

The jordan river

[History](#), [Middle East](#)



The Jordan River The Middle East region is known not only for its ideological, religious, and geo-political differences and disputes but also for the fact that it is extremely arid. The scarcity of water is connected to meteorologic, geographic and demographic factors. Jordan and Israel are highly dependent upon the Jordan River. Jordan, however, is facing another environmental problem which increases the state's dependency on the water of the Jordan River, (Abu-Taleb, 1994). The need for water and the continuing hostility between Israel and the surrounding Arab states has placed the Jordan River as a central bargaining chip since Israel's establishment in 1948. The Israeli War of Independence was rooted in the fact that the Arab countries considered the State of Israel to be illegitimate. Connected to these declarations, the Arab states have persistently denounced the unilateral diversion of the Jordan River as completely illegal. The Israeli response has been that the surrounding Arabs nations were never willing to let Israel exist in peace. These historical disagreements intertwine with the dispute between Israel and Jordan in which the Jordan River plays a main role. In order to understand the core of the conflict between Israel and Jordan around the Jordan River, it is important to note the different perceptions of water between the two countries. Jordan, as part of the Arab world, perceived the water problem as part of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Therefore, for Jordanian, water was always a matter of an Arab national pride (Copaken, 1996). For Israel, as a young country, water seemed to be an integral part of territory and a necessary resource for development (Copaken, 1996). As the population of Israel grew, the reliance on the Jordan River grew to over 50 percent of their water wage. In the early 50's Israel created a National Water

Carrier to transport water from the Jordan River and the Sea of Galilee to the Negev desert. These new waterways permitted cultivation of additional desert land. However, in the eyes of Arab nations in the 1950's, the National Water Carrier became a symbol of Israel's aggressive expansionism. In an attempt to settle the water dispute, American President Eisenhower appointed Eric Johnston as mediator (Cooley, 1984). Negotiations between Arab states and Israel on regional water-sharing agreements continued for more than two years with no actual success beyond a cease fire. Following more than 10 years of silent tensions, the conflict flared again. The Syrian government, inside its borders, attempted to divert the Banyas River which is one of the Jordan River's tributaries. This was followed by three Israeli army and air-force attacks on the site of the diversion. These incidents regarding water issues led up to the outbreak of the Six-Day War in June 1967 between Israel against Syria, Jordan, and Egypt. During that war, Israel captured the Golan Heights and the site of the Banyas headwaters, which enabled Israel to prevent the diversion of the Banyas by the Syrians. Israel also gained control of the West-Bank, the Jordan River as well as the northern bank of the Yarmouk (Cooley, 1984). In the year following the Six-Day War, Israel increased its water use from the Jordan River by 33 percent. Jordan, on the other hand, lost significant access water from the Jordan River. The Jordanian's plans to expand usage of the river and its canal system had to be terminated per the outcome of the war. Following the war, a large percentage of the sources of the Jordan River were controlled by Israel. In addition, Palestinians also took control over large sectors of the Jordan Valley that held these source waters (Reguer, 1993). For Israel, the

West Bank valley became a key water source because of its underground flow of water and wells. In order to provide water to north and central parts of the county, Israel depends on the water that comes from the Golan Heights as well as this area. These water sources are key elements in Israel's strategy to hold onto the West Bank and the Golan Heights (Cooley, 1984). Israel, has recently sought solutions to its water problems by applying advanced technology and environmental research to its efforts to bring water to the entire country. Large amounts of financial resources have been dedicated to find ways to increase efficiency of water usage. One remarkable breakthrough was the Israeli refined drip irrigation system, which delivers water directly to the root of the plant. The use of cloud seeding has also aided conservation efforts. Another plan was to use Mediterranean water, which required a process of desalination. Desalination involves removing the impurities from seawater by using either heat or pressure (Tal, 1992). On October 26 1994, the Prime Ministers of Jordan and Israel signed a peace treaty. This peace agreement put an end to the state of war which had lasted for almost 50 years between the two countries. Some specific articles of the agreement deal with the Jordan River. Israel and Jordan have agreed to share the river. Both countries will create storage facilities to hold excess water from rain floods as well as build dams for river flow management. The parties agreed to provide water to one another. In terms of environmental conservation, Jordan and Israel are obligated to protect the river from pollution, contamination, or industrial disposal. Furthermore, according to the treaty, the countries will establish a joint water committee to oversee issues regarding the quality of the water (Hof, 1995). References 1. Abu-

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