalem and to find a Jewish foothold or birth certificate in it. To this end, it presented several projects serving two directions: the first direction is the

establishment of major Jewish religious and cultural centers in the vicinity of *al-Aqsa* Mosque, such as the headquarters of the Temple Institute's Holy Temple Museum and the Burnt House Museum, as well as, Strauss House project. These Judaization centers are established and open for visitors and efforts are underway to reinforce them with Beit Haliba (Core House) to the west of the Western Wall Plaza, and Kedem Center, the largest center in the plans, to the south. The second direction was the attempt to “revive historical synagogues” established in the early waves of the religious Zionist immigration to Jerusalem in the second half of the 19th century. A project that began with the Ohel Yitzhak Synagogue (Isaac's tent) located above Hammam al-Ain endowment, which was opened in 2009 and is considered the smallest of these synagogues, then Hurva Synagogue which is located above the endowment of the Great Omari Mosque and was opened in 2010, in addition to the largest and most important synagogue Tiferet Yisrael (Glory of Israel).

Today, although the announcement of the projects of Beit Haliba and Tiferet Yisrael, west of *al-Aqsa* Mosque, and Kedem Center, south of the Mosque, took place throughout 2010–2013, these buildings are still in the stages of excavation or establishing the foundations at best. The progress is disrupted due to several considerations including the differences among the sides executing them, the sensitivity and sanctity of the place in which these projects try to change the landscape, as well as the external and internal opposition facing them.

This disruption and slowness in achieving set goals led the Israeli government to explore a different approach, which is to bring a large Jewish population to the vicinity of *al-Aqsa* Mosque and the Old City of Jerusalem, by strengthening the transportation network,⁷⁸ to cast legitimacy on plans and centers serving settlers. Still, this approach is inherently weak as the Old City and its surroundings remain with most of the Arab Jerusalemite population, while the numerical presence of Jews is limited to the Jewish Quarter in the Old City, and the Jews remain in the category of visitors rather than residents.

Based on this, and specifically from the point where the extremist Bezalel Smotrich took over the transportation portfolio in 2019, projects to change the surroundings of *al-Aqsa* Mosque began to focus on infrastructure:

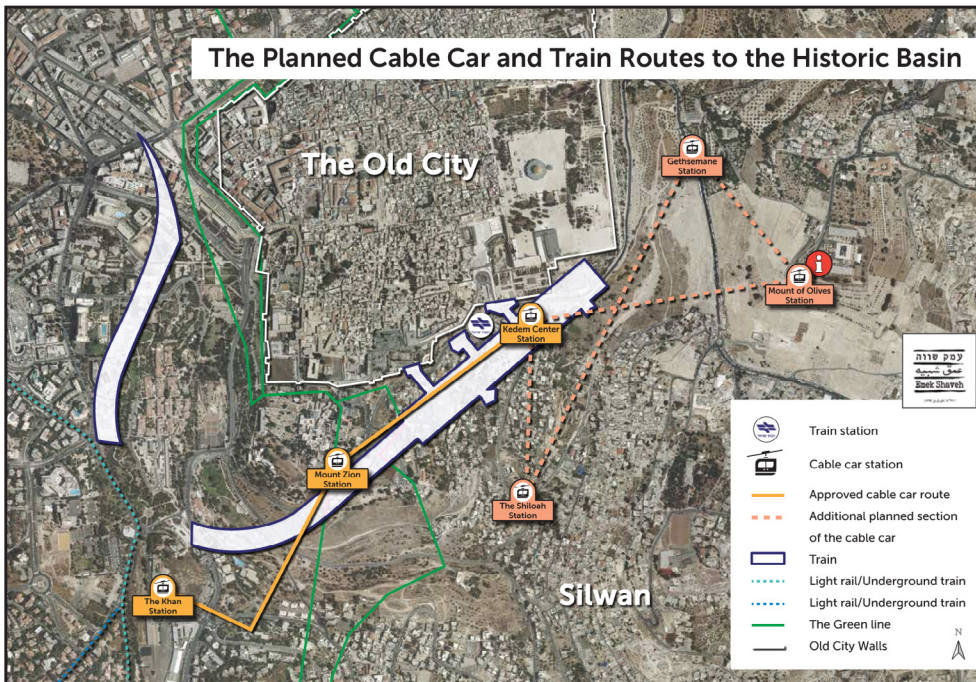
1. The Jerusalem Express Train and the “Trump Station” Project

In June 2019, Israeli Minister of Transportation Israel Katz presented a plan to connect the Jerusalem express train from its station on Jaffa Street, west of

Jerusalem, to *al-Aqsa* Mosque’s Western Wall, and to establish a new station at the Western Wall Plaza, claiming that this constitutes a public transportation solution that facilitates access to the *al-Aqsa* Mosque’s Western Wall. Yet, the National Infrastructure Committee (NIC) rejected the proposal with eight votes to one due to the lack of real passenger pressure, which requires such a transportation line.

When Smotrich assumed the Ministry of Transportation and Road Safety, he put a strategic plan to develop the transportation in WB to promote settlement building and turn Jerusalem into a civil center for WB settlers. He resubmitted the above project to the NIC and succeeded in passing it on 17/2/2020, exactly a month after President Trump presented his plan known as the Deal of the Century. The Committee approved the establishment of a station near the Western Wall Plaza called “Trump Station,” in appreciation of President Trump’s efforts in supporting the occupation and changing the identity of the city of Jerusalem.⁷⁹ Exploratory excavations began in favor of the project in the vicinity of the Old City in May 2020,⁸⁰ and the following map of the train route was presented showing a large intersection between the route of the cable car. This confirms that the repetition of projects of the same objective without a real need comes for purely Judaizing purposes:

Map 1/3: The Intersection of the Proposed Cable Car and Train Routes South of the Old City⁸¹



2. Developments of the Old City Cable Car Project

The cable car project in the vicinity of the Old City received a great boost when the NIC approved its route on 1/2/2019, then on 3/6/2019, it rejected all objections to it. On 4/11/2019, the project was approved by the Ministerial Committee for Housing Affairs, which paved the way for its implementation. Given the seriousness of the project and the deliberate sabotage it causes to the skyline of the Old City and its historical heritage, and the lack of an objective need for it, the left-wing Emek Shaveh organization submitted a petition, on 27/11/2019, against the project to the Israeli High Court of Justice in conjunction with 520 Israeli architects and archaeologists.⁸² The Court held a session to discuss the case on 29/6/2020, then on 26/7/2020, and designated 6/9/2020 as a deadline for the government to provide its response.⁸³ As of that date, the government submitted an 81-page document that the Court appeared to have not been convinced of, so it gave the government a new deadline on 1/10/2020. Also, it gave the objectors a deadline of 22/11/2020 to respond to the Israeli government's justifications for the project.⁸⁴

The East Jerusalem Development Company, the governmental arm responsible for implementing the project, seemed indifferent to this judicial path and announced on 4/11/2020 that it would start foundational excavations for the cable car. However, the High Court of Justice issued a precautionary order to stop the project on 23/2/2021, causing work to stop again.⁸⁵

• Excavations

The numbers are no longer sufficient to report the development of the tunnel network surrounding *al-Aqsa* Mosque and the Old City of Jerusalem, especially since these tunnels and excavations are expanding and interconnecting after they entered, since 2001, the rehabilitation phase. They changed from being excavations to being shrines receiving visitors and controlling the underground space of the Mosque. Throughout 2020–2021, work persisted in two central directions, while digging continued in various other sites:

First direction: Connecting the Herodian Road and the southern tunnels network to the Western tunnels network through a long tunnel passing under the Old City wall. This direction is a priority for the government and extremist groups, because it achieves geographical contiguity underground between what they call the “City of David,” which they claim is located under Silwan’s Wadi Hilweh neighborhood, and the network of tunnels under *al-Aqsa* Mosque’s Western Wall, located under the Old City. The director of excavation operations in this area,

archaeologist Ari Levi of the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA), stated that the excavation operations were taking place in two shifts per day, and they continued from 7 am to 10 pm with 15 working hours per day.⁸⁶

Second direction: Expanding excavations west of *al-Aqsa* Mosque in every direction, as excavations expanded from their path adjacent to the Western Wall of *al-Aqsa* Mosque further to the west under Beit Straus, which is located to the west of al-Tankaziyya School. Those excavations reached a depth of 7–10 meters, which means strengthening the tracks of the previous excavations in Wilson’s Arch and the Chain of Generations Center with another underground area under Beit Straus.⁸⁷ The Israeli authorities started intermittent deep excavations at the far western edge of the Western Wall in 2021, and it seems that these excavations are linked to the creation of large areas underground to serve Beit Haliba, which will form the central landmark at the western end of the Western Wall Plaza.

Excavations Under Beit Straus to the West of Western Wall



2. Jerusalem’s Islamic Holy Sites

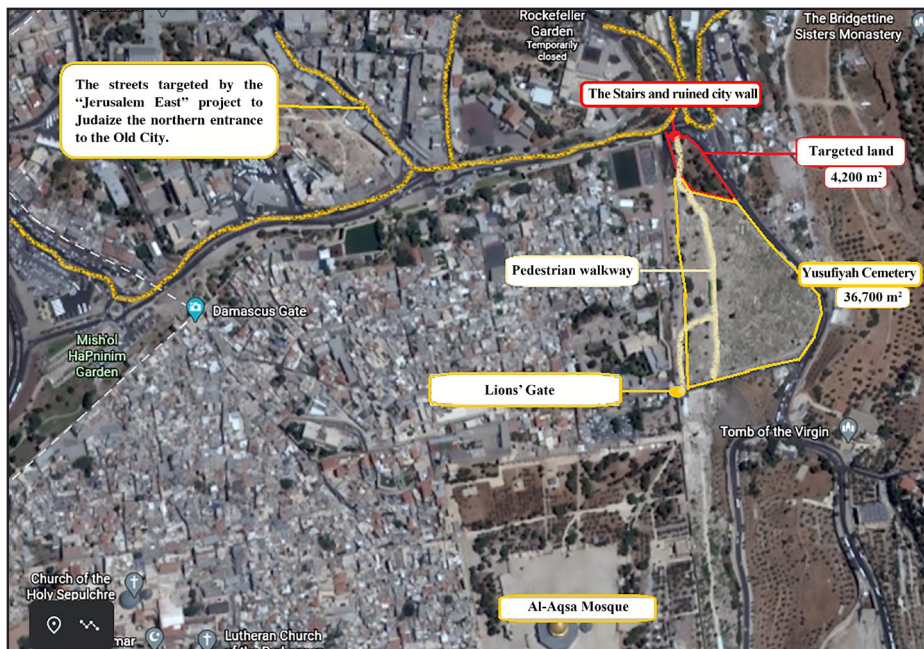
The occupation continued targeting the Islamic cemeteries surrounding the Old City, which is in the context of religious replacement similar to that targeting *al-Aqsa* Mosque. Islamic landmark would be obliterated and removed, and instead, a Jewish landmark would be established, however, there’s a slight difference in the case of the targeted cemeteries near the Old City, they are targeted in favor of expanding a Jewish cemetery on the southern slope of the Mount of Olives to suggest that Jerusalem was historically Jewish. The development in this respect throughout 2020–2021 is the change of target, from the Mercy Cemetery to the Yusufiyah Cemetery opposite it from the north:

a. The Yusufiyah Cemetery

On 29/11/2020, the Jerusalem municipality bulldozers began demolishing a historic staircase adjacent to the wall of the Old City of Jerusalem from its northern side near Burj al-Luqluq and heading south towards the Yusufiyah Cemetery, which was established at the end of the Mamluk era, specifically in 1467. When visiting the cemetery, the visitor first enters an annexed space known as the “Martyrs’ Memorial,” which is a wooded area in which a white stone edifice was erected in memory of the martyrs of the Jordanian army who were killed in the 1967 war. Despite the uproar over the demolition that took place on endowment land and within the property of a 553-year-old historic cemetery adjacent to the Old City wall, the Jerusalem municipality bulldozers, on 14/12/2020, resumed razing the staircase and the corridor to the cemetery’s gate, and demolishing the cemetery’s wall from the east, destroying with it a group of tombstones adjacent to the fence.

According to Google Earth, the area of the targeted land is 4,200 m², which makes it an important area in a vital location, while the area of the Yusufiyah Cemetery is 36,700 m². In terms of numbers, this means that the Jerusalem municipality is trying to seize around 10% of the endowment land of the Yusufiyah Cemetery.

Map 2/3: Al-Yusufiyah Cemetery and the Martyrs’ Memorial Targeted with Bulldozing⁸⁸



Despite the success of lawyers Muhannad Jbara and Hamzeh Qutteineh in stopping the initial bulldozing work through a precautionary decision by the Magistrate's Court in Jerusalem on 24/12/2020,⁸⁹ the Israel Nature and Parks Authority (INPA) succeeded in securing the court's approval to resume bulldozing work in the cemetery on 25/7/2021⁹⁰ and resumed work on 10/10/2021.⁹¹ The immediate popular response was performing prayers in front of the cemetery and the families of those buried in that part of the cemetery tried to defend the graves, matters reached a point of burning the caravan of the workers, who are bulldozing the cemetery, and destroying their tools.⁹² However, this action did not reach a point of sit-in and popular gathering, which allowed the authorities to continue bulldozing. On 25/10/2021, the INPA team surrounded the cemetery with a metal fence to isolate it and prevent protesters from reaching it,⁹³ thus completing works of bulldozing this part of the cemetery on 3/11/2021.

Lawyers Jbara and Qutteineh tried to appeal against the demolition of the cemetery before the court on 17/10/2021, but the court rejected the appeal, contrary to its previous position. This renews the question regarding the feasibility of resorting to the Israeli courts concerning endowment cases, when the long-standing position maintained by the Jerusalem Awqaf Department and the Jordanian government—managing these endowments—was not to recognize these courts or their authority over endowments and Islamic affairs in Jerusalem. Indeed, this position was one of the bases of confrontation to restore the Gate of Mercy and reject court decisions regarding storming or performing “quiet prayers” in *al-Aqsa* Mosque, whereas it is being violated regarding cemeteries, based on the consideration that they are supervised by an endowment affiliated committee, a matter which should be reconsidered given the facts of targeting cemeteries in the past years.

b. Targeting Mosques by Demolition

On 16/12/2021, the Jerusalem Municipality threatened those in charge of al-Rahman Mosque in Beit Safafa to demolish its golden dome which was renewed during restoration and expansion operations four years ago. This threat was against the background of the complaints of neighboring settlers over the dome scene, which was met with a position refusing to change the state of the golden dome from townspeople.⁹⁴ On 3/1/2022, the Jerusalem Municipality notified those building al-Taqwa Mosque in al-Issawiyah of the intention to demolish the mosque during its construction.⁹⁵



Beit Safafa's al-Rahman Mosque Whose Dome is Threatened with Demolition



3. The Islamic Holy Sites in the Rest of Palestine

a. The Ibrahimi Mosque

The occupation began its measures to divide the Ibrahimi Mosque immediately after its occupation in 1967. These measures were reinforced by concentrating settlement building on the eastern side of the Old City of Hebron, which enhanced the presence of settlement outposts and religious schools in the vicinity of Ibrahimi Mosque. Following the Ibrahimi Mosque massacre on 25/2/1994, Israeli authorities imposed military measures in favor of the settlers, which strengthened their presence in the Mosque under the pretext of security. The Protocol Concerning the Redeployment in Hebron (aka the Hebron Protocol) signed on 17/1/1997 between the PLO and Israel contributed to perpetuating the results of the Ibrahimi Mosque massacre and paved for Israeli progress in the city. As a result, Hebron was divided into two areas: H1 and H2; H2 is under full 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,⁹⁶ while H1 is under Palestinian administration and includes the rest of the city's neighborhoods.

In 2020–2021, there were 1,358 Israeli attacks on the Ibrahimi Mosque detailed as follows:⁹⁷

Table 3/3: Israeli Attacks on the Ibrahimi Mosque in 2020–2021⁹⁸

Attacks	2021 ⁹⁹	2020 ¹⁰⁰
Intrusions and performing biblical rituals	28	28
Excavations and constructions altering its surrounding features	18	16
Mosque Closure	13	36
Arrests in the Mosque's vicinity	5	7
Beating worshippers and the <i>Murabitun</i>	5	2
Attacks on infrastructure	8	4
Interfering in crews' work	23	9
Preventing public events and religious occasions	3	2
<i>Adhan</i> ban	581	453
Worshippers entry obstructions	41	66
Total	725	633

In 2020–2021, the attacks on the Ibrahimi Mosque witnessed a qualitative escalation in two directions. The first was the approval to construct an elevator for settlers, which then-Israeli Defense Minister Naftali Bennett greenlighted on 24/2/2020.¹⁰¹ Israel issued a tender for the project on 15/7/2020.¹⁰² In return, on 18/6/2020, the leftist Emek Shaveh, in coordination with the Hebron Municipality and the residents of the Old City of Hebron, submitted an objection against the project.¹⁰³ The Planning Committee rejected the petitions on 19/11/2020 and authorized the continuation of work with the implementation of the elevator.¹⁰⁴ On 10/8/2021, the foundational excavations of the elevator started.¹⁰⁵ According to the Hebron Reconstruction Committee, the elevator project will deduct 91 m² of the Mosque's space, in addition to 300 m² as external spaces and corridors leading to it.¹⁰⁶ It is noticed that, as in the mixed prayer square next to *al-Aqsa* Mosque and the corridor ascending from the Jewish Quarter settlement to the Western Wall Plaza, the Israeli authorities claim that these Judaization projects are for humanitarian purposes, intended for the elderly and people with special needs.



Scheme of the Ibrahimi Mosque Elevator Project as Published by the Occupation Authorities



The second dangerous development concerning the Ibrahimi Mosque is deliberately taking it as a center for Israeli sovereignty, in an overlap between the religious and political scenes, reflecting the social and political dominance of the national-religious Zionist trend. Before the September 2019 elections, then-Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stormed the Ibrahimi Mosque,¹⁰⁷ and three months later, on 29/12/2019, Naftali Bennett, then-Defense minister, lit the eighth candle of Hanukah at the Mosque.¹⁰⁸ Netanyahu again used the storming of the Ibrahimi Mosque in an electoral context, as he stormed it before the elections on 23/2/2020, stressing that if he won, he would apply Israeli sovereignty over Hebron within the framework of the Deal of the Century.¹⁰⁹ On 28/11/2021, Zionist leaders affiliated with the centrist current joined the incursions trend, as Israeli President Isaac Herzog stormed the Ibrahimi Mosque on 28/11/2021 to lit the first candle of Hanukkah.¹¹⁰

b. Al-Isaaf Cemetery in Jaffa

It is one of the few endowments that have parts remaining on the waterfront of the historic city of Jaffa. It is located 1,100 meters from Hassan Bek Mosque, one of the few remaining mosques in Jaffa that dates back to the early 1900s, and less

than 300 meters to the north of Clock Tower Square in the center of the historic city of Jaffa. The remaining area of the cemetery, according to Google Earth, is about 670 m² only, but it gains its importance from being one of the last remaining endowment lands in the historical center of Jaffa. The Israel Land Authority has historically confiscated endowment lands, authorized itself the ownership of the cemetery, and then sold it to a real estate company to build a housing project on it, which the municipality said would provide housing to “the homeless.” For years, attempts have been made to bulldoze this part of the cemetery; on 25/4/2018, the owner company tried to start bulldozing it, then renewed its attempt on 16/4/2019, but was confronted by the people of Jaffa and Palestinians from the 1948 occupied territories who held prayers and protests.¹¹¹ On the morning of 8/6/2020, the bulldozing attempts returned with greater momentum, and a large part of the cemetery’s land was bulldozed before the Palestinians of Jaffa gathered and began to perform prayers and demonstrate in front of the cemetery.¹¹² The Jaffa Islamic Council, an elected civil body for the defense of endowments and holy sites in the city, together with Al Mezan Centre for Human Rights, filed a petition to the Tel Aviv District Court to stop the bulldozing works and obtained a decision to freeze the bulldozing work and oblige the municipality to issue a new construction permit.¹¹³

c. Al-Istiqlal Cemetery in Haifa

This cemetery bears a symbolic dimension for the Palestinians, as Sheikh Izz al-Din al-Qassam was buried in it, which makes it a target of continuous aggression by Zionist extremists, the latest of which was on 23/8/2019, when the cemetery and its tombstones were vandalized.¹¹⁴ On 17/5/2021, during the Uprising of Honor held by the Palestinians of the 1948 occupied territories, in concurrence with the Sword of Jerusalem Battle, settlers set fire to the cemetery.¹¹⁵ In return, the Southern Islamic Movement, in cooperation with al-Istiqlal Endowment Committee, organized a voluntary day for the reconstruction of the cemetery, where volunteers re-identified the graves and renewed the tombs, and painted them.



Al-Istiqlal Cemetery After the 2019 Arson



Al-Istiqlal Cemetery After the 2021 Restoration



d. Holy Sites in GS During the 2021 War

On 21/5/2021, immediately after the ceasefire, the GS official authorities announced the toll of losses resulting from the intensive Israeli bombing of the Strip, including the destruction of three mosques, partial destruction of 40 others and severe destruction of a church.¹¹⁶

4. Christian Holy Sites in Jerusalem and Palestine

The number of Palestinian Christians has been steadily declining parallel to the domination of a class of foreign clergy over the three major Christian denominations; The Greeks over the Orthodox who make up the largest denomination; the mostly Italian and French monks of the Custody of the Holy Land “Terra Santa” over a sector of Catholics; besides Armenian Orthodox and Catholics. With this reality in place, the ecclesiastical property, constituting around 17% of Jerusalem during the British mandate of Palestine, has become a space for barter and exchange of interests for a class of clergy, who are not nationally affiliated with Palestine and do not belong to the culture of the Arab nation and the Palestinian people. Some clergymen even seek interests with the Israeli government which pays a generous price to rent ecclesiastical properties for decades or buy them. This trend continued throughout 2020–2021, although this time focus shifted to the Armenian Orthodox Patriarchate:

a. The Entrance to the Armenian Monastery

On 20/12/2020, author Daoud Kuttab revealed a lease deal between the Armenian Orthodox Patriarch Nourhan Manougian, through his lawyer Mazen Qubti, and the Jerusalem municipality. The agreement stipulates that a company affiliated with the Jerusalem municipality shall evacuate the trash and rehabilitate the land of the Patriarchate, located outside the wall of the Old City and directly adjacent to the Jaffa Gate from the south and that it shall pave it and convert it to a parking lot accommodating 180 cars. This would be in return for the Patriarchate to grant parking rights to 90 cars belonging to the municipality or the Jerusalem Development Authority for ten years, as payment for cleaning and preparing the land, estimated at two million dollars.¹¹⁷ In other words, this contract provides for the lease of half of the land for ten years to the Jerusalem municipality and the Jerusalem Development Authority in exchange for removing the rubble and establishing parking. Most dangerous in this agreement is that it complements the targeting of the Jaffa Gate, as the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate has previously leased Omar Square overlooked by the Jaffa Gate inside the wall, and according to this agreement, the Armenian Orthodox Patriarchate would lease the land overlooked by the Jaffa Gate from outside the wall.



The same documents revealed that the Higher Presidential Committee of Churches Affairs in Palestine was aware of this agreement in the final stages of its negotiation and before it entered into force, as Dr. Ramzi Khoury, Chairman of the Committee, sent a letter to the Armenian Orthodox Patriarch, on 7/7/2020, demanding, along with other church leaders, not to conclude the deal and to adhere to the position of international law.¹¹⁸ Yet, the Armenian Orthodox Patriarchate proceeded to sign and implement the agreement and later denied that this was a contract of sale or lease considering it merely a sort of paying back “a loan” to the Jerusalem municipality, where the loan is the cost of cleaning and preparing the land.¹¹⁹

b. Attacks on Churches and Monasteries

On 4/12/2020, a Zionist extremist infiltrated the mass held in the Gethsemane Church at the foot of the Mount of Olives, carrying a bottle that the guard thought contained water but turned out to contain a highly flammable substance. The settler poured the liquid inside the church and set it alight, but the fire was contained before it spread and the settler was arrested.¹²⁰ On 4/2/2021, a Zionist extremist broke down the door of the Romanian Orthodox Church, and surveillance cameras recorded this attack.¹²¹ On 19/5/2021, extremist settlers severely beat three Orthodox clergymen, one of whom was injured in the eye and rushed to the hospital.¹²² The extremist Lehava organization and settler Price-Tag groups are believed to be responsible for the three attacks within a continuous trend targeting Christian holy sites and symbols in Jerusalem.

c. Decrease in the Number of Arab Christians in Jerusalem

By the end of 2020, the number of Arab Christians in Jerusalem was 12,900, comprising 3.4% of Arab Jerusalemites and 2.1% of the residents of eastern Jerusalem. Adding 3,400 non-Arab Christian residents, the number becomes 16,300 (see table 4/3). If this number is compared to the total population of the two sides of Jerusalem, Christians in the city in 2020 would comprise 1.7%, the lowest ratio of Christian presence in Jerusalem since the emergence of the church in the city, 2000 years ago.

Table 4/3: The Ratio of Christians to Jerusalem’s Population 2010–2020¹²³

Year	Arab Christians	Ratio to Jerusalemites (%)	Christians in general	Ratio to the population of both sides of Jerusalem (%)
2010	11,356	4		
2011	11,720	4		
2012	12,008	4		
2013	12,300	4		
2014	12,300	3.9	15,600	1.8
2015	12,600	3.9	15,800	1.8
2016	12,600	3.8	15,800	1.8
2017	12,600	3.7	15,800	1.8
2019	12,900	3.6	16,200	1.7
2020	12,900	3.4	16,300	1.7

Second: Population Under Occupation

1. The Reality of the Demographic Battle

In 2001, Sergio DellaPergola, the most famous Jewish demographer around the world, published a reference study on the shape of the expected population balance in Jerusalem during 1995–2020,¹²⁴ in which he extrapolated the expected population growth based on previous behavior. His expectations formed the basis for the Jerusalem Master Plan 2020, which was prepared by the Jerusalem municipality at that time to reflect its vision of Jerusalem by 2020, and the last version of the plan was presented in 2004.

The Jerusalem Master Plan was based on DellaPergola’s expectations, which indicated that Arab Jerusalemites in 2020 would make up 40% of the population of both parts of Jerusalem. Planning focused on how to avoid reaching a ratio of 40% Arabs to 60% Jews. Previous plans were based on a recommendation by the Inter-ministerial Committee to the Rate of Development for Jerusalem, which set a binding policy for the Israeli government approved by the Knesset to prevent Jerusalemites from increasing to 30% compared to 70% for Jewish settlers. Chapter seven of the plan titled “Population and Society” stipulated maintaining a solid Jewish majority, considering it the main policy goal around which most development proposals in the various chapters revolve.¹²⁵



In sum, DellaPergola put forward five scenarios based on which he predicted the population of Jerusalem, and he gave preponderance to the fifth scenario, which assumes limited Jewish immigration from abroad, with internal immigration continuing to drain Jewish settlers and the decline in fertility among Palestinians and settlers. Actual figures for 2019–2021 were as follows:

Table 5/3: Demographic Balance in Jerusalem 2019–2021¹²⁶

		East Jerusalem (Occupied in 1967)		West Jerusalem (Occupied in 1948)		Total for both sides of Jerusalem	
		Arabs	Jews	Arabs	Jews	Arabs	Jews
2019	Number	354,000	227,100	4,800	350,500	358,800	577,600
	Percentage (%)	61	39	1.4	98.6	38.3	61.7
Total		581,100		355,300		936,400	
2020	Number	361,900	229,800	4,900**	354,600	366,800	584,400
	Percentage (%)	61.2	38.8	1.4	98.6	38.6	61.4
Total		591,700		359,500		951,200	
2021*	Number	369,900	232,550	5,000**	358,850	374,900	591,400
	Percentage (%)	61.4	38.6	1.4	98.6	38.8	61.2
Total		602,450		363,850		966,300	

* The figures for 2021 were calculated based on the growth rates in Jerusalem published by Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), which amounted to 2.2% for Arabs and 1.2% for Jews.

** An approximate number.

It appears from the actual numbers at the end of 2019 that DellaPergola's expectations were almost in place concerning Arab citizens; however, fertility among Arabs did not decline as much as he expected. The figure he expected in 2020 was practically realized in 2019. The numbers of Jews were lower than what he expected by about 26 thousand, meaning that external immigration was relatively less than he assumed, even with the addition of the expected growth for 2020. Yet, numbers, in general, were closer to the fifth scenario which he considered at the time to be the most likely.

In sum, all the policies of segregation and expulsion tailored to prevent reaching this percentage have practically failed. Even if taken literally as trying to prevent Arab citizens from reaching 40% of the city's population by 2020, they succeeded

in slowing down 1% of this percentage only, and due to the rate of change of the ratio in favor of the Arabs, the percentage will be realized by the end of 2022.

According to a CBS press report, Jerusalem has the largest number of Muslims, reaching about 354 thousand or 37.1% of the city's population, in both the eastern and western parts. The report pointed out that they are a young society, as 32.9% of them are under 14 years old, while the elderly (65 years and over) comprises about 4.5%.¹²⁷

2. Attempts to Expel the Palestinian Population

a. Sheikh Jarrah Neighborhood

The Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood was the first new neighborhood to be established in Jerusalem, as the elite families began to establish urban neighborhoods of modern architectural style in the second half of the 20th century. Sheikh Jarrah was essentially established by al-Husseini family joined later by al-Nashashibi and Jarallah families, besides some other elite families in Jerusalem. This made the neighborhood the political center of Jerusalem, as it witnessed public meetings, and even demonstrations and marches, due to the presence of the Mufti of Jerusalem's home in it.

The Jewish presence in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood began nearly two decades after its establishment. The early religious Zionist migrations after 1870 tried to match the geography of Jerusalem with the biblical description. Thus, a group of immigrants claimed that the tomb of Sheikh Mohammad al-Sa'di, the grandfather of al-Sa'di Jerusalemite family, and the cave attached to it and containing a tomb dating back to the Roman era, matched the biblical description of the tomb of Simeon the Just, claimed to be the last of the alleged priests of the Second Temple. So, they consecrated this tomb and singled it out for sanctification on the spring festival called "Lag BaOmer," which is usually celebrated in May. The passage of these Jewish immigrants through the cultivated lands in Hijazi al-Sa'di endowment led to the damage to the summer crop grown by farmers who imposed an allowance on Jewish immigrants to compensate for the damaged crops. Then, settlers' leaders developed the offer to turn the allowance into an annual rent.

After the 1948 war and the unification of the two banks and the entry of Jerusalem under Jordanian rule, the Jordanian government enacted a law according to which it decided to manage the property of the Jewish settlers by a special



body called the Custodian of Enemy Property. Accordingly, Jordanian Ministers of Interior enumerated Jewish individuals and entities who left the WB during the war and assigned their properties to the Custodian of Enemy Property by virtue of “vesting orders.” By reviewing these orders, it was revealed that they were based on a list of individuals and entities rather than on checking the origin of the properties. Accordingly, many of the authentic and private family endowments were referred to the Custodian of Enemy Property, because they were occupied by Jews who rented them and did not return them to the endowment’s possession as was supposed to happen. Among them, the properties that were used by the Oriental Jews Committee and the Western Jews Committee, by virtue of the vesting order issued in 1954 by the Jordanian Minister of Interior Wasfi Mirza, and among them also was the land of the Jerusalemite family of Hijazi al-Sa’di in Sheikh Jarrah, known as Karm al-Ja’ouni, in reference to the family cultivating it.

By 1956, UNRWA was trying to limit the scope of its operations to specific camps and gatherings, so it concluded a settlement with 28 families in cooperation with the Jordanian government, where the latter would allocate the land to these families, while UNRWA would build them housing units for which they pay a symbolic rent, with a promise to own them in the future, in exchange for giving up the UNRWA blue cards and preserving their right to return. UNRWA built the housing units and the initial lease period expired, but the bureaucracy of the Jordanian government has led to the failure to fulfill the promise to transfer the properties by 1967. After the Israeli occupation of East Jerusalem, the occupation government classified the lands under the “Custodian of Enemy Property” as belonging to it, with the recognition of the Jordanian government. It transferred them to the Israeli “Custodian General,” who in turn allowed those whom he considered the original owners of those lands to “restore” them. Bodies calling themselves the “Committee of the Jews of East Jerusalem” and the “Committee of the Jews of West Jerusalem” submitted a request to “restore” the land of Karm al-Ja’ouni which they originally leased. Hence, the Israeli “Custodian General” registered the lands in the name of these two committees in 1974 without the knowledge of the people of the neighborhood, and this is when the struggle began. Successive courts have refused to discuss the original ownership of the land of Karm al-Ja’ouni and treated its people as “protected tenants” under Israeli law.

The two committees sold the land of Karm al-Ja‘ouni to a settlement company called Nahalat Shimon, which acquired licenses to build settlement units in the neighborhood, and since it licensed new construction, it began demanding the eviction of the people of the neighborhood under the terms of the “Protected Tenant Law.” In 2008, the family of Umm Kamel al-Kurd was expelled, then in 2009, the families of al-Ghawi and Hanoun were expelled as well.

Eviction attempt: In March 2021, an Israeli court warned four additional families of displacement and demanded their homes be handed over to the Nahalat Shimon Company. These families, along with the rest of the neighborhood, began reminding people of their grievance, and among them were the members of al-Kurd family, who excelled in addressing the media and in using social media platforms. The Jerusalemites and the people of the 1948 occupied territories responded to their calls, and neighboring al-Issawiyah youth supported them. Over two months, the neighborhood turned into a focus of confrontation and defense and the people of the neighborhood submitted an appeal to the Israeli High Court of Justice requesting a halt to the eviction until the decision on real estate ownership was issued, which the courts had refused to discuss for four decades. However, this pressure, which the resistance joined in May 2021 through threats to prevent the displacement of the people of the neighborhood by armed force, led the court to procrastinate its decision and seek the opinion of the government’s Attorney General who, after the end of the Sword of Jerusalem Battle, stated that he will not weigh in on the case and would leave the case to the court.

Deception attempt: As the Attorney General rejected to interfere, the Israeli court tried to play the role of mediator and presented a proposal to the residents of the neighborhood and the settlers, which was closer to deception. The proposal stipulated for the people of the neighborhood to temporarily accept their status as “protected tenants” and pay the rent to the lawyers of Nahalat Shimon, until the ownership is decided by the settlement committees of the Israeli Justice Ministry. This means that the people of the neighborhood would acknowledge that they are tenants and the settlement company is the original owner. This ploy almost led the neighborhood issue to undermine the results of the Sword of Jerusalem Battle with all the sacrifices involved, but marathon efforts were made by the National and Civil Action Committee in Jerusalem, and several Jerusalem jurists, to prevent this. Then, Al-Quds International Institution put direct pressure on the lawyers



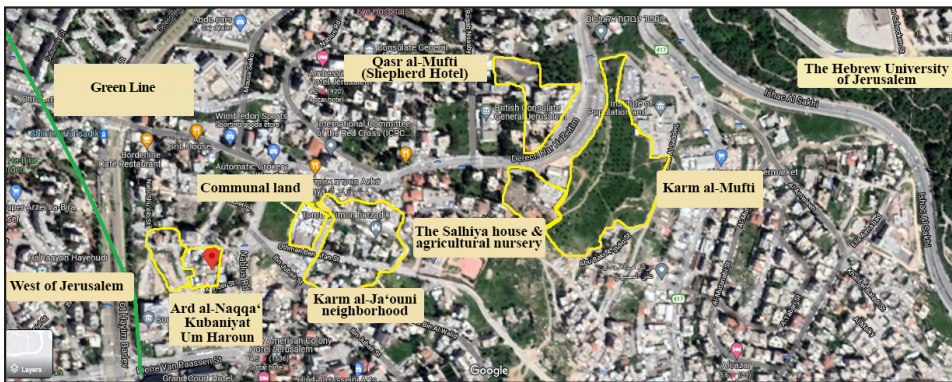
to abide by the national decisions, which led the people of the neighborhood, on 2/11/2021, to reject the court's maneuver.

Circumvention attempt: Given the failure of the displacement attempt, the occupation authorities attempted to encircle the Karm al-Ja'ouni case, by resolving the status of other areas near Sheikh Jarrah—to the east and west—which would make uprooting it easier. In this context, the work on Sheikh Jarrah's four other fronts was accelerated:

- 1. The front of Qasr al-Mufti and Karm al-Mufti:** To the east of Karm al-Ja'ouni and opposite the Hebrew University. The occupation hastened work to build settlement units in Qasr al-Mufti and transform Karm al-Mufti into a biblical park.
- 2. Salhiya land front:** It is a land of six donums (about 6,000 m²), adjacent to Karm al-Mufti from the west. It includes a house and an agricultural nursery owned by the Salhiya family, which were destroyed by the occupation in January 2022, under the pretext of establishing a school for people with special needs.
- 3. Communal land front:** It is located directly to the west of the Karm al-Ja'ouni area, on which Umm Kamel al-Kurd erected a protest tent following her forced displacement in 2008. The land was confiscated by the final decision of the Israeli High Court of Justice in November 2021, after it was at the disposal of Kamal 'Ubeidat, who built a parking lot and a car wash there. The occupation ultimately confiscated the land as green areas in exchange for Palestinian investors on the other side of the land obtaining a hotel permit.
- 4. Ard al-Naqqa' front:** It is the complementary part of Karm al-Ja'ouni of the endowment of the Hijazi al-Sa'di family. It is located directly to the west of it, facing the borders of the 1948 occupied territories, and is known as the "Kubaniyat Um Haroun" section, after a Jewish woman who rented it and built housing units on it for immigrant Jewish families at the end of the 19th century. These units were transferred to the Jordanian Custodian of Enemy Property, who in turn leased them to these families. Today, 40 Jerusalem families reside in the "Um Haroun" section and they face a legal status different from that of Karm al-Ja'ouni, because they fully rented the houses from the Jordanian government and they are considered "protected tenants." The Israeli authorities and the extremist right-wing associations are looking for any loopholes to annul this status, and they started with Fatima Salem's family, given that she was

not at the house of her father Mahmud Salem upon his death in 1986. Thus, she was considered unworthy of protection even though she and her children and grandchildren live in the house. By February 2022, the home of the Salem family and the Ard al-Naqqā‘ area turned into a new arena of confrontation in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood.

Map 4/3: Fronts of the Sheikh Jarrah Neighborhood Between the Hebrew University in the East and the Borders of the 1948 Occupied Territories in the West¹²⁸



b. Silwan

While Sheikh Jarrah is the northern front of the settlement penetration into the central fabric of Jerusalem, Silwan constitutes the southern front of it. However, it is still predominantly Arab with limited settlement penetrations. Under pretexts and means customized for each of its six neighborhoods, adjacent to the Old City, the occupation targets Silwan, seeking to annex most of it. Targeting Silwan is carried out as follows:

1. **Wadi Hilweh neighborhood:** It is the neighborhood located directly to the south of the Old City, and Israeli authorities are trying to seize it by intensifying excavations that have led to cracks in a large number of its properties, leaving them uninhabitable. They have also intensified purchases and fraud deals.
2. **Al-Bustan neighborhood:** It consists of around 100 properties inhabited by about 1,500 people. In 2008, it received a collective eviction order because the Jerusalem municipality considered its land a historical park under the name “King’s Garden” based on the alleged biblical narrative regarding the area.



- 3. Baten al-Hawa neighborhood:** It is the foothill located above al-Bustan neighborhood in the southeast, and the occupation targets it under the pretext of “the heritage of Yemini Jews.” In 1882, Zionist organizations persuaded several Yemeni Jews to immigrate to Palestine, but the emerging settlement community, which was purely European, did not accept them. Thus, they were stranded, and they resorted to renting some inns and warehouses in Silwan to live among the Arabs, who constitute their natural cultural depth. In 1929, al-Buraq Revolution and the ensuing polarization led to their emigration from Silwan, so the Ateret Cohanim settler organization claimed ownership of the properties they were renting.
- 4. Wadi al-Rababa neighborhood:** It is the neighborhood adjacent to the wall of the Old City in the southwest, and it is the last neighborhood of Silwan before Mount Zion whose ecclesiastical property forms part of its remaining area to the west. The Israeli authorities consider all the neighborhood’s houses unlicensed and try to transform it into a park. Every year, they deliberately raze its surroundings hoping for the collapse of some of its properties due to the nature of its overcrowded, random construction.
- 5. Wadi Yasoul neighborhood:** It is the valley that complements Wadi al-Rababa from the southwest side. The Israeli authorities claim that all of its houses are built without permits and have threatened them with their demolition.
- 6. ‘Ain al-Lawza neighborhood:** It is the furthest of these neighborhoods from the Old City wall. It is located to the south of Mount Baten al-Hawa. It is also threatened with demolition by the INPA, which seeks to turn its homes into a park claiming that they are built without permits.

The most prominent dilemma in the case of the six neighborhoods in Silwan is that each of them is fighting its battle on its own rather than uniting the fronts or the points of mass protest. This makes Silwan less present than Sheikh Jarrah although it has more population, where the population of Karm al-Ja‘ouni in Sheikh Jarrah is about 300 people and Ard al-Naqqa‘ is about 400 people (700 combined), while the residents of the six neighborhoods of Silwan threatened with displacement are home to about 7,500 Jerusalemites, ten times those of Sheikh Jarrah. This renders Silwan front more difficult for the occupation should the confrontation be unified and organized, instead of having dispersed legal tracks that may fail at any moment due to the absence of a national reference following up on them.

c. Renewed Attempt to Evacuate Khan al-Ahmar

The attempt to evacuate Khan al-Ahmar dates back to a military order issued by the Israeli army in 2012, but it collided with the steadfastness of the communities, whose owners re-established them every time Israeli authorities destroyed them. After Trump recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, Israel thought the opportunity was ripe to expand the geographical area covered by this decision, so it tried to evacuate Khan al-Ahmar to complete the wall around the Adumim settlement bloc, east of Jerusalem, and announce the expanded borders of the city in line with the path of the wall, with an area of approximately 290 km². This way Trump would have recognized “Greater Jerusalem” rather than Jerusalem only. This attempt faced two main difficulties; the first is the international rejection represented mainly by the Russian and European positions, and even the position of the US Democratic Party, as these parties consider the expansion of Jerusalem to the east, until the Jordan Valley, practically a comprehensive end to the two-state solution. The other obstacle was popular action, especially in the Bedouin community in Abu Nuwar village and its surroundings. This community was the center of this confrontation, although it includes only 180 citizens,¹²⁹ while the total area threatened with eviction is home to around 2,400 people. The action was backed by the PA given the political sensitivity of Khan al-Ahmar file, and groups of foreign activists, which strengthened the position of this community.

On 24/5/2018, the Israeli High Court of Justice issued a final decision to demolish the communities of Khan al-Ahmar.¹³⁰ Israeli army bulldozers tried to remove the Abu Nuwar community and its surroundings several times during the period 23/6–19/10/2018 but failed under popular and international pressure. Even Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC), Fatou Bensouda, announced on 17/10/2018 that she would consider the extensive destruction of Khan al-Ahmar “without military necessity and population transfers in an occupied territory constitute war crimes under the Rome Statute” and that she would “not hesitate to take appropriate action” in this context.¹³¹ Consequently, the Israeli government announced the postponement of its plan to demolish Khan al-Ahmar indefinitely.¹³²

This retreat has turned into a constant headline of the right-wing opposition to Netanyahu, and the current Prime Minister Naftali Bennett has been the loudest in demanding Netanyahu demolish Khan al-Ahmar,¹³³ which puts him today under pressure to implement what he was demanding before. On 23/7/2021, after the



extremist right-wing organization Regavim had petitioned the High Court of Justice to force the state to demolish the Khan al-Ahmar structures, the court gave the Bennett government a deadline to render its opinion on the pending demolition.¹³⁴ The government responded on 5/9/2022 by requesting an additional six-month deadline ending on 5/3/2022, which threatens to return the Khan al-Ahmar case to the fore again in 2022.¹³⁵

d. Land Registration Project¹³⁶

On 13/5/2018, the Israeli government issued Decision 3790 titled “Narrowing Socioeconomic Gaps and Promoting Economic Development in East Jerusalem.” The most important item was the land registration arrangement in the city. This decision came to invest in successive decades of ownership uncertainty, lack of registration and property fragmentation among heirs, as 10% of the lands of East Jerusalem were registered in the Land Registry upon completion of its occupation in 1967. The “Absentees’ Property Law” considered whoever was residing outside occupied Palestine at the time of the war as “absentee” and his property was placed under the “Custodian of Absentee Property.” Thus, Jerusalemites refrained from registering their property so that the Israeli government would not become a partner in their ownership. For decades, “irrevocable agency” has become a common method for expressing the sale of real estate. Also, the property became fragmented among a large number of heirs, some of whom remained in Jerusalem and some left, in addition, there are many leased endowment properties with occupants acting as if they were owners, although they do not have any document proving their ownership except by way of adverse possession.

Decision 3790 sought to invest in the complex reality caused by Israeli government procedures. It would allow the transfer of large properties to the state treasury due to the absence of their owners or the lack of sufficient proof documents. It would also turn Israelis into potential partners when the relatives of the owner are traveling or are refugees outside Palestine. The Israeli settlement committees have worked on sensitive areas, including Ard al-Naqqā‘ in Sheikh Jarrah besides large areas in Sur Baher, Beit Hanina, and Beit Safafa, which necessitates adopting a collective and national stance rejecting the land registration project and any cooperation with its committees, so that the “Custodian of Absentee Property” does not become a partner in most of the properties of Jerusalemites.

e. Deportation Policy

Israeli authorities use the deportation from *al-Aqsa* Mosque, the Old City, parts of Jerusalem, or even the city of Jerusalem in general as a primary tool to suppress activists and community leaders, trying to deprive them of influence. They consider deportation from *al-Aqsa* a deterrent that would alter the behavior of *Murabitun* and make them avoid confrontation to ensure their ability to reach the Mosque. It would also get rid of clashes scenes in *al-Aqsa* Mosque that incite people against the Israeli authorities. This was particularly true after the 2015 events, in which the attacks against the female *Murabitun* instigated the stabbing operations in Jerusalem. In addition to deportation, the Israeli authorities issue orders preventing Jerusalemite activists from communication and travel, which means isolating them from their natural Palestinian depth in WB, and from their Arab and Muslim depth, hence reducing the level of Arab and Islamic popular interaction with the confrontations in Jerusalem.

The Palestinian National Information Center has cited Wadi Hilweh Information Center—Silwanic for statistics on orders of deportation and prevention of communication throughout 2020–2021, as follows:

Table 6/3: Deportation Orders From Jerusalem and *al-Aqsa* and Prohibition of Communication and Travel Targeting Jerusalemites 2020–2021¹³⁷

Deportation orders	Deportation and ban orders	2020	2021
	Deportation from <i>al-Aqsa</i>	315	357
	Deportation from the Old City	33	110
	Deportation from Jerusalem	15	31
	Total	363	498
Ban orders	Ban on entry to WB	4	11
	Travel ban	8	NA
	Total	12	11

3. Demolition of Homes and Structures

According to the figures of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs – occupied Palestinian territory (OCHA-oPt), the number of structures demolished over the past four years was as follows:

Table 7/3: Demolished Structures in Jerusalem 2018–2021¹³⁸

Year	2018	2019	2020	2021
No. of structures	178	206	175	181

By adding the outcome of these years to the demolition of facilities throughout 2000–2017, which amounted to 1,352 structures,¹³⁹ the total demolition in Jerusalem throughout 2000–2021 becomes 2,092, mostly residential buildings.

Third: Settlement Expansion in the WB

It is difficult to determine accurate numbers of Jewish settlers in WB, as Israeli statistics deliberately omit the numbers of settlers in East Jerusalem. Some discretion is also applied to statistics concerning the rest of WB, perhaps to assuage Palestinian and international reactions to the settlement programs. According to a 2021 report issued by Ya‘akov Katz, in charge of Settlement Affairs and the former head of the National Union party, the number of settlers in WB (including eastern Jerusalem) was 800 thousand, with an increase of 2.62% in 2020 and 17% over the last five years (2016–2020).¹⁴⁰ In contrast, the Director-General of the Applied Research Institute–Jerusalem (ARIJ), specialists in land and settlement affairs in WB, stated on 1/11/2021 that the WB (including East Jerusalem) had approximately 913 thousand settlers.¹⁴¹

The same difficulty applies to determining the number of Jewish settlements in WB. Peace Now data indicate the existence of 132 large settlements and 141 other outposts.¹⁴² However, the number of settlements in the WB reached 199 according to ARIJ, in addition to 220 outposts in late 2021.¹⁴³ A report published by *Israel Hayom* newspaper spoke of the presence of 150 settlements in the WB, excluding East Jerusalem.¹⁴⁴ In any case, in addition to the intentional Israeli official ambiguity, there is a problem associated with the Israeli definition of what is “official” and what is “unofficial,” as well as with the definition of outposts, whether they are temporary or have acquired a permanent nature and waiting to be officially “legitimized.” In general, Israeli Peace Now reports tend to be conservative and understate settlement figures.

Reports indicate that the Higher Planning Council of the Israeli Civil Administration has approved 12,159 settlement units from the beginning of 2020 until mid-October of the same year.¹⁴⁵ As for 2021, ARIJ reported that the Israeli authorities deposited 113 settlement plans in 62 settlements to build more than 17 thousand settler units on more than 13 thousand donums.¹⁴⁶ According to the Land Research Center (LRC), in WB, 55 settlements were expanded in 2021, 15 new outposts were established, and 25 new bypass roads were built.¹⁴⁷

In 2021, the shepherds' outposts increased, with support from the Israeli authorities, through the arrival of settlers with herds of sheep or cows and their control over large open areas belonging to Palestinians, under the pretext of grazing. This leads to the confiscation of large areas of land to expand settlements besides terrorism by settlers and the destruction of crops.¹⁴⁸

Aggression on land included targeting Palestinian archaeological sites in WB. At the end of February 2021, the Israeli army issued military orders targeting 601 archaeological and historical sites claiming that they were Israeli archaeological sites. The announcement included 219 locations in the Jericho governorate, 117 locations in Ramallah governorate, 117 locations in the Nablus governorate, and 32 locations in the Jerusalem governorate.¹⁴⁹

Eviatar Outpost on Jabal Sabih

This outpost was established during Netanyahu's term and just before the beginning of the Bennett government's path, and instead of evacuating it, the Bennett government "agreed to leave the buildings in the area and place soldiers to guard them, while promising to legalize the outpost if it turns out to be legally possible. Since then, the soldiers have been subjected to daily attacks by stones and fireworks, and in clashes with the demonstrators, at least seven Palestinians have been killed" by Israeli army fire.¹⁵⁰

Settlers took advantage of the recent uprising in Jerusalem and the GS war to return to the outpost with mobile homes under the protection of the Israeli army, as part of a plan to consolidate their presence and turn the place into a permanent settlement. Jabal Sabih is located between three Palestinian villages: Qabalan, Yatma, and Beita, south of Nablus. It is owned by Palestinians from the three villages, who have documents proving their ownership and have always expressed readiness to submit them through lawyers to the Israeli courts.¹⁵¹



Route 55

In continuation of the Israeli policies supporting settlement expansion in the WB, the occupation forces began on 16/8/2021 razing large areas of Palestinian lands belonging to the city of Qalqilya, the town of Azzun, and the village of al-Nabi Elias, to implement a settlement plan aimed at expanding settler Route 55 linking Qalqilya and Nablus. The Israeli authorities approved the expansion of a section of this route, which links the settlements in the Qalqilya governorate with the settlements within the Green Line, at the expense of Palestinians' agricultural lands south of Qalqilya. The authorities call this section the "nursery route" and prohibit Palestinians from entering it except if they have a special permit.¹⁵²

After revealing a plan to expand settlements adjacent to the aforementioned route to build 5,650 new settlement units in the next few years, objections were filed by 35 Palestinian plant nursery owners whose lands will be expropriated for the highway construction, which is located entirely in the WB, but before a military checkpoint, and therefore mainly Israeli cars travel on it. The objections submitted by the owners of land and nurseries were rejected by the Higher Planning Council of the Civil Administration, arguing that this was not under its purview. The Civil Administration claimed that the expansion of the road served Palestinians who use it, while barely 250 Palestinian cars travel on this route. The route is part of a larger plan to expand Route 55, which is being expanded in stretches.

The owners of these nurseries fear the expanded service roads, besides Route 55, which will lead to the confiscation of a very large area of their land and the complete elimination of their nurseries. On both sides of this route are 14 agricultural nurseries employing hundreds of workers and providing a livelihood for about 500 families, in addition to the presence of four artesian wells.

It can be said that the main objective of this settlement project is to separate Qalqilya and the town of Habla, by seizing agricultural lands between them, thus opening the way to link the city of Kfar Saba within the 1948 occupied territories with Alfei Menashe settlement, which will negatively affect the Palestinian presence between them.¹⁵³

Land Confiscation

The years 2020–2021 witnessed the confiscation of about 41,095 donums of Palestinian lands in WB, for security reasons, establishing new settlements or

expanding existing ones, expanding bypass roads for the benefit of settlers, or linking settlements through a network of settlers' bypass roads or to expand these roads.

In 2021, more than 24,750 donums¹⁵⁴ of Palestinian land were confiscated in WB and Jerusalem in favor of settlement activity, while in 2020, more than 16,345 donums were confiscated and 1,650 donums of agricultural land were bulldozed to expand settlements and outposts, according to 2020 figures.¹⁵⁵

For example, in January 2021, in Khallet Hassan of Bidhya town, Salbit, the Israeli forces bulldozed an area of agricultural lands threatened by confiscation and uprooted olive and grape trees. The Israeli authorities also issued a military order to confiscate an area of Palestinian lands in Bethlehem governorate, and another military order to confiscate 1,008 donums of Palestinian lands near the settlement of Alfei Menashe.¹⁵⁶ In the following month, a group of settlers did settlement work on the Palestinian citizens' lands to expand the boundaries of the settlement of Yitzhar. In addition, the occupation forces razed Palestinian lands on the southern side of Ematin village – Qalqilya, near Emmanuel settlement's industrial zone to expand the industrial site, in addition to expanding Maskiot settlement established in the northern Jordan Valley. The occupation forces issued another order to confiscate 193 donums of lands from Deir Dibwan and Ramon village located east of Ramallah and al-Bireh governorate, to establish a landfill for the benefit of settlers.¹⁵⁷

Demolition of Homes and Structures

The demolition of Palestinian homes and facilities by the Israeli authorities during the period covered by the report witnessed a significant increase compared to the previous years. In 2020, they demolished 854 Palestinian homes and structures, which resulted in the displacement of 1,001 citizens and leaving them without shelter, compared to the demolition of 905 Palestinian homes and structures in 2021, resulting in the displacement of 1,205 Palestinians.¹⁵⁸

Field documentation by OCHA-oPt showed a significant increase in demolitions carried out by Israel against Palestinian homes and facilities during the reporting period. The Israeli authorities claim that demolitions are due to a lack of permits or security reasons in addition to demolishing the homes of martyrs' families or those executing resistance operations, as a form of collective punishment.



Table 8/3: Demolitions of Homes and Structures in WB and People Displaced 2017–2021¹⁵⁹

Year	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Demolished homes and structures	421	468	628	854	905
People displaced	664	472	907	1,001	1,205

The Separation Wall

No significant developments were witnessed in the reporting period regarding the construction of the Separation Wall in WB, as most of the main stages of work were completed several years ago, except for a few parts that were completed in the past three years. Also, there has been no increase in the length of the Wall's route reaching 708 kilometers. This does not mean that Israel will abandon work on the Wall, but indicates the absence of important developments due to the completion of the basic parts separating the WB and Jerusalem from Palestinian territories occupied in 1948 and 1967, in addition to the completion of isolation of WB settlements from their surroundings.

In December 2021, Israel announced the completion of the construction of a security barrier along the GS borders with the 1948 occupied territories. According to the Israeli PM's spokesman Ofir Gendelman, the Israeli army completed after three and a half years the construction of the smart security barrier, surrounding GS, and extended over 65 kilometers, to prevent infiltrations into Israel.¹⁶⁰

The Barriers

The year 2021 witnessed an unprecedented leap in the number of barriers including fixed and flying (temporary) Israeli military checkpoints that cut off roads deep in WB, preventing communication between the governorates of WB, on the one hand, and between the centers of Palestinian cities, villages and towns surrounding them, on the other hand. The number of barriers including fixed and flying Israeli military checkpoints reached 4,210 in 2021 compared to 705 in 2020. Most Israeli military checkpoints are concentrated in the cities of Hebron, Ramallah and Nablus in particular.¹⁶¹ The following table provides a summary of the most prominent violations of the Israeli occupation and its settlers:

**Table 9/3: Violations of the Israeli Occupation and its Settlers in the WB
2020–2021¹⁶²**

	2020	2021
Settlers' violence	698 attacks	1,032 attacks
Cutting, burning or destroying trees	10,105 trees	20,309 trees
Land confiscation	16,345 donums confiscated and 1,650 donums bulldozed	24,750 donums
Homes and Structures demolished by the occupation	854 Homes and structures inhabited by about 1,001 citizens	905 Homes and structures inhabited by about 1,205 citizens
Barriers	705	4,210

Conclusion

Al-Aqsa Mosque was the reason for seven popular confrontations over the past 25 years, including five successive uprisings in July 2014, October 2015, July 2017, February 2019, and May 2021, with an average of 17 months between each of them. At each milestone, these confrontations have increased their mobilization capabilities and were able to impose setbacks. The trigger of such uprisings is the continuous Israeli attempt to resolve the status of *al-Aqsa* and impose radical changes to its identity. Given the continuation of this central motive, the next uprising, according to this pattern, is expected approximately in September 2022. However, given the extrapolation of the field situation and the Hijri–Hebrew congruence, the month of Ramadan and its third week coinciding with the period 16–22/4/2022 may witness the eruption of the next uprising.

The struggle over Sheikh Jarrah, the prevention of the forced displacement of its residents and also those of Silwan, the confrontation over the demolition policies, and the struggle over the Damascus Gate Plaza were the reasons for confrontations, along with the central trigger represented in *al-Aqsa*. All these elements are still interacting, with the possibility of the Khan al-Ahmar evacuation issue joining in March 2022. This complex scene along with the confrontations over settlement building and the Wall in WB, the harsh conditions of prisons, the GS siege and the prevention of reconstruction there, the marginalization of the Arab and Muslim

identity in the 1948 occupied territories, and the continued attempts to displace the Palestinians in the Negev, form a network of intertwined elements heading towards a new peak whose events would be in Jerusalem, at least as a trigger for the uprising. Notably, over time, these uprisings could impose Israeli retreats similar to those done by an organized popular uprising, albeit over a longer period.

Endnotes

- ¹ The Temple Institute formed the institution that laid the foundations of knowledge for the extremist Temple groups. Since 1987, it has been working on a conception of the alleged temple, its shape, construction, the rituals to be performed in it, the tools of religious worship and the dress of priests. In 2008, it inaugurated a new headquarters at the northwestern edge of Western Wall plaza. It consists of four floors and includes a space to display all these models, collectibles and imaginary drawings under the name “Mount Temple Museum.” See Holy Temple Museum, site of Temple Institute, <https://templeinstitute.org/holy-temple-museum>
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- ¹² Documented by the researcher quoting eyewitnesses who said that the policeman Ibrahim Sa‘id, of Arab origin, was accompanying the group of intruders between 7–8 a.m., and when a number of *al-Aqsa* guards objected to the settlers performing rituals and prayers inside the Mosque, Sa‘id told them in a threatening tone that what the settlers had done was acceptable, and that the guards should accept it against their will, and that their objections to these rituals would not be heard.
- ¹³ See the right-wing news website “Srugim,” 21/7/2020 <https://www.srugim.co.il/471962-%D7%9C%D7%90-%D7%99%D7%A%D7%9B%D7%9F-%D7%A9%D7%A7%D7%A8%D7%99%D7%90%D7%A-%D7%A9%D7%9E%D7%A2-%D7%99%D7%A9%D7%A8%D7%90%D7%9C-%D7%AA%D7%94%D7%99%D7%94-%D7%A2%D7%91%D7%99%D7%A8%D7%94-%D7%A4%D7%9C%D7%99> (in Hebrew)
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This Report

Al-Zaytouna Centre is pleased to present to its readers the Palestine Strategic Report (PSR) 2020–2021, the 12th PSR to be published.

With an academic methodology and comprehensive objective approach, the report details the developments concerning the Palestine issue and provides the latest information and data available at the end of 2021, along with analyses and forecasts.

This report is the result of collaborative work of 15 experts and researchers. In eight chapters, it addresses the internal Palestinian scene; Palestinian demographic and economic indicators; the situation in Jerusalem and the holy sites; the specifics of Israeli aggression, Palestinian resistance and the peace process; the internal situation in Israel, politically, economically and militarily; and Palestine's Arab, Islamic, and international relations.

The PSR now occupies a prominent position as an indispensable reference, integral to Palestine studies and research. Al-Zaytouna Centre hopes the PSR will continue to make valuable contributions in this field.

Prof. Dr. Mohsen Mohammad Saleh

The Palestine Strategic Report 2020 – 2021



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ISBN 978-614-494-027-3



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