

Water development in the Mideast: source of life, resource for peace

by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

Water, water every where,
Nor any drop to drink.

—Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Rime of the
Ancient Mariner*

The Middle East, whose vast water resources allowed it to be the site of succeeding civilizations over thousands of years, is facing a potentially deadly water crisis. Not only the Pentagon in 1985, but also several think-tanks and government agencies in the region since, have issued the grim prognosis that, unless a comprehensive solution, economically viable and politically fair, is found to provide abundant water for expanding populations and economies, the region will be plunged into war. Thus the crucial issue being discussed in the context of the implementation of the September 1993 Oslo agreement between the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and Israel, the peace treaty signed between Israel and Jordan on Oct. 26, 1994, and the negotiations between Israel and Syria, is the issue of water. The solutions proposed thus far are inadequate, due not only to financial constraints, but to a fundamental flaw in the economic policy thinking behind them.

The background

It is a fact that all the wars waged in the region over the past 40 years have had more to do with water than with territory; or, better, that the territories seized by Israel, particularly in the 1967 war, were taken because of the water sources—defined as “strategic reserves”—they control. This is a fact readily acknowledged by Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, who said that Israel had fought “wars provoked by the conquest of Arab rivers.”

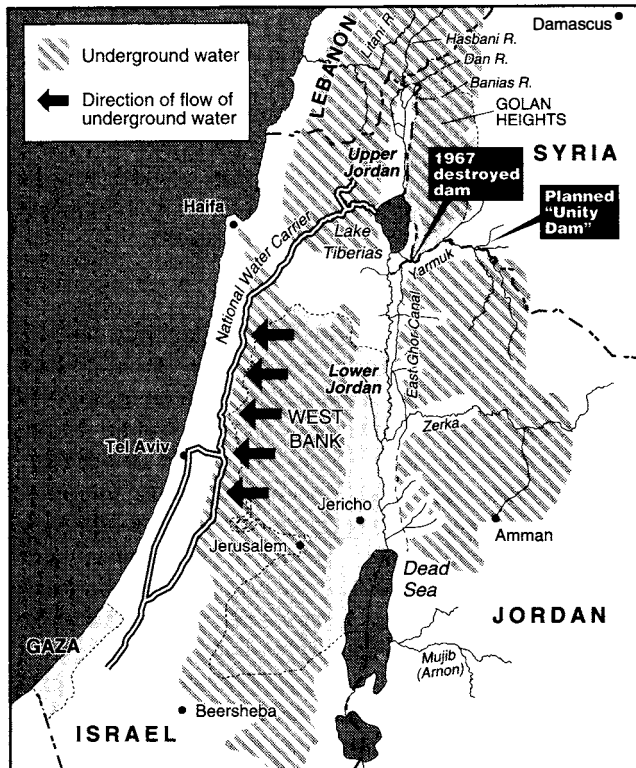
Water for Israel, Palestine, and Jordan, as summarized in a report in the February 1994 issue of *Middle East* magazine, comes primarily from the mountain aquifer covering the West Bank, which receives rainfall that flows both eastwards to the Jordan River and westwards to Israel. In addition there is a shallow aquifer on the coast which includes the Gaza Strip. Prior to 1967, Israel accessed this water through wells, taking 80% of it, which left the Palestinians, then living

on the West Bank under Jordanian sovereignty, with 10%. Palestinians living in the Gaza Strip under Egyptian administration from 1948-1967, relied on water from wells which were rapidly exhausted, as twice as much water had to be drawn than was replenished, to provide for a population which has grown since then from 50,000 to 800,000.

In 1967, following the war, the situation was dramatically aggravated for the Palestinian population and for Jordan, when Israeli water policy further diverted resources. As detailed in *Europa Archiv*,¹ the occupation authorities introduced special laws, whereby Arabs required permits to drill wells; permits were seldom granted, while Israeli settlers were allowed to dig new wells and make existing ones deeper. By 1992, Israel and the settlers were consuming 80% of the groundwater west of the West Bank, which supplied 20% of Israeli water needs, or 475 million cubic meters (mcm). Another 20% of Israel's water supplies come from groundwater under the coast, and the remaining 60% from Lake Tiberias, which feeds Israel's vast “national water carrier” which runs along the coast supplying Israeli cities, but stops short of Gaza. To increase the water into Lake Tiberias, Israel pumped underground water from the Yarmouk River. This combination has reduced the Jordan River to a stream, exacerbating Jordan's chronic water shortage. In terms of usage, this arrangement has made it possible for 100,000 Israeli settlers in the Occupied Territories to have 100 mcm, or 1,000 cubic meters per capita, as compared to the 1 million Arabs on the West Bank who have 137 mcm, or 137 cubic meters per capita.²

As a result, the amount of land actually irrigated by the Palestinians under occupation went from 27% to 4% of available arable land, with obvious, deleterious effects on food production. In Jordan as well, lack of water forced a two-thirds reduction in cultivated land in the Jordan Valley on the east side of the river, in 1991. Due to the influx of 300,000 more Palestinian refugees, expelled from the Persian Gulf countries in the war against Iraq, pressures on Jordan's water supplies increased, forcing the government to divert groundwater north of Amman, otherwise used for irrigation, to supply the capital's needs.

FIGURE 1
Water supply in the Middle East



In Gaza, the water crisis has assumed alarming proportions. Riad al-Khudari, a Palestinian delegate at the April conference on water held in Oman, told *Middle East* (June 1994), that Gaza's renewable water resources were 50 mcm per year, but Gazans were using 115 mcm. "This has led to a fall in the water table and to salt water intrusion [from the sea] which is extending inland." One-half the wells there are saline water, and there are twice as many diseases related to contaminated water in Gaza than in other areas of the Occupied Territories.

Plans for fair sharing of the region's water did not emerge first with the peace negotiations. As far back as 1955, U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower commissioned water expert Eric Johnston to work out a proposal for sharing water from the Yarmouk and Jordan rivers. Israel was to receive 567 mcm, Syria 132 mcm, Jordan and the West Bank were to have 720 mcm, and Lebanon, 35 mcm. The plan was never ratified, although the parties agreed in principle to the apportionment. According to the Aug. 5, 1994 issue of the German business daily *Handelsblatt*, "Today Israel takes 737 mcm from the Jordan and Yarmouk rivers per year, Syria, 170 mcm, while only 120 mcm remain for Jordan." In addition, Lebanon has accused Israel of pumping 320 mcm from the Litani River.

The Arabs have made several attempts to rectify this by building dams which would assure them water from the Yarmouk. One project in 1964 foresaw a canal in Syria, which would have rerouted water from the Hasbani and Baniyas (both of which feed the Jordan River) around the Golan Heights and into the Yarmouk, where a dam would have been built east of the Israeli border. As recalled in a Dec. 20, 1991 dossier published by Germany's *Die Zeit* weekly, "In spring 1965 this led to the first military clashes on the Israeli-Syrian border. In 1966 and 1967, even before the Six Day War broke out, the Israeli Air Force repeatedly bombed construction vehicles, roadways, and the dam construction site. In the war, by conquering the Golan Heights, Israel annexed the Baniyas source, and won control over half the flow of the Yarmouk." Israel destroyed the dam completely, in the last hours of the war. In addition, by controlling the north bank of the Yarmouk, at Hammat Gadar, Israel controlled the flow of water into Jordan's East Ghor Canal.

According to the Johnston Plan, Jordan was supposed to have 377 mcm from the Yarmouk for this canal, which feeds water into the Jordan Valley's rich agriculture. Two years after the 1967 war, Israel resorted to military means, on Aug. 10, to destroy large parts of the East Ghor Canal. In 1976, the water flow was blocked by rocks and sand, reducing the flow into Jordan's canal, and in 1979, a drought year, new military clashes were prevented by American intervention.

In 1986, Jordan and Syria joined in a project called the "Unity Dam" to be constructed farther up the Yarmouk, to provide Jordan with water and Syria with electricity. Israel was to get its share of water as defined by the Johnston Plan, but, according to *Europa Archiv*, Israel's contention that that was insufficient led the World Bank to withhold funds for construction.

The current situation

Against this background of war over water, one can better understand the contending positions in the peace negotiations. Whether it be the Golan Heights, the West Bank,³ southern Lebanon, or even the tiny patch of land which Jordan leased to Israel in its peace agreement, one central issue is water and water rights. In the recent Israeli-Jordanian accord, for example, Israel agreed to give the Jordanians 40 mcm of water back from what they had been diverting from the Yarmouk River. Jordan will reportedly also receive 10 mcm of desalinated water. This 50 mcm corresponds to half of what Jordan had demanded from the Yarmouk. In addition, two dams are to be built as joint projects on the Yarmouk, which should supply Jordan a further 50 mcm in the future. Jordanian consumption of water, which was 800 mcm water in 1993 (with rationing), is only one-fourth the average world consumption of 1,000 cubic meters per person. And, with its yearly population growth of 4%, Jordan will need at least 1,000 mcm of water—ten times as much as what Jordan demanded in negotiations—by the year

2000.

In the case of the Palestinian Authority, the water issue is still not resolved. Reportedly, Israel is to continue pumping water from the West Bank and to sell it to the Palestinians.

Given the increasing population in the region and the perspective of a growing economy, clearly, even when and if the existing water resources are equitably shared, there will be a massive water deficit. The only way to overcome this is to create new sources of water, through desalination.

The most reasonable proposals put on the table thus far are those for massive canal projects linking the Mediterranean and Dead Sea, on the one hand, and the Dead Sea and the Red Sea, on the other. The first, an Israeli project, has been on the drawing boards for decades, the second, elaborated by Jordan, for about 13 years. Recently, the World Bank announced that it was considering partial financing of the \$12 billion Med-Dead Canal. According to press reports, "The canal would be lined with hydroelectric and desalination plants to generate electricity and produce freshwater. Experts estimate that the plants could produce 3.3 billion cubic feet of freshwater a year, half the total now consumed by Israelis and Palestinians."

The second canal project was part of the Jordanian-Israeli peace negotiations and was discussed at length at the Casablanca economic summit in Morocco in November. The World Bank has been cited as willing to put up \$2-3 million for a feasibility study for the \$1.5-2 billion project, reportedly carried out by the Bechtel group. Here, too, desalination plants have been mentioned.

Both projects are among those promoted by Lyndon LaRouche in his "Oasis Plan" for Mideast development; yet neither of the projects as currently defined embodies LaRouche's approach. In the "Oasis Plan" (see *EIR*, May 20, 1994, p. 21), LaRouche proceeds from the standpoint of *physical economic* parameters, identifying a regional concept for revolutionizing the entire economic process through the introduction of advanced technologies, specifically, the high-temperature (HTR) nuclear reactors as the energy source for desalination plants. This is combined with a series of port projects, for example, at Gaza, connected to high-speed train grids, to maximize the efficiency of transportation of persons and freight. In addition, "soft" infrastructure projects are envisioned to rapidly upgrade health, sanitation, education, and communications.

The center of LaRouche's conception is nuclear energy, for important reasons. In addition to being the cheapest and safest available in real economic terms, its application, for both desalination and electricity generation, has the effect of raising the energy density throughput per capita, thus raising the technological level of the economy and the labor force as a whole. The LaRouche proposal for building floating nuclear desalination plants includes a project for one in Gaza, which would serve as a training center for scientists, a research center, and a kind of "living museum" to inspire young minds

with excitement about science.

There are forces in the Middle East peace process committed to the idea of nuclear technology in principle. Shimon Peres has gone on record promoting nuclear desalination, in articles as well as in his book *The New Middle East* (New York: Henry Holt, 1993). Yet, the Israelis' regional program distributed at the recent Casablanca conference omits any mention of the technology. Furthermore, at the cited Oman water conference, the head of the Israeli delegation, Avraham Katz Oz, was quoted as saying Israel would participate in a water steering committee set up there by contributing to desalination projects using "solar technology."

World Bank incompetence

The fact is that the World Bank, which has come to assume controlling power over the economic planning of the entire region, is violently opposed to nuclear technology. In its 1993 report on economic development for the region, the World Bank explicitly identified any and all relatively advanced technologies, even modern rail lines, as "low priority." The economic thinking on the part of the World Bank centers around tourism and "get-rich-quick" financial rackets. The hegemony of World Bank insanity in the peace process has led Palestinian Hanna Siniora, president of the Palestinian-European Chamber of Commerce and publisher of the *Jerusalem Times*, to abandon the very idea of food production. At a seminar held in Stuttgart, Germany on Nov. 5, 1994, Siniora said that the agricultural sector, currently one-third of the Palestinian economy, would further shrink due to lack of water. He said that investments should not go into this sector but rather into tourism, which would become the lion's share of the economy.

Those who want nuclear energy, and the economic policy approach that goes with it, are bluntly told they cannot have it. Palestinian spokesmen who have broached the subject with European industrial and political representatives, have been told that it is "too expensive and too controversial." One German government bureaucrat involved in Middle East affairs told *EIR* that "the Palestinians in Gaza don't need nuclear energy, they need waste disposal systems," i.e., there is to be no technology transfer. This was confirmed by Palestinian Minister of Finance Mohamed Nashashibi, who endorsed the nuclear desalination approach, in a recent *EIR* interview: "The programs of technical assistance presented to us from international organizations do not constitute a genuine transfer of technology, which is what we need the most. They promise very ordinary training courses, for technical assistance, at a time when we need to absorb . . . modern and sophisticated technology. This is the main road to achieve genuine economic development: through science and technology" (see *EIR*, Oct. 21, 1994).

Solving the water crisis, which has been the cause of bloodshed and injustice over decades, requires acknowledging the fact that water is not merely a liquid which keeps

animal bodies alive. It is a prerequisite for *human* life, which, different from that of lower species, is dependent on the generation and communication of creative ideas, institutionalized in science and embodied in ever-advancing technologies. If the World Bank, as is clear, does not share this view, it should be excluded from any decision-making process.

Lyndon LaRouche drove the point home in his weekly radio interview with "EIR Talks" on Dec. 1: "The problem now, is the World Bank. First of all, one should look at the case of [French Nobel Prize economist] Maurice Allais's criticism of the World Bank's program. The World Bank has three qualities: It is evil, it is stupid, it is incompetent. When someone talks about a World Bank analysis, the World Bank is using an unscaled set of Von Neumann-style inequalities in a computer. If a human being were in that state of mind, you would put him in a canvas overcoat, stuff him full of Prozac, and have some people take care of him, and you would not particularly pay much attention to his technical or business advice.

"You should have the same attitude on the competence of the World Bank. An unscaled, incompetent set of inequalities, as a global model: You come up with a proposal, they take your proposal, they plug it in to this global model (if they even bother to look at it); and what comes out is a pile of garbage. And then they tell you, that you can't have the money, because your ideas don't look good to their lunatic global model.

"The problem here, is to get the World Bank out of the picture. We *must* provide funding which completely bypasses the World Bank. Going to the World Bank to assist development, is like asking Adolf Hitler to join a Jewish minyan. It's the same thing. So, just cut it out, stop the fun and games, get some money down there fast, some aid down there fast, through, generally, purchase credits, for services and materials, as they need them. The Israelis and the Palestinians know what they need."

Notes:

1. "Wasser als Konfliktstoff: Eine Existenzfrage fuer Staaten des Nahen Ostens," Arnold Hottinger, No. 6, 1992, pp. 153-163. The article also documents how the rebellion in southern Sudan was motivated by a desire to stop the Jonglei Canal project, which would have greatly enhanced Sudan and Egypt's supply of Nile waters.

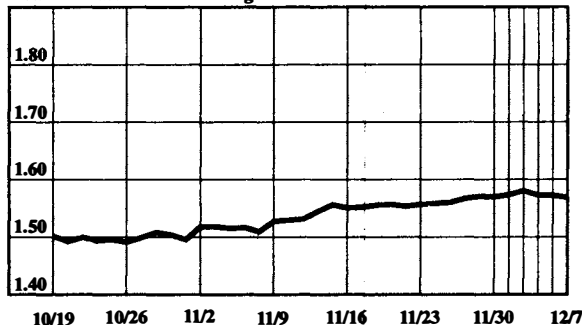
2. Estimates of water usage vary. A U.N. report, cited in *Handelsblatt* on Aug. 5, 1994, said, "Israel takes 67% of its needs from sources lying outside its 1948 borders, of which 37% from the West Bank and the rest from the Jordan River and its sources, as well as the Lebanese Litani River."

3. The *Jerusalem Post* on July 16, 1994 ran an article by Itamar Marcus, who acknowledged that control over the West Bank was related to water needs. The author presented a plan whereby "Israel does not have to hold all of Judea and Samaria in order to control most of the water. There are three regions . . . where pumping affects the water flow to Israel's wells . . . which amount to only 20% of the land. . . . To prevent a destructive loss of water, Israel should retain full authority over these areas during the autonomy period, and annex them to Israel as part of the permanent agreement."

Currency Rates

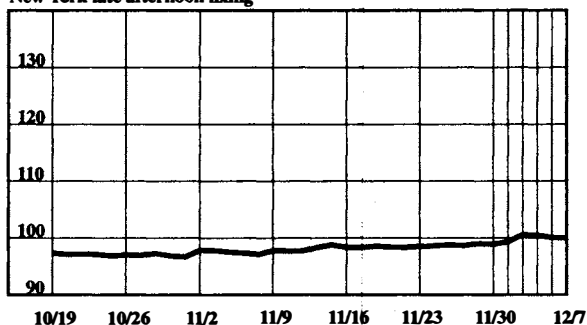
The dollar in deutschemarks

New York late afternoon fixing



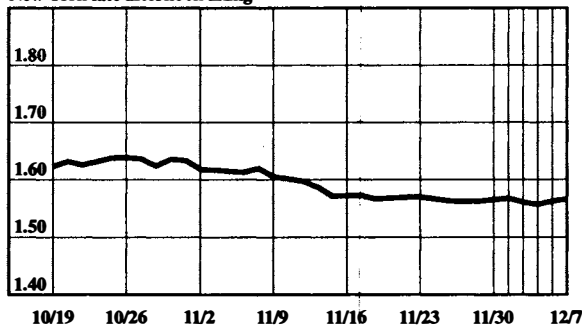
The dollar in yen

New York late afternoon fixing



The British pound in dollars

New York late afternoon fixing



The dollar in Swiss francs

New York late afternoon fixing

