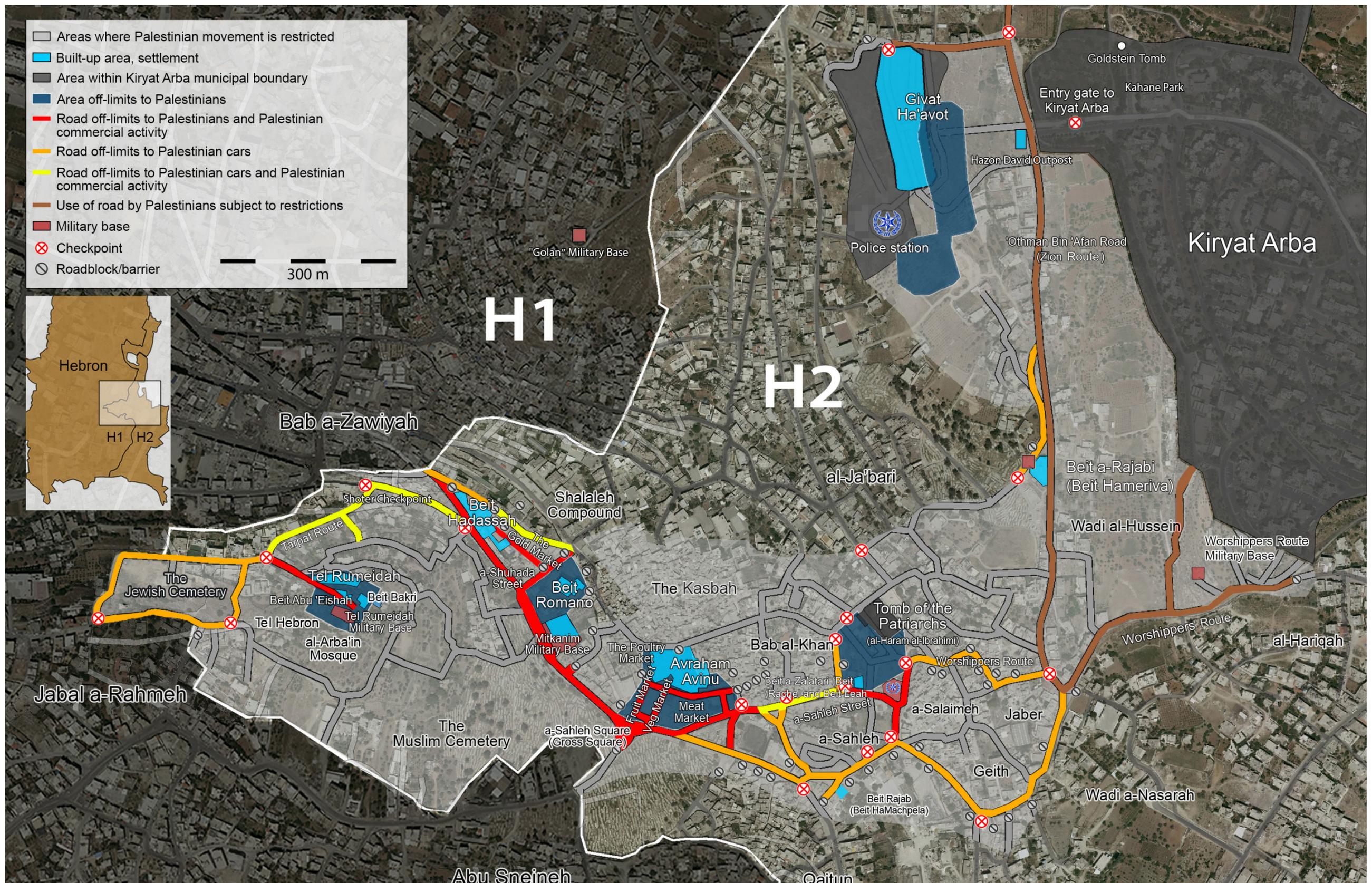


The settlement in Area H2, Hebron

Movement restrictions imposed by the army on Palestinians





Hebron is the second largest city in the West Bank, with a population of around 220,000 Palestinians. In 1968 an Israeli settlement was established in the heart of the city, and today it is inhabited by approximately 850 settlers, who are guarded at any given time by at least 650 soldiers in addition to police personnel stationed in the city.

The Hebron settlement is the only one in the occupied territories to be located in the midst of a Palestinian city, and the close proximity between the settler and Palestinian populations makes for constant 'friction'. In 1997, Israel and the PLO signed the Hebron Agreement, according to which the city was divided into two parts: H1, which comprises around 80% of the city and, much like the other big cities in the West Bank – designated as Area A – is under Palestinian security and municipal control; H2, on the other hand, which makes up 20% of the city – including the city center, the Tomb of the Patriarchs, the Old City and the Israeli settlements – is under the IDF's direct control.

With time, due to the actions of successive Israeli governments, the settler movement and the IDF, the city center has become a deserted ghost town, almost entirely void of Palestinians. Since the 1994 Tomb of the Patriarchs massacre – in which a settler shot dead 29 Palestinians and wounded a further 125 – and even more so during the second intifada, Hebron's city center has seen a drain of Palestinian residents. Among those living in immediate proximity to the settlements, a third have abandoned their homes.

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Settler Crime and Violence

In their efforts to 'Judaize' Hebron and to force out its Palestinian residents, the settlers violently harass Palestinian residents of the city on a daily basis. Their violence includes direct verbal and physical attacks on Palestinians, purposely provocative behavior, stone-throwing, vandalism, cutting telephone wires and water pipes, throwing garbage into Palestinian yards and more.

The settlers also exploit the fact that IDF soldiers – who are usually the first to respond to any incident as they are stationed throughout the city – are only allowed to enforce the law when it comes to Palestinians, but are ordered not to do so in the case of Israeli citizens. The direct result is criminal and violent behavior by the settlers, aimed mostly at Palestinians but at times even at soldiers when they act in a way that does not serve the settlers' interests.

In an attempt to establish 'facts on the ground', with the aim of creating territorial contiguity between Kiryat Arba and Tel Rumeida, the settlers also use a tactic of invading and seizing Palestinian properties in strategic locations in the city. This tactic is well-known: settlers invade a property and refuse to leave; the IDF is forced to protect the criminals, stationing soldiers inside or surrounding the property; heightened military presence in the area leads to more friction with the local Palestinian population, along with a rise in violence; the settlers and their representatives in parliament declare that 'violence will be met with more construction', and invade more houses. Thus, Hebron's settlers exploit the IDF to perpetuate an endless cycle of violence, theft and oppression.



1990s



Today

Photo by: Natif Hashlamun

Photo by: Keren Manor/Activestills

"The settlers have a very clear interest to transform what is known as 'Zion route' into a Jewish route. The 'Machpela House', the 'Red House', 'Hazon David', which is an illegal outpost opposite the entrance gate to Kiryat Arba – it's all part of turning it into a Jewish route. Ultimately, the Palestinians won't want to live there because it's too difficult, and the settlers ride that wave. All the H2 Area, especially this area – if you're a Palestinian with money, you

won't live there. Why should you? The army takes over your house regularly, there are roadblocks. But especially on Zion route. If you live on Zion route or in the Kasbah or something like that, and you have money, you just leave. Why should you stay? Why have the army sit there all day long... Not being able to drive up to your house, there's part of your neighborhood you can't go by foot? No reason to live there." **Civil Administration | Hebron | 2011**



1990s



Today

Photo by: Natif Hashlamun

Photo by: Keren Manor/Activestills

A Policy of Separation

In order to protect the 850 settlers living in the heart of a 220,000-strong Palestinian population center, the IDF's approach is to separate between the two populations by restricting Palestinian movement. Thus, for decades, Israel has been operating a system of severe movement restrictions, including what's known in the IDF as 'sterilization' of entire areas and main roads. In Hebron, like in much of the West Bank, Palestinians are restricted from approaching the settlements. The difference is that unlike other settlements, in Hebron the settlement is in the very heart of the city, which results in a severe and constant disruption to everyday life for its Palestinian residents.

As of the end of 2019, that system includes 22 manned checkpoints and 64 other physical barriers of various kinds. Some of these are arbitrarily operated, in line with the IDF's logic, according to which the harder it is for Palestinians to know when, where and how

the army operates, the easier it is for the army to maintain control of the population. The use of movement restrictions increases around special events in the Jewish calendar, including the 'Hayei Sarah' weekend, the Purim parade and so on. Restrictions also intensify when settlers conduct events inside Palestinian neighborhoods (for example, 'Kasbah tours'), and even when those events take place in H1 (for example, when settlers make pilgrimages to the grave of Otniel Ben Knaz).

According to the Hebron municipality, 1,079 of the 3,362 residential properties (32%) in H2 have been abandoned since the second intifada. Additionally, 512 commercial properties have been closed due to military orders, and around 1,000 more were closed by their owners due to movement restrictions which prevented access to customers and retailers.

"Initiated operations – we have a nice one every Friday at Jabel Johar. What happens during this initiated operation is that soldiers go, say five, six or eight, with a lot of riot-dispersal means, walk around and wait for someone to provoke us. You wait for someone to provoke you. And then, of course, the Hebron kids, their game is to throw stones at soldiers on Friday afternoons.

They start throwing stones, riot-dispersal and all that mess begins, jokes. They throw a stone, we fire riot control bullets or tear gas, they throw a stone, we chase after kids. You'll never catch them because you're fully equipped with a bulletproof vest and all that shit. We cause a bit of chaos, lots of gas." **First Sergeant | Nahal, 932nd Battalion | Hebron | 2014**



86 checkpoints and barriers set up by the IDF



43 Palestinian houses fully or partially seized to be used as military outposts



9 roads and areas where Palestinian access is restricted or prohibited



32% (1,079 of 3,369) of Palestinian houses in H2 currently stand vacant



More than 1,500 Palestinian commercial properties in H2 closed down

Increased Military Presence

Due to the tension caused by having a settlement located in the heart of a large Palestinian population center, the IDF's central aim in Hebron is to maintain 'quiet' through the use of various means of control over the Palestinian residents, as well as by giving in to settler demands. IDF soldiers, who are stationed in Hebron at a ratio of almost one combatant for every settler, conduct the same military activity in Hebron as soldiers do in other parts of the West Bank, including placing the entire Palestinian population under curfew, carrying out patrols and arrests, operating checkpoints and entering Palestinian homes.

One of the most fundamental elements of the IDF's mission in Hebron, like in the rest of the West Bank, is to 'demonstrate its presence'. According to the IDF mindset, in order to ensure quiet and security in an area, Palestinians must constantly feel as if the IDF is everywhere, and that at any given moment they're being watched. In order to create that atmosphere, IDF forces demonstrate their presence in a way that is both constant and, at the same time, entirely random and unexpected. At any given time of day or night, three groups of soldiers patrol the city. In the course of such a patrol, soldiers enter Palestinian houses at random, block roads, stop and search passersby on foot or in vehicles, carry out arrests and detain people on a regular basis. The heavy military presence in Hebron is not limited to H2 alone; although according to the Hebron Agreement H1 is not under direct Israeli security control, there are IDF soldiers in H1 at all times, and they often make use of the same practices that are used in H2.