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New BESA Center Study Published

[The Israeli-Palestinian Water Conflict: An Israeli Perspective](#)

by Prof. Haim Gvirtzman

This important new study by Prof. Haim Gvirtzman, based on previously classified data, refutes Palestinian claims that Israel is denying West Bank Palestinians water rights negotiated under the Oslo Accords. The study also proposes a practical plan for Israeli-Palestinian water sharing in the future.

In this BESA Center study, hydrologist Prof. Haim Gvirtzman of the Institute of Earth Sciences at the Hebrew University examines Palestinian water claims against Israel by presenting detailed information about water supply systems presently serving Israelis and Palestinians. He also discusses international law and shows that the Palestinians have little basis for their water demands.

Gvirtzman relies on previously classified data, recently released for publication by the Israeli Water Authority – 15 years after the signing of the Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement. The data shows that currently there is almost no difference in per capita consumption of natural water between Israelis and Palestinians.

Nevertheless, the Palestinian Authority claims that it suffers from water shortages in its towns and villages due to the Israeli occupation and cites international law in support of its claims. These claims amount to more than 700 million cubic meters of water per year (MCM/Y), including rights over the groundwater reservoir of the Mountain Aquifer, the Gaza Strip Coastal Aquifer and the Jordan River. These demands amount to more than 50 percent of the total natural water available between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River.

But contrary to Palestinian claims, Gvirtzman demonstrates that Israel has fulfilled all of its obligations according to the agreements it signed in 1995 with the Palestinian Authority, and in fact has exceeded them. The PA currently consumes 200 MCM of water every year (with Israel providing about 50 MCM of this) – which, under the

accords, is more than Israel is supposed to provide a full-fledged Palestinian state under a final settlement arrangement.

Gvirtzman shows that large difference in water usage that existed in 1967, when the administration of Judea and Samaria was handed over from Jordan to Israel, has been reduced over the last 40 years and is now negligible. As well, the per capita domestic water consumption of the Palestinians is significantly higher than the minimum human needs defined by the World Health Organization.

In contrast, the Palestinians have violated their part of the agreement by drilling over 250 unauthorized wells, which draw about 15 MCM/Y of water, and connecting these pirate wells to its electricity grid. Moreover, the PA has illegally and surreptitiously connected itself in many places to the water lines of Israel's Mekorot National Water Company – stealing Israel's water.

Palestinian famers also routinely overwater their crops through old-fashioned, wasteful flooding methods. Gvirtzman says that at least one-third of the water being pumped out of the ground by the Palestinians (again, in violation of their accords with Israel) is wasted through leakage and mismanagement. No recycling of water takes place and no treated water is used for agriculture.

In fact, 95 percent of the 56 million cubic meters of sewage produced by the Palestinians each year is not treated at all. Only one sewage plant has been built in the West Bank in the last 15 years, despite there being a \$500 million international donor fund available for this purpose. “The Palestinians refuse to build sewage treatment plants,” Gvirtzman says. “The PA is neither judicious nor neighborly in its water usage and sewage management.”

Gvirtzman further shows that the Palestinians have little basis for their water demands according to international legal norms. First, the signed water agreement overrules all other parameters. Second, Israel's historical possession of the Mountain Aquifer was established in the 1940s. Third, the Palestinians should not exploit groundwater from the Western Aquifer, which is fully utilized by Israel, before first exploiting groundwater from the non-utilized Eastern Aquifer. Finally, the Palestinians should be preventing leaks in domestic pipelines, implementing conservative irrigation techniques, and reusing sewage water as irrigation.

The fact that the Palestinians have taken none of these steps and have not adopted any sustainable development practices precludes their demands for additional water from Israel, writes Gvirtzman.

Israel believes that the water issue could be transformed from a source of controversy and tension to a source of understanding and cooperation. Gvirtzman's study suggests a plan that can efficiently and quickly solve the current and future water shortages on both sides. The plan, based on sustainable development and advanced technologies, would supply the sufficient quantity of water needed at least until 2030 and still leave some reserves.

The full study is [online](#).