

Trump and the Plight of East Jerusalem

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We bring to the attention of Global Research readers, this carefully documented analysis of East Jerusalem published in May 2017, updated in early November, prior to the historical announcement by President Trump.

Israel unlawfully annexed East Jerusalem to its territory. Since then, and despite its incursion upon their home, it has treated the Palestinian residents of the city as unwanted immigrants and worked systematically to drive them out of the area.

In June 1967, immediately upon occupying the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, Israel annexed some 7,000 hectares of West Bank land to the municipal boundaries of Jerusalem and applied Israeli law there, in breach of international law. The annexed territory greatly exceeded the size of Jerusalem under Jordanian rule (about 600 hectares), encompassing approximately 6,400 more hectares. The additional land belonged, in large part, to 28 Palestinian villages, and some of it lay within the municipal jurisdiction of Bethlehem and Beit Jala. The annexed area is currently home to at least 370,000 Palestinians and some 280,000 Israeli settlers.

The new municipal boundaries of Jerusalem were drawn largely in accordance with demographic concerns, chief among them to leave out densely-populated Palestinian areas in order to ensure a Jewish majority in Jerusalem. In keeping with this logic, Israel included some lands belonging to villages near Jerusalem within the city's municipal jurisdiction, yet left the owners outside it. This occurred, for example, with Beit Iksa and al-Birah to the north, and with sparsely-populated areas within the municipal jurisdictions of Bethlehem and Beit Sahour to the south. In doing so, Israel divided Palestinian villages and neighborhoods, annexing only parts of them.

In June 1967, Israel held a census in the annexed area. Palestinians who happened to be absent at the time, lost their right to return to their home. Those who were present were given the status of "permanent resident" in Israel – a legal status accorded to foreign nationals wishing to reside in Israel. Yet unlike immigrants who freely choose to live in Israel and can return to their country of origin, the Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem have no other home, no legal status in any other country, and did not choose to live in Israel; it is the State of Israel that occupied and annexed the land on which they live.

Permanent residency confers fewer rights than citizenship. It entitles the holder to live and work in Israel and to receive social benefits under the National Insurance Law, as well as health insurance. But, permanent residents cannot participate in national elections – either

as voters or as candidates – and cannot run for the office of mayor, although they are entitled to vote in local elections and to run for city council.

Permanent residents are required to submit requests for ‘family unification’ for spouses who are not residents themselves. Since 1967, Israel has maintained a strict policy on requests of East Jerusalem Palestinians for ‘unification’ with spouses from other parts of the West Bank, from Gaza or from other countries. In July 2003, the Knesset passed a law barring these spouses from receiving permanent residency, other than extreme exceptions. The law effectively denies Palestinians from East Jerusalem, who are permanent residents of Israel the possibility of living in East Jerusalem with spouses from Gaza or from other parts of the West Bank, and denies their children permanent residency status.

Israeli policy in East Jerusalem is geared toward pressuring Palestinians to leave, thereby shaping a geographical and demographic reality that would thwart any future attempt to challenge Israeli sovereignty there. Palestinians who do leave East Jerusalem, due to this policy or for other reasons, risk losing their permanent residency and the attendant social benefits. Since 1967, Israel has revoked the permanent residency of some 14,500 Palestinians from East Jerusalem under such circumstances.

Israel’s attempts to shape the demographic reality of East Jerusalem are concentrated in several spheres:

Land expropriation and building restrictions

While the Jewish neighborhoods of Jerusalem and the settlement blocs on its outskirts enjoy massive development and substantial funding, Israel goes to great lengths to prevent development in Palestinian areas. As part of this policy, since 1967 the state has expropriated more than a third of the land annexed to Jerusalem – 2,450 hectares, most of it privately owned by Palestinians – and built 11 neighborhoods on them, earmarked for Jewish inhabitants only. Under international law, the status of these neighborhoods is the same as the Israeli settlements throughout the West Bank.

Immediately after the annexation, Israel cancelled all the Jordanian outline plans for the annexed areas but left those for the rest of the West Bank in place. This created a planning vacuum that took some time to fill. Only in the 1980s did the Jerusalem Municipality draw up outline plans for all Palestinian neighborhoods in East Jerusalem. The most striking feature of these plans was the designation of huge swathes of land as “open scenic areas” where development is forbidden. In 2014, after several amendments made to the plans over the years, these “scenic areas” made up about 30% of the land in Palestinian neighborhoods. Only some 15% of the land area in East Jerusalem (about 8.5% of Jerusalem’s municipal jurisdiction) is zoned for residential use by Palestinian residents, although Palestinians currently account for 40% of the city’s population.

Another measure Israel has employed to limit the amount of land available to Palestinians is [declaring national parks](#) where development is almost entirely forbidden. To date, four national parks have been declared in East Jerusalem, within the city’s municipal boundaries, including on privately-owned Palestinian land or on land that lies within or adjacent to the built-up areas of Palestinian neighborhoods and villages. The Jerusalem Municipality is planning more parks in East Jerusalem.

The unusually high number of national parks in East Jerusalem, some of which contain

nothing of archaeological or natural importance, indicates that – unlike other parks declared by Israel’s Nature and Parks Authority – the purpose of these parks is not conservation. Instead, they are an instrument for sealing off large expanses of land in East Jerusalem in order to further political goals such as ensuring Jewish-only contiguity from the Old City to the planned settlement area of E1, while increasing Jewish presence in East Jerusalem.

In any case, the municipality consistently avoids drawing up detailed urban building plans (UBPs) – a prerequisite for receiving building permits – for Palestinian neighborhoods. As a result, Palestinian communities in East Jerusalem suffer an extreme shortage of housing, public buildings (such as schools and medical clinics), infrastructure (including roads, pavements, and water and sewage systems), trade services and recreational facilities.

With no land reserves for development, the Palestinian population in East Jerusalem – which has grown more than fivefold since 1967 – remains confined within increasingly crowded neighborhoods. According to statistics gathered by the Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research, in 2015 population density in Palestinian neighborhoods within Jerusalem’s municipal boundaries was almost double that of Jewish neighborhoods: an average of 1.9 persons per room and 1 person per room, respectively.

Given this reality, Palestinians have no choice but to build without permits. The Jerusalem Municipality estimates that between 15,000 and 20,000 housing units were built without permits in Palestinian neighborhoods until 2004. An unknown number have been built since, including densely packed multi-story buildings east of the Separation Barrier. These structures are then issued demolition orders by the Israeli authorities, which wilfully ignore their role in forcing residents into this impossible bind. Thousands of Palestinians in East Jerusalem live under constant threat to their homes and businesses; in many cases, the authorities follow through on this threat or force residents to demolish the structures themselves. From 2004 to the end of September 2017, Israeli authorities [demolished 730 housing](#) units in East Jerusalem.

At the same time, various authorities encourage hundreds of settlers to take up residence in the midst of Palestinian neighborhoods, driving Palestinians out of their homes. Settlement pockets in East Jerusalem encircle the Holy Basin to the south (in Silwan and Ras al-‘Amud), east (in a-Tur and Abu Dis) and north (in Sheikh Jarrah), and some are strategically located along main routes leading to the Old City. Other pockets have been established within the Muslim and Christian quarters of the Old City. According to Israeli NGO Ir Amim, a total of approximately 2,800 settlers live within Palestinian neighborhoods in East Jerusalem. These settler enclaves have altered the neighborhoods in which they were established, making the lives of the Palestinian residents unbearable, the latter having to contend with legal proceedings aimed at driving them from their homes, invasion of their privacy, financial pressure and daily harassment by settlers. All these lead to violent confrontations between Palestinians and settlers. The incursion of settlers has also brought increased presence of police, Border Police and state-paid private security personnel who use violence against the Palestinian residents, threaten them and arrest teens, thus exacerbating the disruption of life in the neighborhood.

Cutting East Jerusalem off from the rest of the West Bank

Until 1967, Jerusalem under Jordanian rule was an economic, medical, cultural and religious hub for many residents of the West Bank, who continued to work, study and shop in the city after the Israeli annexation. However, in the early 1990s, during the first Intifada, Israel put

up checkpoints deep within the West Bank, and since then has forbidden Palestinians from other parts of the West Bank to enter Jerusalem without a special permit. In addition, the Israel Police erected checkpoints at the entrances to several Palestinian neighborhoods in the city, curtailing residents' movement. These restrictions weakened East Jerusalem's position as a regional center.

In 2002, during the second Intifada, Israel began constructing the Separation Barrier in the area of Jerusalem, most of it in the form of a high concrete wall that in some parts passes right by Palestinian homes. The wall was completed in 2016. Unlike the checkpoints that the military erected some ten years earlier deep within the West Bank, the wall completely sealed East Jerusalem off from the rest of the West Bank, heightening its separation. This was the intentional result of building as much of the barrier as possible along the municipal boundaries that Israel declared around Jerusalem in 1967, in order to ensure control over the annexed land. However, until the wall was built, these municipal boundaries were largely theoretical and had almost no effect on life in Jerusalem and its environs.

The wall cut through a vibrant fabric of Palestinian communities with ties that cut across municipal lines, including trade, culture, education and health services. Tens of thousands of Palestinians with permanent resident status who had moved to East Jerusalem suburbs were left on the other side of the wall, cut off from the rest of the city. The construction of the wall abruptly overturned their lives, forcing them to cross checkpoints every time they wish to enter the city, usually on a daily basis. As a result, many permanent residents moved back within city limits, driving up real estate prices and causing massive crowding. This severed East Jerusalem almost completely from the rest of the West Bank, and it lost its status as a regional hub for good.

The route of the Separation Barrier deviates from the municipal boundaries of Jerusalem in five locations, in keeping with the goal that governed the drawing of these boundaries in 1967 – to annex as much land and as few Palestinians as possible. This resulted in a winding route that adds up to some 202 kilometers in the area of Jerusalem.

Two areas were cut off from the city although they lie within the municipal boundaries: Kafr 'Aqab to the north and Shu'fat Refugee Camp to the northeast. These areas include eight Palestinian neighborhoods, which are home to some 140,000 Palestinians, including an unknown number of West Bank residents. Residents of these neighborhoods pay municipal and other taxes, but both the Jerusalem Municipality and the various government ministries avoid entering these neighborhoods and ignore their needs. Consequently, these areas have become a no man's land: The authorities do not provide basic municipal services such as waste removal, road maintenance and education, and there is a severe shortage of classrooms and day care facilities. The water and sewage systems fail to meet the population's needs, yet the authorities do nothing to repair them. In addition, the residents suffer extreme restrictions on their movement due to the checkpoints separating them from the rest of the city.

In three areas, the route of the barrier – including the existing sections, those under construction and those awaiting construction – effectively expands the city without formally changing its municipal boundaries. This choice of route has added open areas, as well as settlements and land adjacent to them, to the city. The added land mass amounts to about 6,500 hectares in the area of the Gush Etzion settlement bloc, to the south; some 6,000 hectares in the area of Ma'ale Adumim and nearby settlements to the east; and about 2,500 hectares in the area of Givat Ze'ev and nearby settlements to the north. The northern

section has been completed. In the Gush Etzion area, only some 21% of the route (about 11 kilometers) have been built and another 14% (about 7 kilometers) are under construction. In the Ma'ale Adumim area, about 28% of the route (some 14 kilometers) are in various stages of construction.

Discrimination in budget allocation and municipal services

Palestinians in East Jerusalem are required to pay taxes like any other inhabitant of the city, but do not receive the same services that others do. The Jerusalem Municipality deliberately avoids significantly investing in infrastructure and services in the Palestinian neighborhoods – including roads, pavements, water and sewage systems, schools and cultural institutions. This policy affects almost every aspect of Palestinians' lives in East Jerusalem. For example, Ir Amim estimates that as of 2017, there is a shortage of 2,557 classrooms in Palestinian neighborhoods, and about a third of the children do not complete twelve years of schooling. Only some 52% of the population in these neighborhoods has legal access to the water grid.

In addition, while Palestinians make up 40% of the Jerusalem population, the municipality runs only six family health centers in the Palestinian neighborhoods, as opposed to 27 centers in Jewish neighborhoods. The municipality also has only four social services offices in the Palestinian neighborhoods, as opposed to 19 in Jewish neighborhoods – although in the former, 76% of all residents and 83.4% of the children live below the poverty line.

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