

# The Issue of Water in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

## Water Facts

**Water is a vital but sparse resource in Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza. Though the Israeli-Palestinian Joint Water Commission was established in 1994 to foster cooperation and resolve disputes, water remains an outstanding issue in the conflict.**

**Palestinians' consumption of fresh water in the West Bank grew dramatically between 1967 and 2010.**

- Overall consumption in the West Bank rose 300%, from 60 mcm\* to 180 mcm per year.
- Consumption per person grew 50%, from 93 cm to 140 cm per year.

**Israel has been giving its own water to Palestinians, over and above the supplement agreed on in the Oslo Accords—an international treaty signed by Israeli and Palestinian leaders.**

- Israel has given the West Bank 60-70 mcm per year, three times more than the agreed amount of 28.6 mcm per year, to supplement the West Bank's own supplies of fresh water.
- Israel continues to pump 5 mcm into Gaza annually, as agreed on in the Oslo Accords.

**Israel helped modernize the water systems in the West Bank and Gaza after 1967.**

- Israel introduced new irrigation technologies into the West Bank, helping Palestinian farmers create a profitable commercial industry. The area under cultivation increased by 160% and agricultural output soared 12-fold from 1967 to 1989.
- The number of West Bank towns and villages connected to a running water network soared from 4 to 641 between 1967 and 2010.
- Israel built two desalination plants in Gaza. When Israel withdrew from Gaza in 2005, it gave the entire water system it had developed for Israeli settlements to the Palestinians, including 25 wells, storage reservoirs, and a well-developed transmission system.
- Despite aggression by the terrorist organization Hamas, Israel began treating sewage from Gaza in 2017 after the territory's treatment facility was shut down.

**Israel does not use Palestinian water.**

- Israeli settlements in the West Bank are connected to Israel's water system, not to the Palestinian Authority's water system.
- Israel uses the same aquifers for its water today that it used before 1967 with the exception of the eastern aquifer which provides only marginal amounts of water to the West Bank.
- Israel does not impede the flow of water to Gaza from the Gaza aquifer. Gaza's access to this water is unaffected by how the water flowing further north, in Israel, is used.

\*"mcm" is million cubic meters. "cm" is cubic meters.

## **While Palestinians in the West Bank are using more fresh water, Israeli usage is plummeting because of conservation, recycling and desalination.**

- The water from the Mountain Aquifer flows naturally into Israel. Before 1967, Israel used almost 100% of the water. Today, Israel uses only 83% of it.
- Israel's per capita consumption of fresh water dropped 340 percent between 1967 and 2008 (from 508 cm to 150 cm per year), while the West Bank's per capita use rose 50 percent (from 93 cm to 140 cm per year) in the same period.
- The gap between Israeli and Palestinian water usage dropped 4,150% between 1967 and 2008. By 2010, Israelis consumed only 10 cm more per person than the Palestinians.
- The Joint Water Commission approved the drilling of 92 new wells in the West Bank between 1994 and 2008. Israelis and Palestinians are subject to the same strict regulations on drilling wells to prevent pollution and deterioration of water resources. Nevertheless, Palestinians have drilled over 250 unauthorized wells, resulting in wastewater flowing into Israel. Israeli authorities must then treat this wastewater to address environmental concerns.

## **Israeli water policies in Gaza and the West Bank contributed to the robust growth of the Palestinian population between 1967 and 1995.**

- The Palestinians became one of the world's fastest growing populations under Israeli administration, growing from 942,000 in 1967 to 1,973,000 in 1995.

## **Palestinians can increase their water resources without taking water away from Israel by implementing approved, donor-funded sustainable development programs and by making more use of the resources available to them.**

- Plants for treating sewage, plugging leaks in existing pipes, and improved irrigation techniques would add at least 55 mcm to the water supply annually.
- Desalination plants could supply virtually unlimited quantities of water, and Palestinians can use more of the water from the West Bank's Eastern Aquifer.
- According to the NGO EcoPeace, in 2022 members of the Israeli government have, "reached out to the Palestinian Authority with a desire to increase cooperation in the environment and water sectors". Such cooperation would build on a 2021 water and energy agreement between Israel, Jordan, and the United Arab Emirates.

Sources: Israel Water Authority, "The Issue of Water between Israelis and Palestinians," March, 2009 at [www.mfa.gov.il/NR/rdonlyres/71BC5337-F7C7-47B7-A8C7-98F971CCA463/0/IsraelPalestiniansWaterIssues.pdf](http://www.mfa.gov.il/NR/rdonlyres/71BC5337-F7C7-47B7-A8C7-98F971CCA463/0/IsraelPalestiniansWaterIssues.pdf); The Begin-Sadat Center For Strategic Studies Bar-Ilan University, "The Israeli-Palestinian Water Conflict: An Israeli Perspective," January 2012 at [https://www.pseau.org/outils/ouvrages/besa\\_the\\_israeli\\_palestinian\\_water\\_conflict\\_an\\_israeli\\_perspective\\_2012.pdf](https://www.pseau.org/outils/ouvrages/besa_the_israeli_palestinian_water_conflict_an_israeli_perspective_2012.pdf). Daniel Hillel, Rivers of Eden, 1994; UN Conference on Trade and Development, Population and Demographic Developments in the West Bank and Gaza Strip Until 1990, 1994; Matan Tzuri, "Israel to build pipeline to absorb sewage from Gaza" Ynet News, January 7th, 2017, at [www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4983174,00.html](http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4983174,00.html); Security Council, "Without Prospect of End to Occupation, Middle East Region Faces Irreversible, Dangerous Collapse, Special Coordinator Tells Security Council," United Nations, January 19, 2022, at [www.un.org/press/en/2022/sc14769.doc.htm](http://www.un.org/press/en/2022/sc14769.doc.htm)