

Is Israel a water expert?

ANALYSIS

In Western Asia, water is more than just a natural resource; It is a critical geopolitical tool. The Zionist regime faces one of the world's harshest water crunches with a semi-arid to desert climate, a population exceeding 9.5 million, and an illegally occupied area of around 22,000 square kilometers. This regime ranks ninth globally in terms of water stress in 2025 and is in a worse situation than many regional countries, including Iran.

Israel's water crisis, exacerbated by population growth, industrial development, climate change, and discriminatory water allocation policies, has snowballed into a serious threat to public health, human security, and regional stability.

Claims by Israeli officials like Benjamin Netanyahu that the country knows the ropes in managing water crises — and their misleading promises aimed at the Iranian people — fall flat once you consider that much of Israel's water comes from controlling West Bank and Gaza resources, while Palestinians are denied fair access to water.

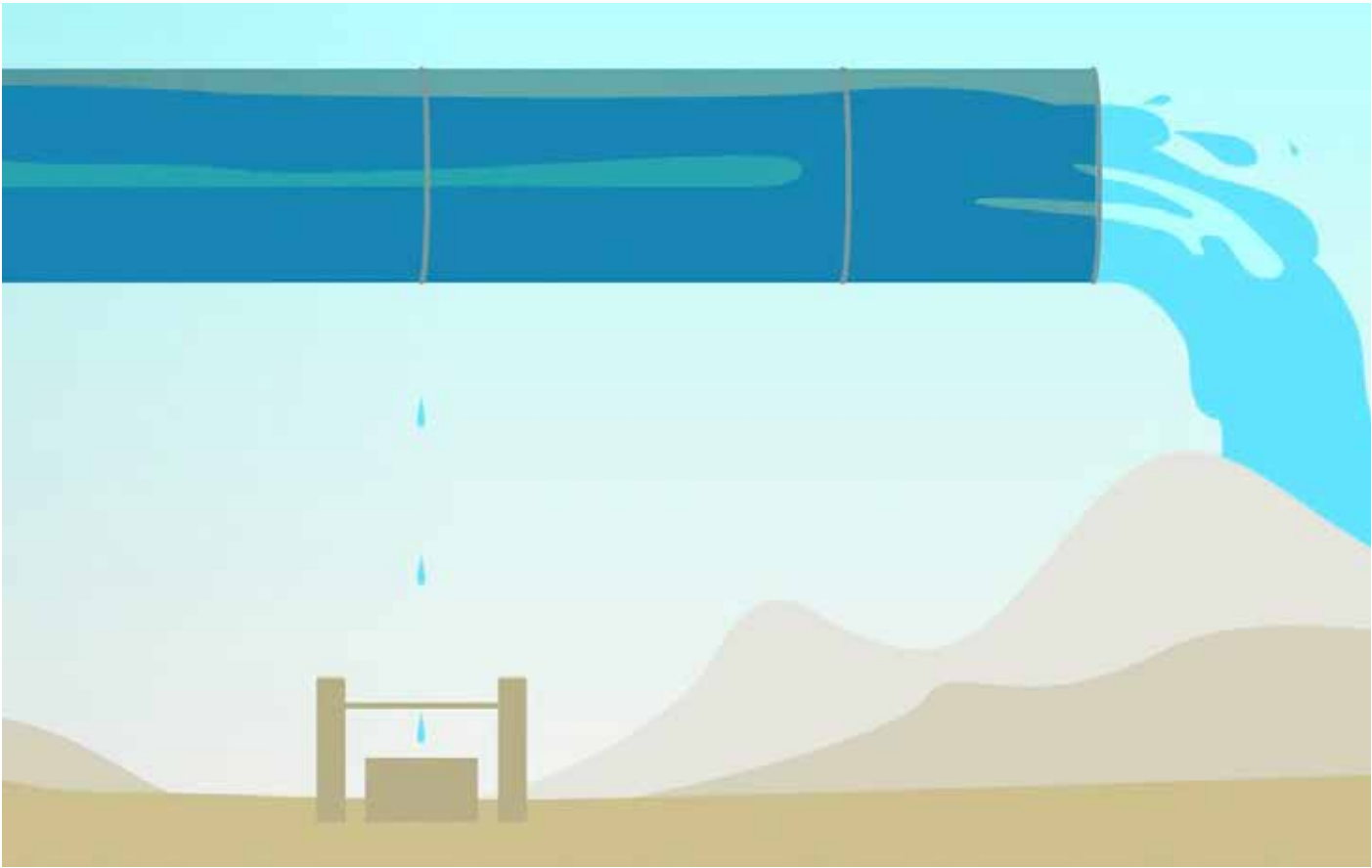
History of water crisis in occupied territories

Before the establishment of the Zionist regime, water resources in historic Palestine — including rivers, springs, and underground aquifers — were handed over primarily to local communities. Traditional agriculture relied on seasonal rains and simple storage, but water sources were limited and scattered.

In 1959, the National Water Carrier project was rolled out to transfer water from the Sea of Galilee to central and southern regions. This system became Israel's water backbone, but over-extraction combined with reduced rainfall drained the Sea of Galilee's water levels dramatically. In 2018, the water level was only 11 centimeters above the "red line" — the lowest in a century.

Following the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Israel took over direct control of the region's major aquifers, especially the Mountain Aquifer, tilting the scales of water access heavily in its favor.

Meanwhile, Palestinians have become tied down by military permits to drill wells or develop water infrastructure — permits that are rarely given. These policies, coupled with Israel extracting between 80 to 85 percent of the West Bank aquifers, force Pal-



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estinians to buy overpriced water from Israel.

Israel's surface water sources

- **Sea of Galilee:** With a nominal capacity of about four cubic kilometers, it provides roughly a quarter of Israel's surface water. Annual evaporation between 200 and 300 million cubic meters, pollution from agricultural and industrial wastewater, and declining water levels have weakened this source. According to the Israeli Water Authority, the Sea of Galilee is no longer a go-to reliable source for drinking water and is mostly used for agriculture.
- **Jordan River:** Once a vital water source, it's now severely depleted and polluted due to over-pumping by Israel and upstream countries, with flow down to less than 10 percent of its historical volume.

Israel's groundwater sources

- **Mountain Aquifer (Yarkon-Taninim):** Made of limestone rock, it produces about 740 million cubic meters annually. Around 80 percent of its recharge area lies in the West Bank, fully controlled by Israel.
- **Coastal Aquifer:** Spanning 2,000 square kilometers from Mount Carmel to Gaza, it yields about 450 million cubic meters per year. Overdraft since the

1950s has caused water levels to drop 20 meters below sea level and seawater intrusion into wells.

Israel's unconventional water sources

- **Desalination:** Since 2005, Israel has shifted gears to desalination, with five large plants producing 600 to 750 million cubic meters annually — about 85% of the country's drinking water. This high-cost, energy-intensive technology is a lifeline.
- **Wastewater recycling:** Israel treats nearly 85% of its wastewater (400 million cubic meters a year) and reuses it for agriculture, but this alone can't make up for its water deficit.

Scarce natural resources, limited rainfall

With an average annual rainfall of just 435 millimeters — less than half the global average of 1000 millimeters — Israel's precipitation mostly holds off until winter and concentrates in the north, while the Negev desert remains almost bone dry. Surface and groundwater supplies are at their lowest levels in a century, with an annual deficit between 1.5 to 2 billion cubic meters, nearly equal to the regime's total yearly consumption. According to CNN in August 2022, Israel's situation has pushed it into exploring solutions such as

pumping water from the Mediterranean Sea.

Climate change impacts

Since the 1970s, Israel's average temperature has risen by about 1.5 degrees Celsius — double the global average. This has stepped up evaporation from surface reservoirs and reduced natural aquifer recharge. Seawater intrusion into the coastal aquifer has cut down groundwater quality significantly. Projections show that by 2100, rainfall will drop off by 20–30 percent and temperatures will climb by 3 to 4 degrees Celsius, placing water reserves under even more pressure.

Demand-side pressures

Population growth has ramped up water demand. Household water consumption in Jewish areas ranges from 240 to 250 liters per person per day, while Palestinians in the West Bank average only 70 to 80 liters, dropping to 20 to 30 liters in some areas. Agriculture consumes 75 percent of water resources, and subsidies pump up pressure on supplies.

Resource control

Israeli control over West Bank and Gaza water resources has added fuel to the fire. Israel extracts 80 to 85% of the West Bank aquifers, leaving Palestin-

ians access to just 15%. In Gaza, over 95% of coastal aquifer water is unfit for drinking, with per capita water consumption between 3 to 5 liters daily — far below the WHO's minimum recommendation of 50 liters.

Inequality, political facets of water crisis

The water crisis in the Palestinian territories, especially the West Bank, is deeply political and social, with glaring inequalities. Israel's full control of regional water resources cuts off Palestinians' access, forcing them to cough up much higher prices than Israelis. This policy, framed as part of Israel's water management and national security, hits home for Palestinians — many households spend up to 30% of their income on water, while Israeli settlers enjoy a continuous water supply at minimal cost.

These inequalities are not only economic — they also wear down Palestinian infrastructure. Water networks and supply facilities in many Palestinian areas are aged and inadequate, and legal and administrative restrictions on upgrading infrastructure pile on existing problems. As a result, Palestinians face severe shortages and limited access, while Israeli settlements enjoy uninterrupted, reliable water supplies.

Socially and economically, this situation puts the squeeze on Palestinian society and acts as a control lever over everyday Palestinian life. The water crisis in the West Bank is not just an environmental or technical issue — it's a stark example of inequality, injustice, and the curtailing of Palestinians' fundamental rights, illustrating the close tie-up between natural resources and political power in a volatile region.

Two weeks ago, Israel's prime minister claimed in a video message, referring to Iran's water crisis, that Israel is an expert at dealing with drought and urged Iranians to take to the streets for freedom and plenty of water.

These claims have been kicked around repeatedly over recent years (including in 2018). The World Resources Institute reports that Israel is ranked 9th globally in water stress, in worse shape than Iran, ranked 14th. However, much of Israel's water consumption is not the fruit of indigenous technology but comes from controlling West Bank and Gaza water sources.

Israel extracts 80 to 85% of the Mountain Aquifer in the West Bank, while Palestinians have access to only 15% — about 45 million cubic meters out of 450 million. Palestinians need military permits, rarely granted, to dig wells or maintain infrastructure, and must buy costly water from Israel.

In Gaza, over 95% of coastal aquifer water is undrinkable due to seawater intrusion and nitrate pollution. Meanwhile, Israeli settlers consume more than 250 liters of water daily, enjoying a continuous supply for domestic, agricultural, and even swimming pool needs.

This structural inequality lays bare that Israel's claimed success in water management is due not only to technology but also to discriminatory policies and control over Palestinian resources. Netanyahu's claim to offer solutions for Iran is, at best, misleading.

The article first appeared in Persian on IRNA.



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Palestinians returning to Khan Younis, southern Gaza's main city, after the withdrawal of Israeli forces, pull water containers to meet their vital needs under catastrophic conditions on May 6, 2024.
● ALI JADALLAH/ANADOLU

