

THE JORDAN VALLEY

OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORY

GEOGRAPHY

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The strategic territory of the Jordan Valley stands on the eastern part of the Israeli-occupied West Bank. Stretching over a fertile strip of 68.5 kilometers at length, the Jordan Valley spans over the Dead Sea from the east, down to Tubas' and Jericho's western slopes, at a width of 24 km. Both the Jordan Valley and the northern Dead Sea make up 1.6 million dunums, bordering the Jordanian territories. The Jordan Valley occupies a total land area of 840,906 dunums (840.9 km square meters), which constitutes 14.9% of the West Bank's total area.¹

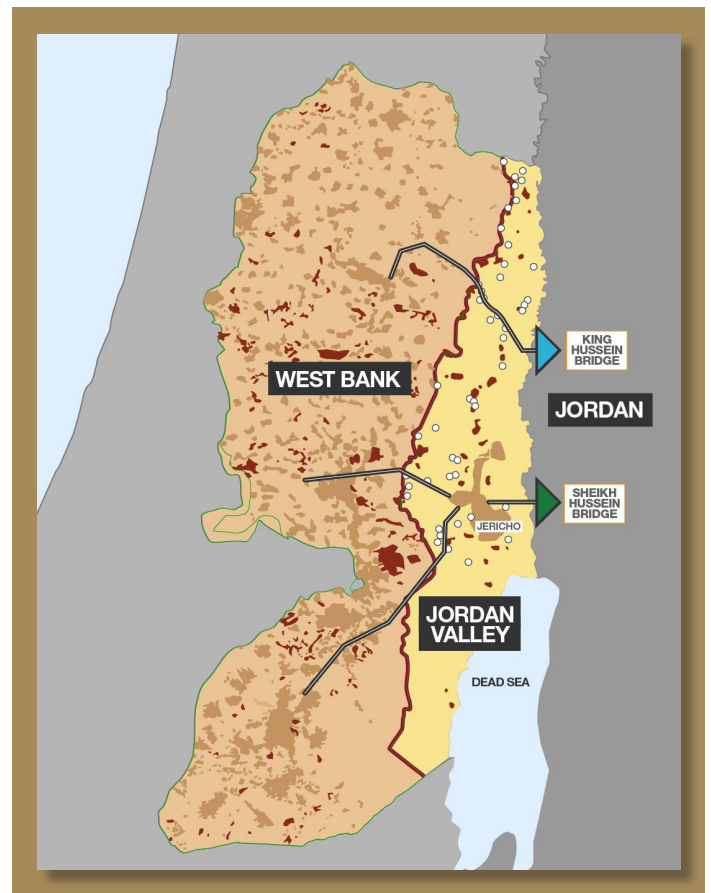
The Israeli occupation authorities have left no stone unturned to disconnect the area from its Jordanian borderlands, in an attempt to create a buffer zone pending the takeover of the entire territory. In line with its land grab policy, the Israeli occupation held sway over 55% of Jordan Valley lands, declaring those areas closed military zones.²

DEMOGRAPHIC IDENTITY

The Jordan Valley is a fertile strip of land running along the Jordan border that makes up a quarter of the West Bank's overall area. The sparsely populated zone is home to around 65,000 Palestinians. Nearly 11,000 Jewish settlers live in the area, making up 2% of its Palestinian population. Some 27 residential communities and other Bedouin groups have set up roots over 10,000 dunums of the region.

Administratively, the Jordan Valley is subordinate to three main Palestinian provinces: Tubas (Northern Jordan Valley) with 11 communities; Nablus (Central Jordan Valley) with four communities, and Jericho (Southern Jordan Valley) with 12 communities.

Available data by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics points out the demographic disequilibrium overwhelming local communities in 2017, compared with the findings of a census conducted in 2007, as a result of Israel's colonial policies.³



WATER RESOURCES

The Jordan Valley is considered as one of the primary suppliers of agricultural products in the West Bank because it is rich with underground and surface water resources. The area also draws its water abundance from the surrounding Dead Sea and Jordan Valley waters. As such, it provides profitable agriculture chances to both the Palestinian local and external market, in addition to the animal wealth that also forms a major source of income to most Palestinian families in this area.



As soon as Israel saw the day, its successive governments have issued military orders, which are into force up to the present day, green-lighting the takeover of water resources.⁴ Israel grabbed hold of nearly 78 million cubic meters of water in the Jordan Valley, waging a water war that has never ended.⁵ 60% of local water wells were dug in the Jordanian era. Israel grabbed most of those resources.

Left on their own in a battle that far exceeds Bedouins' unfeigned love for virgin land and nature, the local Palestinian communities have managed to make use of no more than 15% of their water wealth.

According to Israeli rights monitor B'Tselem, "these communities rely on the scant rainfall in the area, which they collect in cisterns and supplement by purchasing water from private vendors who transport water in tankers. Although the water provided by the vendors costs many times as much as the water supplied through the local pipeline, it is often unfit for drinking as it is transported in unsanitary conditions. The residents of these communities use only about 20 liters of water per person a day overall, for all needs. This falls far short of the 100 liters per person per day that is the minimum recommended by the World Health Organization."⁶

Seeking to stretch its nature-grab policy beyond all acceptable limits, the Israeli occupation has denied the Palestinians the right to dig up wells no matter the required depth. However, the Israeli state-owned water company Mekorot was granted government go-aheads to install water wells of a depth of up to 100 meters. Settlers and ranches in Jewish-only communities receive water supplies that keep running around the clock.⁷



ECONOMIC VALUE



Ever since Israel occupied the West Bank, in 1967, its colonial agenda towards the Jordan Valley has gradually, but conspicuously, come into sight, with dozens of industrial and agricultural projects pushed ahead.⁸ 38% of Jordan Valley territory spans fertile lands, with an estimated area of 280,000 dunums. The Palestinians have only managed to cultivate 50,000 dunums of arable land lots. Israeli settlers residing in nearby outposts, backed by the occupying power, continue to reap the crops of 27,000 dunums of lush land. Representing Palestine’s “food basket”, as the locals would call it, the Jordan Valley makes up 50% of the total agricultural areas in the West Bank and 60% of the total vegetable output.⁹ Its inherently-productive agricultural identity forms also a major source of livestock and dairy wealth to most Palestinian families in this area.¹⁰

DEMOLITIONS AND EVICTIONS

From 1967 onwards, over 50,000 Palestinians have been forced out of their own and only homes in the Jordan Valley. Entire communities, namely in Khirbet AlHadidiya, in the Northern Jordan Valley, have also been evicted from the territory under the clichéd “military zone” or “state-property” pretexts.

According to ground research conducted by Israeli watchdog B’Tselem, Israel compels Palestinians to remain within the narrow confines of their communities and prevents virtually all Palestinian construction in what it refers to as Area C. The Civil Administration (CA) issues almost no building permits, whatever the purpose: be it for housing, agricultural construction, public buildings or infrastructure.

B’Tselem has monitored demolitions carried out over the years, counting at least 698 Palestinian residential units demolished by the CA in the Jordan Valley from the January 2006 through September 2017. The demolished structures were home to at least 2,948 Palestinians, at least 1,334 of whom were minors. Of these, 783 Palestinians (including 386 minors) had their homes demolished at least twice. From January 2012 to through September 2017, the CA also demolished at least 806 non-residential units, including agricultural structures.

“The ban on Palestinian construction and development in the Jordan Valley takes a particularly harsh toll on the roughly 10,000 residents of more than 50 Palestinian communities in Area C that Israel is attempting by various means to drive from their homes and land”, said B’Tselem. “The authorities deny these communities any possibility whatsoever of lawful construction to meet the needs of their population, and refuse to connect them to water and power supplies.”

In several cases documented by B’Tselem, in recent years, and especially since early 2013, the Israeli military has periodically ordered communities located in areas Israel declared firing zones to temporarily vacate their homes.



The official reason given is that the military needs to train in these particular areas, which make up about 45% of the Jordan Valley (73,600 hectares). Time and again, residents have been served military orders requiring them to vacate their homes for various periods of time, ranging from several hours to two whole days. Should they refuse to comply, the orders threaten forced removal, expropriation of their livestock, and retroactive fines covering the costs of the removal.

From January 2013 through September 2017, the military compelled various communities throughout the Jordan Valley to vacate their homes 140 times. Some were subjected to temporary displacement several times, in some cases with only a week's respite between times.¹³ The frequent displacements take a heavy toll on residents' safety and livelihood, and also have sparked much fear and uncertainty. "Sometimes, the flocks can not be brought along and the residents have no choice but to leave them behind, hoping they will not come to harm. In some instances, families were forced out of their homes in mid-winter and had to seek shelter from the elements in harsh weather. After some removals, residents returned to find their cultivated fields damaged by the military training."¹⁴



"Every such removal means leaving homes and property behind and involves expending considerable effort. Families must gather mattresses, blankets and sustenance (food and water) for themselves and for their livestock, before setting out with their children and flocks to seek shelter elsewhere"

B'Tselem.



Under international law, deportation and forcible transfer both entail the forcible displacement of persons from the area in which they are lawfully present, without grounds permitted under international law. Article 49, first paragraph, of the 1949 Geneva Convention IV provides: "Individual or mass forcible transfers, as well as deportations of protected persons from occupied territory to the territory of the Occupying Power or to that of any other country, occupied or not, are prohibited, regardless of their motive."

SECURITY PRETEXTS

Israel has stretched its illegal settlements in the Jordan Valley beyond all legitimate limits, under the security guise. Of the total list of settlement outposts, three settlements are of a military nature, housing soldiers, army officers, and their families; 21 settlements host agricultural projects; two settlements are based on tourist industry and another two comprise industrial projects. The classification indicates that 86% of Israeli settlements in the Jordan Valley are economically-motivated.

At the military level, a 2011 report by the Israeli Peace and Security Association dismissed claims Israel needs the Valley for strategic depth. The report, representing hundreds of Israel security experts, concluded that “with or without the Jordan Valley, Israel does not have strategic depth; it is only about 40 kilometers [25 miles] across, including that valley” therefore, “guided missiles and rockets of various ranges...can reach any target in the State of Israel regardless of control of the valley.”

When Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced on Sept. 10 that he plans to annex the Jordan Valley in the occupied West Bank if he wins in the legislative elections, he knew deep inside that it was Palestinians’ “breadbasket” for their future independent state that he was zooming in with the ever-vigilant eye of his imperial thirst.

The annexation vow made Netanyahu meant that Israel would literally surround any future Palestinian state and doom the two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.



An article written by Ynet News’s Ben-Dror Yemini said the prime minister’s announcement that he plans to annex the Jordan Valley and northern Dead Sea is nothing more than an attempt to win more votes, but such declarations only serve to hurt Israel, even more so than the Gaza rocket fire that forced him to seek shelter mid-speech in Ashdod.



Netanyahu’s threat came as no surprise. Israel already controls 88% of the Jordan Valley’s overall area which it classifies as Area C under the Oslo Accords.



SETTLEMENT EXPANSION



The Jordan Valley is one of the main areas that the Israeli government aimed at annexing shortly after the 1967 occupation of Palestine. Nearly all of the Jordan Valley has been officially sanctioned by Israel as a land reserve for future settlement expansion. The Jordan Valley hosts 37 illegal Israeli settlements with a total settler population of around 10,000 people. Most of Jordan Valley lands are off limits for Palestinians, which has led to a remarkable decrease in the indigenous Palestinian population.

At the same time, settlers receive interest-free loans, free access to education and housing services, along with other discriminatory privileges to set up roots in the area.¹¹ The unabated pace with which settlement projects has been proceeding has given birth to a “colonial architecture” spanning all along the Jewish-only neighborhoods built in the area.¹² Currently, Israel controls 400,000 dunums of Jordan Valley land, declaring them closed military zones. 90 military sites have been established in the area.

RESOURCES

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¹³ B’Tselem, *ibid*

¹⁴ B’Tselem, *ibid*

