

Israeli Settlements in the Valley

Because of its strategic location (separating the pre-1967 boundaries of Israel from the Arab world by the River Jordan and the arid highlands of central Palestine) and its great agricultural potential as "the natural hot house of the Middle East," the Western Valley region became the favoured area for Jewish colonization efforts since the first years of Israel occupation. During the 1967 war and estimated 75,000 out of 84,779 of the region's residents (88 percent of the total -- Harris, 1980:16) escaped, thus creating a "demographic vacuum" for the Israeli military and later, civilian outposts to fill. Although many thousands of the area's inhabitants later filtered back, the Israeli military government made full use of the category of "absentee land" holders to confiscate thousands of dunums in favour of agricultural colonies.

Significantly, the Jordan Valley constituted the one area of consensus in the divergent settlement policies of the Labour and Likud wings of Israeli policy as expressed in the Allon Plan (1967, modified 1975). Although Likud and Gush Emunim maximalists objected to the territorial compromises implicit in the Allon Plan, especially the component allowing for the restoration of Arab sovereignty in the "Jericho Corridor" (see Map 10:1), nevertheless, both maximalists and minimalists agreed on the non-negotiability of the Jordan Rift in future peace settlements.

The expansion of Israeli presence went through several phases which can be summarized as follows:⁴

1. Nahal (military) settlements aimed at guerrilla intrusions, especially in the Ghor el-Far'a region (1968-1971). Moshav (then Nahal) Argaman (see appendix F) was established in this period. During the 1971-1975 period a second line of out-