

# The Bedouin Encampment of Khan Al-Ahmar (Part One)

by Hugh Fitzgerald



You've perhaps heard about the Bedouin of Khan Al-Ahmar? The standard version of the tale presents these noble sons of the desert, members of the Jahalin tribe who for millennia have lived in their ancestral village in the West Bank, where they have been quietly raising their sheep, bothering no one, and nonetheless, are now about to be summarily kicked out, for no reason, by the quasi-fascist goose-stepping army of hegemonic Israelis. These Bedouin will have to fold their tents, take their sheep, move far away, and try to restart their lives, on whatever wretched piece of land the Israelis place them on. That, more or less, is what the "Palestinians" would like you to believe.

Many people have been up in arms about the "uprooting" (a word which presumes they had set down roots) of these Bedouin. British Prime Minister Theresa May has called the planned demolition of the Bedouin village of Khan Al-Ahmar in the West Bank by the Israeli authorities "a major blow for the prospects of a two state solution with Jerusalem as a shared

capital with the Palestinians.” The Prime Minister also said: “I once again call on the Israeli government not to go ahead with the demolition of the village, including its school, and displacing its residents.” So the fate of fewer than 30 families, 180 people in all, would be “a major blow” for the “prospects of a two-state solution”?

The E.U. chimed in, deploring Israel’s plan to move the Bedouin encampment, and **warning that by demolishing Khan al-Ahmar, Israel would undermine the “prospects for peace,”** as well as the possibility of achieving a two-state solution.

*“The community of Khan al-Ahmar is located in a sensitive location in Area C, of strategic importance for preserving the contiguity of a future Palestinian state.”*

But if there is “contiguity” – a land link – between the parts of “a future Palestinian state,” as the E.U. apparently wants, then it is Israel that will be cut in two. Why should Israel be split apart, and not “Palestine”? Which state has had to fight for its survival in three big wars, as well as having to fight four smaller ones? Which state will always be the victim of a permanent Jihad – a future “Palestine,” or Israel?

Not to be outdone by the E.U., **the International Criminal Court’s chief prosecutor, one Fatou Bensouda, has said that in moving the Bedouin, Israel may be “committing a war crime.”**

A war crime?

Let’s go over the real, rather than the recently fabricated, history of this Bedouin encampment. It is not a village. There are tents and shacks and a rundown school made of mud and old tires. No structure in the encampment was built to last, because the Bedouin always knew that their illegal squatting, on land owned by the state, would eventually come to an end. They never requested, much less submitted, permits from the

Israeli government even for the structures they did build; everything they did in Khan al-Ahmar was illegal. The 180 inhabitants even get their electricity, and water, by tapping illegally into Israeli sources of both.

The encampment came about this way. A blood feud broke out within a large Bedouin tribe in the Negev in the 1950s. As a result, the Jahalin Bedouin, an offshoot of that larger tribe, were forced to migrate north. They arrived, continuing their nomadic existence, but finally settled in their present location sometime after the Yom Kippur War in 1973. Far from being an "ancient" Bedouin site, the tents and shacks they put up are at most 45 years old. The Israelis possess the evidence: dated aerial photographs showing the land before the Bedouin moved in. The Jahalin Bedouin knew they were squatting on state land belonging to Israel. They have never claimed to own the land they squatted on. They simply set up their tents, and built their shacks, on land that they knew eventually they would have to leave. They placed themselves on a cliff right next to, and overlooking, Route 1. That highway is the major link between Jerusalem, Ma'ale Adumim, and the Dead Sea. The Bedouin chose to squat in a place that is of vital importance to Israel if it is to maintain strategic control of this critical area.

It turned out to be a good place for the Bedouin to throw rocks down on Israeli cars, and they have been doing so for years. It's also a danger for Bedouin children, who could easily slip and slide down into the traffic on the highway below. See photograph above.

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