

## Thirty Years of the Peace Agreement with Jordan: Time to Upgrade Water Cooperation

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**Thirty years after the signing of the peace agreement between Israel and Jordan, water cooperation remains a central pillar of the relationship between the two countries. Jordan's water crisis presents challenges for the kingdom, potentially leading to internal social and political unrest, mass migration, and even destabilization of regional order. These scenarios also have implications for Israel, which sees the stability of Jordan and the region as an important security anchor. Against this backdrop, the two countries should view water cooperation not only as a humanitarian and economic matter but also as a mutual national security interest. Recognizing the strategic importance of water agreements with Jordan and promoting steps to expand them will help strengthen peaceful relations between the countries, reduce tensions along Israel's longest border, and fortify regional order.**

Since the signing of the peace agreement between Israel and Jordan in October 1994, water has remained a cornerstone of the countries' relationship. Unlike the pioneering peace agreement between Israel and Egypt—which focused mainly on territorial and security arrangements—the agreement with Jordan emphasized diverse material cooperation, including alleviating the kingdom's chronic water scarcity. Under this agreement and subsequent agreements, Israel committed to supplying Jordan with 55 million cubic meters of water annually, a commitment that has been honored, maintained, and has become a stable anchor in the bilateral relations of the two countries.

The transfer of water from Israel served King Hussein early on to strengthen the legitimacy of the peace agreement in the eyes of the public. In a speech given just before the peace signing, he quoted the Quranic verse, “And We created every living thing from water” (Surah 21:30), using it to frame water arrangements between the countries as a religious duty. The verse reappeared in a peace-promotion video broadcast on Jordanian television at the time. Early peace-era public opinion surveys showed over 80% of the Jordanian public supported the agreement, with many citing improved water access as a significant factor influencing their stance. However, much of the hoped-for fruits of the peace agreement have been slow to materialize over the years, leading to a decline in its popularity, and Israel–Jordan relations have become another “cold peace,” similar to Israel–Egypt relations.

Nevertheless, even in this challenging reality, water cooperation has stood out as an exceptional success story within the broader relationship. The water agreements between the countries have not only been upheld but have also expanded. For example, in July 2021, Israel increased the water quota sold to Jordan by 50 million cubic meters for three years, and in May 2024, this increase was extended for an additional six months. Furthermore, in November 2022, the two countries formulated a memorandum of understanding to advance the “Prosperity” project (“Water for Energy”), under the auspices of the United Arab Emirates, which envisions Israel selling Jordan 200 million cubic meters of desalinated water annually in exchange for purchasing renewable energy-generated electricity from Jordan. As of now, however, due to the outbreak of the war in the Gaza Strip, Jordan has suspended the signing of the agreement to implement the project.

### **Jordan’s Water Crisis: Current Situation**

Jordan is considered one of the most water-scarce countries in the world. This crisis affects the nation’s well-being and poses a continuous threat to its social and political stability. Neighborhoods in the capital city of Amman [receive](#) water once a week for 24 hours, and residents must store it in tanks placed on rooftops to last until the next supply. The per capita water quota in Jordan is [currently](#) only 61 cubic meters per year—less than 15% of the global water poverty line, which stands at 500 cubic meters per person. According to forecasts, the shortage is expected to worsen in the coming years.

This crisis is [driven](#) by a combination of factors: firstly, Jordan’s rapidly growing population—currently estimated at around 11.5 million—places a strain on existing water infrastructure. This growth is partly due to waves of refugees who have come to Jordan over the years from its war-torn neighbors, from the influx of Palestinian refugees in 1948 and 1967 to Palestinian and Iraqi refugees during the Gulf Wars in 1991 and 2003, and most recently, Syrian refugees during the “Arab Spring.” Today, Jordan [hosts](#) approximately 700,000 registered refugees, around 90% of whom are Syrian. Secondly, climate change [has led](#) to a 20% decrease in rainfall in the kingdom, increasing the pressure on its already scarce and diminishing water sources. Thirdly, Jordan suffers from a high rate of water loss in its pipelines, amounting to about 48% of the total water supply, alongside a water theft problem that is difficult to control. Extreme weather and rising sea levels also threaten the reliability and resilience of water storage, treatment, and transport infrastructure.

The water crisis has social and political repercussions that largely remain under the surface but occasionally emerge. Villages in Jordan—such as those in the [Southern Mazar](#) region in the Karak Governorate bordering Israel—experience water shortages lasting two weeks or more, forcing residents to purchase water at high prices from private tankers, fueling local protests and creating a sense of discrimination among the population. This situation particularly [affects](#) low-income households, over 90% of whom are critically vulnerable in terms of water access. The inequality in water supply thus deepens social divides and increases internal tensions.

The water crisis also [impacts](#) the agricultural sector, which is responsible for about 55% of the country's water consumption, as well as the industrial and tourism sectors, and affects agricultural employment in peripheral areas and local food-production capacity. The growing reliance on imports decreases food security, worsens Jordan's economic vulnerability, and, in turn, exacerbates social instability.

### **Between Climate and Revolutions: The Syrian Case and Its Implications for Jordan**

For decades, researchers have warned about Jordan's potential instability, only to be proven wrong as other supposedly more stable countries in the region experienced social and political upheavals. Revolutions are not always predictable, but studies have [pointed](#) to a link between environmental and political changes, or at the very least, an increased potential for revolutions due to climate shifts.

The Middle East is considered a climate-sensitive region, with models predicting temperatures that could rise 20% above the global average in the coming decades. Climate pressures are increasing the frequency of extreme weather events, water shortages, temperature rises, ecosystem damage, and sea-level rise. Over the last two decades, severe droughts have affected Israel, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and Iraq, intensifying discussions around water security in the region among countries and international organizations. The effects of climate change, particularly droughts, have damaged agriculture and reduced livelihoods, triggering both internal and external migration. People are forced to leave their rural homes and move to cities or other countries, placing pressure on urban infrastructure and increasing social tensions.

In addition, rising temperatures and water shortages in the Middle East, which depends heavily on food imports, directly impact the ability to grow crops. Farmers

are facing declines in agricultural productivity and food insecurity, leading to food price increases and undermining economic stability. These conditions also pose a potential threat to political stability in regional countries.

The war in Syria, which began in 2011, inflicted widespread [damage](#) and caused a severe humanitarian crisis, resulting in hundreds of thousands of deaths and 12 million refugees and displaced persons. Among the primary factors driving the rebellion against Assad's regime were not only political repression and social unrest but also the effects of climate change, particularly the severe droughts that struck the region from 2007 to 2009. These droughts caused a 48% drop in wheat production, increased pressure on Syrian farmers, and led 1.5 million farmers to migrate to urban areas, increasing strain on infrastructure and driving up food prices.

Climate change exacerbates existing problems, and in Syria, it combined with poor resource management and government corruption. The droughts—alongside outdated irrigation systems and over-pumping—undermined water supply and agriculture, contributing to the country's destabilization. The Syrian case demonstrated the potential impact of climate change on the stability of countries in the Middle East, a region already characterized by limited rainfall and scarce natural resources. The recurrence of similar events in other regional countries is a realistic scenario, with potential implications for Israel as well.

Indeed, phenomena similar to those seen in Syria are now occurring in Jordan, creating a troubling reality that requires appropriate attention. The threat posed by climate change to water security is a regional challenge expected to intensify in the coming decades, threatening the stability of countries struggling with severe water shortages and rapid population growth, including Jordan. The worsening water scarcity in the kingdom could directly affect Israel, for example, in a scenario where Jordanian refugees approach its borders seeking to improve their living conditions. Rural areas in Jordan face significant environmental challenges and lack investment, driving young people to migrate at increasing rates to major cities or neighboring countries in search of opportunities. In addition, youth unemployment in Jordan currently stands at around [40%](#), necessitating the development and promotion of comprehensive initiatives that address the unique needs of this population. As shown in Syria, failure to address environmental and economic challenges can destabilize a country.

The drought affecting Jordan and Syria has not spared Israel, but Israel made early investments in desalination plants, raised water conservation awareness, and adjusted its economic activities. Over the past two decades, five desalination plants have been established along the coastline—Ashkelon, Palmachim, Hadera, Sorek, and Ashdod—providing about 597 million cubic meters of water annually. Two additional desalination plants (Sorek B and one in the Western Galilee) are being built with a combined capacity of 300 million cubic meters, set to become operational within the next two years. With these new desalination plants, Israel is not expected to face water shortages and may even achieve surplus capacity. These significant changes in Israel’s water infrastructure will have a direct impact on agreements with Jordan, including the potential for Israel to sell more water to its neighbor.

### **Jordan’s Water Strategy 2023–2040**

In recent years, the Jordanian government—under the guidance of the king and with his personal involvement—has been working to alleviate the kingdom’s water crisis. In March 2023, it approved a [national water strategy](#) for 2023–2040, which includes plans for water efficiency and conservation, infrastructure improvements, reservoir construction, wastewater purification for agricultural use, reducing water loss in pipelines, and implementing advanced technologies.

At the heart of the strategy is the “National Carrier” project, an ambitious initiative that includes a desalination facility in the port of Aqaba. From there, a 457-kilometer pipeline will extend toward Amman, intended to supply the kingdom’s water system with 300 million cubic meters per year. Alongside the facility, a solar farm [will be established](#) to provide the necessary energy to operate it. The project is [estimated](#) to cost \$2.5 billion and is expected to be ready by the end of the decade.

As approximately 40% of Jordan’s water sources are located outside its borders, the country aims to develop independent solutions to reduce its dependence on neighboring states, particularly Israel and Syria. For example, the “National Carrier” was partly created as an alternative to the “Red–Dead Sea” project—a joint project discussed for years by Israel and Jordan but abandoned after Israel decided to withdraw due to economic and environmental concerns. Jordan’s inclination toward independent water solutions stems from its disappointment with previous projects with Israel, as well as pressure on the royal palace from Islamist opposition parties, primarily the “Islamic Action Front,” which opposes normalization with Israel in general and cooperation with it in the [water sector](#) specifically.

## Recommendations

Jordan's stability and welfare are of paramount interest to Israel. Jordan is a strategic security asset for Israel as a peace partner, sharing the longest border with it (over 300 kilometers, including the West Bank) and serving as a buffer to the east against the region's radical axis, led by Iran. Additionally, the two countries maintain bilateral and multilateral partnerships in water, energy, tourism, and trade.

Jordan's worsening water crisis may accelerate trends of social and political unrest in the kingdom, adding to other factors threatening its stability, such as unemployment and poverty. Compounding this is the increasing subversion since October 7, 2023, by Islamist forces and Iran's regional proxies, which repeatedly infringe on Jordanian sovereignty and aim to turn the kingdom into another "resistance" front against Israel.

While Jordan prefers to achieve water security independently of Israel, there are significant opportunities in an integrated approach that would simultaneously support Jordan's independent capabilities and expand cooperation between the two countries:

1. Increasing water quotas supplied to Jordan by approximately 50 million cubic meters in addition to the 100 million cubic meters currently provided. This could be done at the cost of the water to Israel's system and transportation, assuming there are desalinated water reserves in the system and continued average annual replenishment of Israel's natural water reservoirs.
2. Signing and implementing the "Prosperity Agreement" when political circumstances allow. This important agreement is intended to be a cornerstone of Jordan's stability, strengthening cooperation with Israel and promoting regional collaboration. Moreover, the agreement will serve the shared Israeli-Jordanian interest in regional integration by realizing the vision of geographic connectivity and bridges between East and West in energy and trade, with Israel and Jordan at the center.
3. Providing Israeli assistance in implementing various aspects of Jordan's 2023–2040 water strategy, drawing on Israel's extensive expertise as a world leader in desalination, water recycling, preventing water loss in pipelines, and optimizing irrigation systems.
4. Strengthening and expanding agricultural trade relations between the two countries. Increased imports of vegetables and fruits from Jordan would enhance food security in Israel. From an Israeli perspective, these ties are

particularly crucial during emergencies, such as the current one due to Turkey's direct trade boycott of Israel in response to the war in the Gaza Strip.

Beyond alleviating Jordan's water crisis, these proposed steps could strengthen the peace relations between the two countries and contribute to regional stability. The central challenge is rebuilding trust between the leaderships and the peoples, bridging Jordan's legitimate desire to reduce its dependency on Israel for water with the benefits that enhanced cooperation offers both countries. Building trust should be based on transparency, consistency, and investment in relations, with Israel taking into account Jordan's internal political sensitivities.

Thirty years after the peace agreement was signed, the water sector continues to stand out as a high-potential lever for strengthening relations between Jerusalem and Amman by preserving existing agreements while exploring opportunities to incorporate new and essential areas of cooperation. The water sector could even serve as a successful model that, if replicated, could benefit other fields in bilateral relations, such as trade, tourism, and investments, contributing significantly to stability and prosperity in the region. The more public visibility this water cooperation receives in both Jordan and Israel, and the more it leads to tangible improvements in the quality of life for both peoples, the greater its potential to foster recognition of the value and benefits of the Jordanian Israeli peace among decision-makers and public opinion in both countries.

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