

## Research Report

COMMITTEE : Security Council

ISSUE : How to ensure sustainable access to water for Israel and Palestine despite the ongoing conflict?

CHAIRS : Jérémie De La Fuente & Noor Fakhruddin

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# *How to ensure sustainable access to water for Israel and Palestine despite the ongoing conflict?*

## INTRODUCTION

Hi delegates! My name is Jérémie de la Fuente, I am 17 years old and I am glad to be your chair for FerMUN 2023. I have attended MUN conferences as a delegate during the last 2 years. This year, I will chair the conference of my high school, the Lycée International de Ferney-Voltaire. I am passionate about history, geography and international relationships. Being a part of MUN brings me back to those three disciplines that I enjoy. But what I like the most about MUN is the debates, the different points of view and also to meet students from all over the world.



In the FerMUN 2023 session, we have a specific topic that is part of all committees: water. Our committee, the Security Council, will focus on the political, bilateral and social issues related to access to water. Indeed, water, the source of life, is also a source of conflicts between countries since it is fundamental to human life. Therefore, you, delegates, will represent a country or an organization in which you will debate, discuss and seek solutions thoughtfully constructed around the issues that will be announced to you.

I know you will succeed, good luck!

## KEY WORDS

**Aquifer:** a mass of groundwater filling rock voids, through which it slowly circulates, and which is supported by an impermeable horizon.

**Gaza Strip:** It is a Palestinian enclave on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea. This space is surrounded by Israel and Egypt.

**RSDSC:** The Red Sea – Dead Sea water Conveyance project became a real possibility after the Jordanian-Israeli peace accord, signed in 1994. Members of both governments have publicly supported the development of the initiative. Jordan is one of the most water stressed countries in the world, with severely limited fresh water supplies; the situation is similar in the territory of the Palestinian Authority.

**Desalination:** the removal of salt and other minerals from seawater to make it suitable for human consumption & industrial use.

**Hydropolitics:** Multidisciplinary science dealing with the political and judicial problems posed by water resources. Specifically, it is about understanding and finding solutions for water resources shared by several countries.

## OVERVIEW

### THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

#### The Historical Review

In order to understand our issue, you need to understand the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from a historical viewpoint:

After the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in the First World War, the British acquired control of the region of Palestine. The territory was inhabited by a Jewish minority and an Arab majority. In 1947, the United Nations proposed a plan to divide Palestine into two parts: an independent Jewish state and an independent Arab state. Thus, much of the land in the region has been considered to be the current Israel.

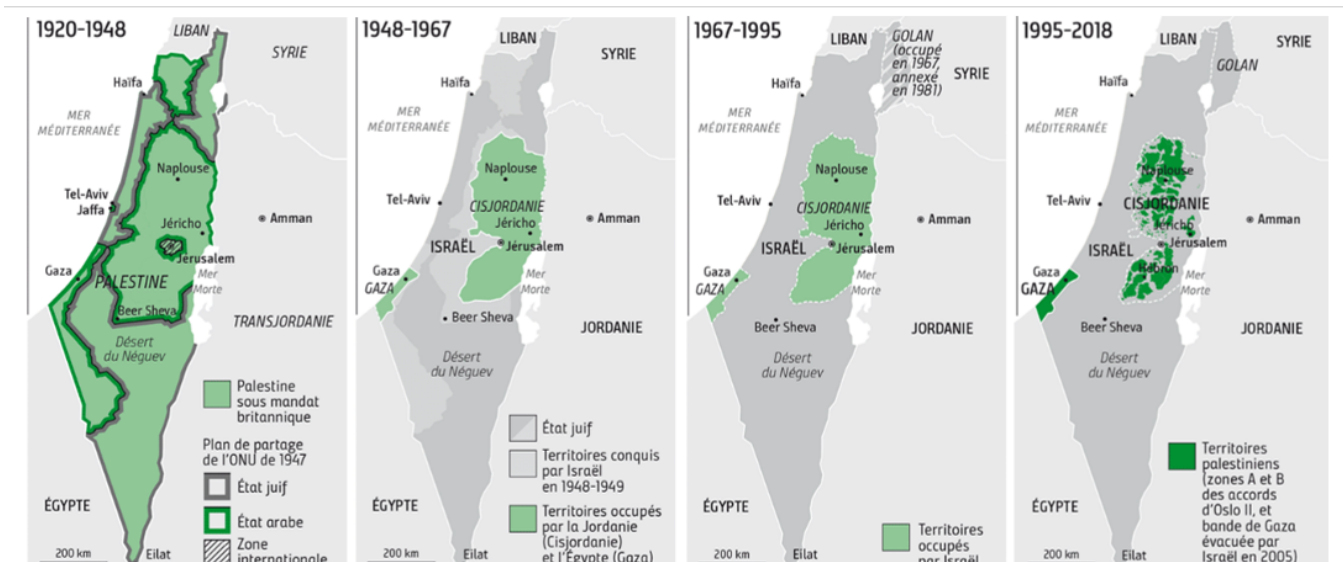
The two-state project was accepted by the Jewish people but the Palestinians were hostile to it and decided to oppose it. In 1948, the British withdrew from Palestine and Israel declared itself an independent state. The Palestinians and neighboring Arab countries, which opposed this, mobilized to block the formation of the Israeli state, triggering the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. When the fight ended a year later, Israel controlled most of the territory of the former British Palestine. According to the UN, more than half of the Palestinian Arab population fled or was expelled in neighbouring countries such as Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.

In 1967, during what became known as the Six-Day War, Israel seized many territories including the Gaza Strip and Sinai Peninsula from Egypt, the Golan Heights from Syria, and the West Bank (which corresponds to "Cisjordanie" on the maps) and East Jerusalem from Jordan.

Israel offered to return the territories in exchange for Arab recognition of the country of Israel and guarantees against future attacks. Arab leaders at the time refused a peace agreement, but Egypt eventually negotiated the return of the Sinai Peninsula in exchange for full diplomatic recognition of Israel in 1979. This is the Camp David treaty.

In the early 1990s, a sort of appeasement took place between Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO, created in 1964, with the purpose to establish a Palestinian state in former British Palestine and eradicate the State of Israel), which no longer demanded the destruction of Israel but still claimed recognition. Between January and August 1993, the representatives of Israel sit down with the leaders of the PLO. They met in Norway and the Oslo Accords were signed in Washington D.C. These agreements allow for the mutual recognition of the two countries, and a Palestinian authority is established: that is to say, this authority does not give Palestine the title of a state, but rather of an institution that allows the stability of the Palestinian territories (Westbank and Gaza Strip) by helps that it gives (health, education, nutrition).

But the problem is that these agreements are rejected by Palestinian and Jordanian extremists, as well as Israeli extremists. The Oslo agreements are then a failure. In addition, Israel continues to colonize the Palestinian territories. It is the expansion of settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) as you can see on the map from 1995 to 2018.



The territorial evolution of Israel and Palestine, source: Le Monde Diplomatique (February 2018)

## The Conflict Nowadays

Israel's continued occupation of the seized territories has triggered decades of conflict and violence. While major Palestinian leaders still claim to want a peace agreement with a two-state solution, the Jews continue to build colonies in the occupied territories in a way that makes a future partition difficult, maybe impossible. That is why in our current situation, neither side is willing to compromise on terms.

The conflict is still an international issue because important actors contribute in one way or another to a desire for peace. For example the European Union, allied with the United States, recognizes the irrevocable right of Israel to live in peace and security within internationally recognized borders. At the same time, it agrees on the need to establish a democratic, viable, peaceful and sovereign State of Palestine on the basis of the 1967 borders before the Six-Day War, if necessary, with minor adjustments agreed by the parties.

There are also the Middle Eastern countries which are very concerned by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Indeed, the Middle East would rather lean towards Palestine which is under pressure because of the inequalities that it undergoes in particular with the access to the water which is mainly with the Israelis. Other countries like Russia and China appear to be taking a more neutral stance on the conflict. Moscow called on both sides to "defuse tensions and resolve emerging issues peacefully. Similarly, China is urging all parties to exercise restraint to avoid further losses. China and Russia continue to jointly promote the "two-state system" as the best option for a peace settlement, which has also been supported by the UN.

## THE WATER ISSUE

### Main Water Locations In The area

#### Mountain and Coastal Aquifers



Israel and Palestine share three main water sources (Jordan River Basin, Coastal Aquifer, Mountain Aquifer).

All the blue symbols on this map represent the water issues in the Palestine region especially the groundwater sources with their direction (blue arrows) mainly towards Israel showing the inequality of access to water between the two territories.

You can therefore better understand the principle of aquifers, these underground water surfaces which are located in the West Bank, Gaza and the Mediterranean coast.

source : UNEP

## The Challenges

According to the Palestinian Hydrology Group (PHG), the continuation of Israeli restrictions and the increasing expansion of settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) are seen as the main factors aggravating the conflict and preventing the implementation of development plans. This has resulted in the vulnerability of families in many areas of the region (South of the West bank, East Jerusalem, Gaza) through increased poverty and food insecurity, as well as the deterioration of living conditions and hygiene practices.

Moreover, more than 7500 people still have no access to water in the West Bank while 95% of domestic water in Gaza is of poor quality. In addition, the poor services related to water supply and limitation on physical infrastructure for both water and wastewater have left nearly 68% of the population in the West Bank not served with wastewater collection and treatment systems.

The hydropolitics employed by Israel discriminates against Palestine because it limits its access to the water needs of the Palestinian population. This is another major problem that slows down peace between the two States. The water supply of Israel and Palestine comes mainly from groundwater. In recent years, water scarcity in Israel has become less of a problem with the advent of large-scale desalination. But this process is contested because of its environmental impact: to desalinate seawater, the plant Israel is building requires a huge amount of energy. Since Israel's hydroelectric and nuclear generation is not enough to satisfy the demand, the country relies on coal and gas-fired plants.

**After the 1967 Six Day War** : Israel occupied the West Bank and Gaza Strip and nationalized the water resources of the occupied territories. Since then, control of these aquifers, and in particular the Mountain Aquifer, has been a major source of contention between the parties. The price Palestinians paid for water was three times the rate charged in Jewish settlements. The researchers pointed out that Israel has been over pumping aquifers since 1970 to accommodate rapid population growth and the expansion of irrigated areas in Israel since 1949. Despite agreements guided by the Norwegian and U.S. governments in 1993 and 1995 and successful negotiations between the two parties, experts have pointed out that the 1995 treaty was asymmetrical in favor of Israel. It started with equitable access to water for both parties. There is therefore a hydro-political stake since it is a question of access to an essential resource for the inhabitants but it also denounces the strong will of both parties to want their total independence. The 1995 agreement did not mark a real change for the Palestinians who still suffer from a lack of water.

**In the Gaza Strip:** 95% of the water available in this area is not potable and only 1 in 10 people have direct access to clean water in the Gaza Strip. However, access to clean water and adequate sanitation is a basic human right. In the area, 1.8 million people are in need of some form of humanitarian water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) assistance, approximately 52% of whom are children. The inhabitants of this region also have multiple obstacles, notably the lack of energy, which prevents them from living properly in order to cook, have access to light and have the correct hygiene.

Destruction of WASH infrastructure, mismanagement of resources, and rapid population growth are contributing to increasingly severe shortages of safe water. With the Palestinian population spread over fractured geographic areas and expected to double to 9.8 million by 2050, investment in infrastructure is not only necessary but essential to maintaining the health of Palestinians. The water inequalities between Israel and Palestine are very high: an average Israeli will use about 300 liters of water per day while the average Palestinian will use only 73 liters per day.

These water inequalities retard Palestine's development. Indeed, since it has to spend much more on water, it loses a lot of money, especially since its expenses are not even enough to cultivate the land. Because it is limited in water, it has the consequences of economic activities such as agriculture. On the other hand, Israel, which has less of a water problem, will be able to invest in research to enable new technologies that will allow for more secure development. Indeed, more efficient and economic systems such as the "drop by drop" can compensate for the asymmetry between Israel and Palestine.

## RELEVANT UN TREATIES AND EVENTS

### 1993 and 1995: THE OSLO ACCORDS

The Oslo Accords marked a turning point in the pursuit of peace in the Middle East. It is actually a set of two separate agreements signed by the government of Israel and the leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), a militant organization formed in 1964 to create a Palestinian state in the region. The Oslo Accords was ratified in Washington, DC, in 1993 (Oslo I) and in Taba, Egypt, in 1995 (Oslo II) in which Israel recognized the water rights of the West Bank that ensures equal water resources for all.

Although the Oslo Accords were notable in that the PLO agreed to formally recognize the State of Israel and in turn Israel allowed the Palestinians some form of limited autonomy in Gaza and the West Bank (the so-called occupied territories). However, the Oslo Accords have not yet resulted in a lasting peace and their overall impact remains debatable.

In 1995, the Oslo agreements were revised in order to give concrete form to those of 1993, notably by negotiating the division of the Palestinian territories into three zones.

### THE PEACE CANAL (Project in progress)

The level of the Dead Sea is falling by about one meter per year due to the intensive exploitation of the Jordan River, but also due to the presence on its shores of many evaporation ponds, used for the extraction of precious minerals. In 2013, its level was 427.13 meters below sea level, nearly 27 meters lower than in 1977, according to official Israeli data. This is why in 2005 Jordan, Israel and the Palestinian authorities met to implement the RSDSC project, also known as the "peace canal". This project consists of connecting the Dead Sea to the Red Sea in order to supply water to the Dead Sea.

## POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

The RSDSC project would be a possible solution since it would provide sustainable access to water for the three countries, drinking water through the desalination of the Sea and eventually reduce tensions between Israel and Palestine. This desalination is based on agreements between Israel and Jordan which has also ensured peace between the two countries and a new accessibility to drinking water. However, some NGOs, such as Friends of the Earth in the Middle East (FOEME), worry about abuses by international companies that may jump on the economic opportunity. Other NGOs believe that the price of desalinated water will be financially unaffordable for local populations.

To guide you, dear delegates, you can ask whether, at the level of your country, you have already considered solutions for your access to water (use of technologies, techniques, financing, organizations, etc.).

UNICEF leads the WASH cluster in close collaboration with the Palestinian Water Authority and supports national capacity to provide safe water and sanitation services, while strengthening national capacity to respond to emergencies. In partnership with governmental and non-governmental organizations, UNICEF is working to ensure that

families, schools, and health facilities have improved access to safe WASH infrastructure and services.

To improve access to safe water, the EU has funded the largest seawater desalination plant in the Gaza Strip to date, as well as the largest solar field in the Gaza Strip, which will eventually provide safe drinking water to 250,000 people. It is a source of clean energy to implement the desalination plant. They were built by UNICEF, which continues to work on innovative solutions to make the supply of clean water more sustainable and cost-effective, including installing a new desalination prototype in Gaza through a partnership with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology that runs on solar energy, uses far less energy than conventional water technologies and converts about 90 percent of the water it extracts from the aquifer into drinking water. Continuing on this path could lead to a reduction in tensions.

## Questions to guide you in your research on the position of your delegation

- 1) How does your delegation perceive the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? Does it side more with Israel or Palestine or does it have a neutral or mitigated opinion?
- 2) Does your delegation also experience problems related to access to water? If so, what solutions has it put in place?
- 3) Has your delegation already contributed towards solutions for the problems related to water or the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?
- 4) What solutions could your delegation put in place for the problem we are studying (other than funding)?

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