

Dgaiga

An Unrecognized Village in Area C



By Mahmoud Najada

D

gaiga* is a Bedouin village in the West Bank, southeast of Hebron, which has been inhabited since the early nineteenth century. People there depend on raising livestock for their living. Their life used to be quiet and simple until 1948, when the State of Israel was created and borders were set that divided historical Palestine. Since that time, Dgaiga has been suffering from measures such as the confiscation of cattle, house demolitions, and the imposition of fines.

The situation grew much worse in May 2022, when the village was suddenly and literally reoccupied. A number of Israeli soldiers besieged the village and constructed a new military camp in its vicinity, preventing people from moving freely in and out of the village. Moreover, they bulldozed the surrounding lands to construct a new road and, in doing so, created a wall that no one can cross! Khalid, a shepherd, says, “I was really shocked when I saw it. It

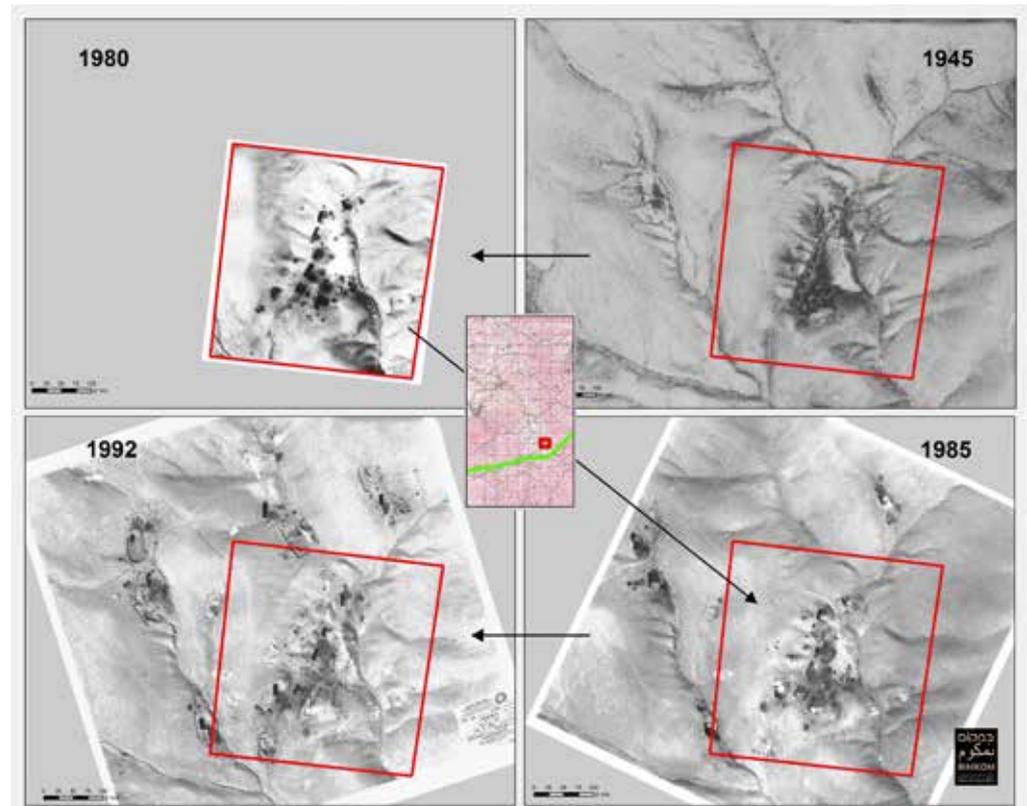
was like a terrible nightmare! What can I do with my cattle? There are no pastures left to graze them. They will simply starve!” Indeed, the people in Dgaiga have suffered because fodder is very expensive and the pastures are no longer available to them. This has led to tragic results because the loss of their livestock has meant utter poverty for many.

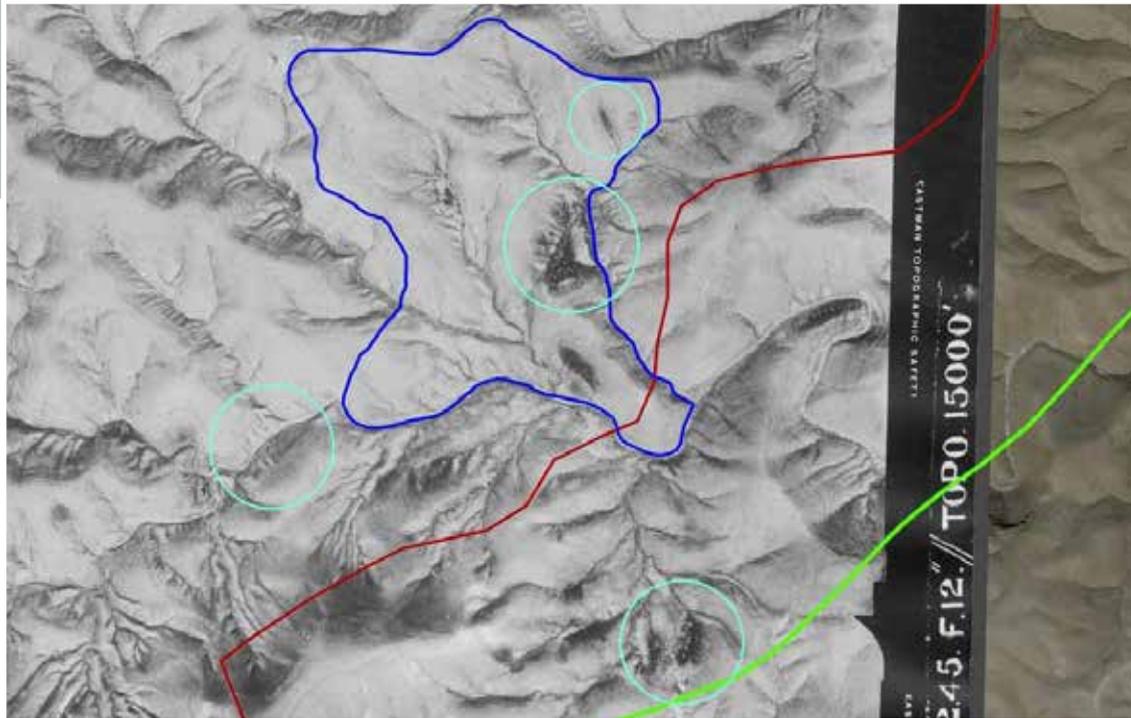
This new occupation has affected people psychologically, socially, and economically. Ibrahim, a 31-year-old father, told me a terrifying story: “My 8-year-old daughter had left to fetch her goat when soldiers began to chase her; they were rude

and aggressive. When I saw them, I rushed to protect my daughter, but they stopped me. They were shouting at the little girl, threatening that they would shoot her and her goat the next time.” Tears welled up in his eyes as he recounted his experience: “I was entirely powerless and helpless.”

Anyone who visits Dgaiga will meet Mohammed, a man whose entire body is paralyzed, yet he heads the village council and is leading the struggle for survival, inspiring his people and his friends. He explains, “We live in a big prison; our relatives have a very hard time when they

Aerial views of Dgaiga village from various years indicating the existence of the village in 1945 and its ongoing habitation. Photo courtesy of BIMKOM.





From the British archive, 1945. The blue lines were the borders of Dgaiga, and the red lines were the suggested path of a planned separation wall. The green line is the 1967 armistice border.

want to visit us. I have often felt embarrassed when guests come to visit me because the soldiers allow them only a half-hour visit and then aggressively force them to leave. My guests don't even have time to drink their coffee! Entirely unacceptable!"

Mohammed spoke with great bitterness while telling me of other horrible incidents: "Many shepherds, most of them children, have been arrested without any reason and taken to the army camp. Sometimes, they are detained for hours; at other times, the soldiers take them at night to some faraway place and release them there, forcing them to return home by foot."

A military observation point has been established on an overlooking mountain to observe everything that goes on in the village. "They have binoculars that can see everything,

even the ants! So we women cannot carry out our duties freely; there is no privacy!" said Hajja Sara. "When we milk our goats and sheep, we must do it quickly, which is why we don't get the same quantity as we used to, before the army came."

In another incident, a drone was flown over Dgaiga Elementary School. "It scared the kids who rushed inside, into the classrooms," explained Ali, the school principal. "Once the drone was gone, we tried to get them to leave the classrooms, but they were too terrified, and we were hardly able to make them go outside!"

Dgaiga has very poor infrastructure: a fragile water network, no electricity, and dirt roads. Any attempt to develop the village has been refused and thwarted by the Israeli occupation authorities. Things

got much worse when the army confiscated some of the citizens' vehicles under the false claim that they were illegal vehicles. The true aim was to restrict and paralyze the inhabitants' movement. Those who are sick are particularly affected, as are women who are about to deliver a child, because the nearest hospital is about 40 kilometers away; a distance that takes more than an hour because there are military checkpoints along the way.

The soldiers' treatment of us is full of hatred. It seems to be their explicit racist intention to show disrespect to people, which extends beyond Dgaiga residents to those

of nearby villages. Whenever they meet residents driving on the narrow paved road, they taunt them and force them off the road, even if that damages their vehicles.

While the situation in Dgaiga is bad, people fear that it could become even worse. Something must be done to avoid catastrophe, to prevent more suffering and alleviate the poverty.

Photo courtesy of BIMKOM.

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TO SHARE



*This is the Bedouin pronunciation of *daqeeqa*, which literally means precise and is used as a nickname for a thin, neatly dressed woman.