

Background on the Jordan Valley

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Bedouin community in firing zone, near Route 578 (Derech Alon). Photo: Keren Manor / activestills.org, 8 Feb. '11

The Jordan Valley is a sparsely populated region with vast, uninhabited areas. The considerable size of the Jordan Valley and its relatively sparse population make it the largest land reserve for future development of the West Bank. Urban centers could be developed in the Jordan Valley to address population growth in the West Bank; its fertile land is crucial for the production of food for the West Bank's growing population and for turning a profit on agricultural exports; and its extensive uninhabited sections make it attractive for development in terms of energy, infrastructure and industry. Israeli and Palestinian economists [believe](#) that "In order to ensure the viability and sustainability of the future Palestinian state, the Jordan Valley needs to be opened to the Palestinian population immediately," thereby enabling realization of the potential for economic development in this region, which is crucial to the rehabilitation and development of the Palestinian economy.

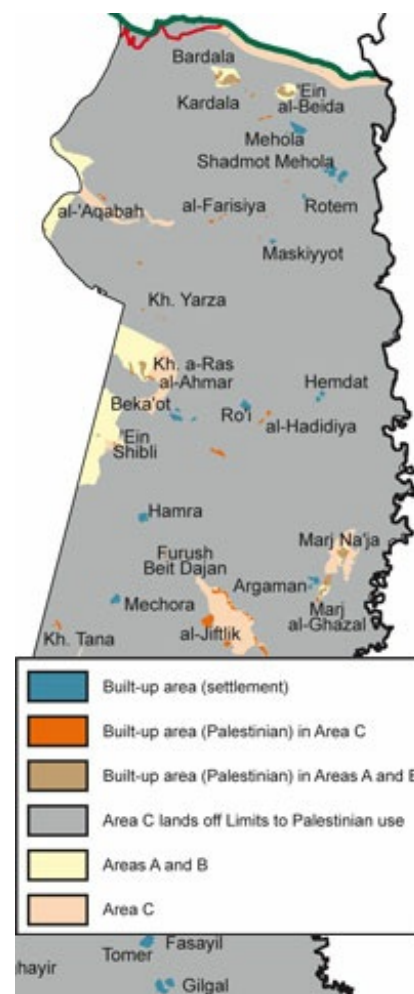
According to a joint study by [Israeli and Palestinian economists](#), agricultural cultivation of 10,000 hectares in the Jordan Valley could yield 150,000 to 200,000 new jobs. The use of advanced agricultural technologies would enable farmers to increase their production five- to ten-fold and would also enable the development of approximately 5,000 hectares for agricultural exports worth about one billion dollars a year. Agricultural development on this scale depends on allocation of land and water resources and cannot be realized without Israeli cooperation. Yet Israel's policy in this region actually aims at keeping Palestinian population away. On various pretexts, Israel does not allow Palestinians to use most of the Jordan Valley, restricts their access to the Jordan Valley's abundant water resources and refuses to draw up plans for Palestinian villages located there. Among the objectives of this policy, under which Israel exploits the area's resources and reduces Palestinian presence there to a minimum, is the control of the area by Israel and de-facto annexation of the Jordan Valley to Israel. Ultimately, the policy is designed to set the stage for perpetuating Israel's presence in the area in the long run, even in the framework of a formal status agreement.

Figures

The Jordan Valley and the region of the northern Dead Sea cover approximately 160,000 hectares, which make up about 28.8% of the West Bank. Some 88% of the land in this area had been designated as Area C, comprising approximately 42% of all Area C lands in the West Bank. The rest of the land in the Jordan Valley is made up of enclaves of Palestinian communities, including the city of Jericho, designated as Areas A or B. In 2009, some 58,000 Palestinians lived in the Jordan Valley, most in the greater Jericho area. About 10,000 of the Palestinians in the Jordan Valley live in more than twenty communities located in Area C. This number includes about 2,700 people who live in small Bedouin and shepherding communities.

To date, 39 Israeli settlements, including nine illegal outposts have been established in the Jordan Valley and the northern Dead Sea area. In 2011, the overall settler population in this area was 10,738. The municipal land allocated to the settlements encompasses approximately 12% of the region and is 2.8 times the size of the Palestinian communities in Area C, despite comparable population sizes. The municipal lands of the settlements are surrounded by lands under the jurisdiction of the regional councils of the Jordan Valley. All told, nearly 95% of Area C lands in this area are under the jurisdiction of local or regional councils.

Israel forbids Palestinian use of most of the land in the Jordan Valley and northern Dead Sea on various pretexts: 48.7% of the area – partly located within the boundaries of thirty of the settlements – has been declared “state land”, (more than half of which was declared as such under Jordanian rule or earlier); 46.1% of the area has been declared a closed military zone, including the municipal land of the settlements and 11 firing zones; Israel has designated 26 nature reserves, encompassing about 20% of the area; on one percent of the land, Israel had once planted landmines. The vast majority of the remaining land is under the jurisdiction of the settlements’ regional councils. All told, after accounting for overlaps in the areas cited, 85.2% of the land area of the Jordan Valley and northern Dead Sea is off-limits to Palestinians: they may not be, build, or herd their livestock in these areas.



Proportion of lands off-limits to Palestinian use in the Jordan Valley and Northern Dead Sea

	Size (in hectares)	Percentage of Jordan Valley and Northern Dead Sea area	Percentage of West Bank area	Percentage of Area C in Jordan Valley area
Settlements and regional councils	1,344,335	83.40%	24%	95%
“State land”	784,969	48.70%	14%	55.50%
Closed military zones	743,626	46.10%	13.30%	52.60%
Nature reserves	334,614	20.70%	6%	23.60%

Area closed off by Separation Barrier	2,505	0.16%	0.04%	0.20%
Total (after deducting for overlap)	1,372,695	85.17%	24.50%	97%

Refraining from planning; prohibiting construction; demolishing homes

The limited space allowed for Palestinian residence in the Jordan Valley is split up into isolated sections that are surrounded by firing zones, settlements and nature reserves. Similarly to its policy in the rest of the West Bank, Israel limits building and development opportunities in the villages of the Jordan Valley. Of the more than twenty Palestinian population concentrations in the Jordan Valley, which are located entirely on Area C land, the Civil Administration has prepared master plans for only a single village (al-Jiftlik) and even then, the plans and the constructions permits apply only to part of the village's built up area. In the other villages, the Civil Administration issues demolition orders for homes that Palestinians – having no other option – build without a permit. Some of these orders are implemented. According to B'Tselem's data, from January 2006 through the end of April 2013, the Civil Administration demolished at least 315 residential units in Palestinian communities in the Jordan Valley and another unknown number of agricultural structures. The houses demolished were home to at least 1,577 Palestinians, including at least 658 minors. Of the Palestinians whose homes were demolished, 225, including 102 minors, lost their homes to demolition at least twice.

Robbed of their water

The Jordan Valley has some of the most abundant water resources in the West Bank, and Israel has taken over most of them. Israeli drilling and pumping reduces the volume of water that the Palestinians can draw from their wells, detrimentally affects the quality of the water and diminishes the flow of natural springs throughout the Jordan Valley. In addition, Israel denies Palestinians access to springs located beyond the boundaries of their communities. Israel denies Palestinians access to the Jordan River basin. Israeli, Jordanian and Syrian waterworks pump water from various parts of the basin and have reduced the flow in the river itself by 98%, compared to the natural flow during the 1940s. As a result, some parts of the river have dried up and the water level of the Dead Sea has been losing one meter every year.



Left: Ein al-'Uja spring in better days. Photo: Itamar Grinberg. The dry 'Ein Uja spring today. Photo: Eyal Hareuveni, B'Tselem, 23 March 2011

Most Israeli water drilling in the West Bank - 28 out of 42 wells - is in the Jordan Valley. Israel produces about 32 million cubic meters of water from these wells annually, most of which is designated for the settlements and a small portion of which is supplied to the Palestinian villages. Israel also supplies water for agricultural use in the settlements from the Tirtza artificial water reservoir in the central Jordan Valley as well as from treated waste water from the Israeli and Palestinian neighborhoods of East Jerusalem and the Adumim settlements.

All told, 44.8 million cubic meters of water a year are allocated to the approximately 10,000 settlers living in the Jordan Valley and northern Dead Sea, an amount equal to just under a third of the water available for the 2.6 million Palestinian residents of the West Bank. The settlers receive a volume of water many times greater than the amount with which their Palestinian neighbors must make do. In 2011, average household water allotment in the Jordan Valley settlements was approximately 450 liters per person per day, whereas for Palestinians in the central and northern Jordan Valley, average water consumption in 2009 was around 60 liters per person per day. The World Health Organization recommends a daily water consumption of 100 liters per person.

The Palestinian communities in the Jordan Valley, to which the Civil Administration denies legal planning and construction opportunities, generally do not get permission to be hooked up to the water system. The residents of these communities depend for water on the scant rainfall which they collect in cisterns. They also depend on water trucks brought in by private contractors, which water costs on average NIS 25 per cubic meter. The average water consumption in these communities is only twenty liters per person per day. The village of al-Hadidiya, for instance, is cut off from any regular water supply, despite its proximity to a Mekorot (Israel's national water company) pump (Beka'ot 2), which provides water to the nearby settlements of Ro'i and Beka'ot. The per diem water allotment per person in these settlements, for household use alone, is over 460 liters – at least 23 times the consumption of water in al-Hadidiya. The Civil Administration has avoided making improvements to the natural water sources that serve Palestinians and issues demolition orders when the residents do so themselves, for example by restoring natural springs. Village residents who earn their living as shepherds roam with their flocks through vast grazing areas that have no water. To water their animals, they generally transport large containers of water to the grazing areas. Testimony given to B'Tselem shows that over the past few summers the Civil Administration has confiscated these water containers, each of which costs nearly 300 NIS, alleging that they were placed in firing zones. Residents have

reported that official Israeli representatives dumped the contents of the containers prior to removing them.

Damage to agriculture

The Jordan Valley region is suitable for agriculture due to its fertile soil, diverse water resources and high temperatures. The strong sun and low humidity contribute to protecting the crops from disease. However, the Palestinians are hard put to develop this sector because of the Israeli prohibition on use of most of the land in the area, diminished access to water and restrictions on construction and infrastructure hookups. This reality makes farming more costly, limits the range of crops that can be raised and puts Palestinian agriculture as an industry at a disadvantage compared with the settlements. Under these circumstances, despite substantial agricultural potential, Jordan Valley farmland is the least cultivated farmland in the West Bank. The Palestinian Ministry of Agriculture estimates that Palestinians in the Jordan Valley currently cultivate only 5,000 hectares, an eighth of its arable land. The Civil Administration mounts obstacles even to small agricultural projects. Citing various reasons, such as the prohibition on cultivating state land or land in closed military zones, the Civil Administration keeps Palestinian farmers and developers, including those who live in Areas A or B, from developing agricultural projects in the Jordan Valley and creating jobs.

In contrast to the stagnation and neglect Israel imposes on Palestinian communities in the Jordan Valley, the settler population in the Jordan Valley enjoys extensive investment of resources. Nearly all the land in the Jordan Valley is under the jurisdiction of the settlers' regional and local councils; the settlements enjoy generous allocations of water and have received unprecedented benefits over the years. All this has enabled Jordan Valley settlements to develop modern intensive agriculture on an area of some 3,200 hectares. The settlements' agricultural production in the Jordan Valley is currently estimated at about half a billion shekels a year. Thirty percent of the families in Israel's Jordan Valley settlements engage in agriculture and a similar percentage of families provide auxiliary services to farmers.

Shepherding communities being pushed out of firing zones

Some 2,700 people live in approximately twenty shepherding communities in the Jordan Valley in areas declared firing zones by the military or on the periphery of those areas. Some of the communities existed there even before the land was declared a closed zone in the 1970s. In 2009 – decades after the firing zones were originally declared – the military placed cement slabs near each of these communities and posted notices stating that the area was a firing zone and entry was prohibited. According to testimony provided by residents of these communities to B'Tselem, it has been years since any exercises were conducted in the zones where they live.

The Civil Administration uses different measures in order to prevent these communities from remaining where they are and using the land. In June 2012, the Civil Administration notified the High Court of Justice of its intention to relocate Bedouin communities from various parts of the West Bank to “permanent sites”, where permanent housing would be built and linked to utility infrastructure. This program also includes evacuation of the Bedouins of the Jordan Valley to two sites in the vicinity of Fasayil in the central Jordan Valley, two in the Nu'eimeh area north of Jericho and two other sites also north of Jericho. In May 2013 the Civil Administration approved for filing a plan for establishing a permanent community on state lands in Area C for the Bedouins of the Nu'eimeh region. According to the reports, the Civil Administration plans to gather into this community [Bedouins from various tribes](#) who live in different areas of the West Bank, including the area of Ma'ale Adumim. The plan has yet to be made public. As of the summer of 2012, the military occasionally orders the temporary evacuation of communities located in Jordan Valley areas designated firing zones, alleging that this is necessary for the purpose of military exercises. The orders given to the residents required them to leave their homes for periods of time ranging from a few hours to two days at a time and stated that, if the residents did not leave voluntarily, they would be forcibly removed, their livestock confiscated, and they would be billed for the cost of the evacuation. In some cases documented by B'Tselem, only an oral warning of the evacuation was conveyed.

The frequent evacuations force residents to put their lives on hold. They evoke fear and uncertainty and involve a

great deal of inconvenience. In each such evacuation, the families must abandon their homes and some of their property. They must take along mattresses, blankets, and food and water for themselves and their livestock. They have to leave with their children and flocks and find shelter from the weather elsewhere. Some of the evacuations took place in the winter, in severe weather. In some cases the military training sessions damaged residents' cultivated fields.

By the end of May 2013, there were at least twenty such instances. The communities thus harmed include Hamam al-Maleh, al-Burj, 'Ein al-Mita, Khirbet Humsah, Khirbet Ras al-Ahmar, Ibziq, Khirbet Tana, al-Hadidiyah, Khirbet Yarza, 'Ein al-Hilweh and Samra . Some of the communities were evacuated several times, sometimes twice within the space of a week.