

'The Deal of the Century' and Its Hidden Secrets

By [Hazim El-Naser](#)

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We oppose and reject the US-Israeli peace plan, or the so-called "deal of the century", for many political, economic, social and religious reasons. It is rejected due to new signs that it will impede progress on the water issue between Palestinians and Israelis, as well as between the Israelis and their neighbouring countries.

The plan does not give the water issue the required weight, neither the attention necessary to indicate a goodwill effort towards the establishment of a Palestinian state on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. Digging in-depth into the financial resources allocated in the so-called "deal of the century", one finds that the total allocation for water for Palestine, including Gaza, Sinai and the joint projects with Jordan, does not exceed 3.1 billion dollars over a period of two to ten years.

It is worth noting that this amount is equivalent to what Jordan spent on the Jordanian water sector to meet its growing water needs, as well as to meet the needs of the influx of Syrian refugees to Jordan (then 1.5 million refugees) during the period of 2013 to 2017. Jordan spent this amount, despite a difficult financial system and without entering into deals with anyone else.

It is clear that the architects of this "deal" know well the importance of water for the establishment of the Palestinian state, and that without a long-term water plan that is sound and sustainable the desired state will lack necessary elements. This is likely why the plan moved away from the water issue, denying the previous agreements signed with the Palestinians, and continuing to control areas rich in surface water and groundwater, while continuing the building of settlements. This is evident in the areas of Jerusalem and Nablus, which are rich in surface and groundwater water.

Additionally, Israel will continue to occupy the remaining territories adjacent to the Jordan River and the northern Dead Sea area, which Palestinians do not maintain any control over, nor do they have sovereign rights on the occupied land mentioned above.

This time, through the "deal of the century", Israel did not attempt to take control over the water and resources of border areas, as their strategy has changed given the presence of a surplus of gas. We have lived through periods when the tributaries and sources of the Jordan River were the main engine of aggression in 1967, and before that, the war of 1948, as well as the last war of attrition in 1973. Israel ended all of its wars with truce lines which allowed them to control the water resources of the Jordan River, the West Bank, the occupied Golan and the Sea of Galilee. Furthermore, Israel maintains control of the West Bank Mountain Aquifers and its water-rich underground reservoirs, whose water has been withdrawn by Israel in unfair and unsustainable ways, without the Palestinians having the right to their sovereign water.

Returning to the so-called “deal of the century”, the new Israeli strategy is focused on water networks and transmission lines from within Israel, towards the West Bank, Sinai, Gaza and Jordan. It ignores the Oslo 1993-1995 agreements and the 2017-2018 agreements signed to supply water to the West Bank and Gaza as part of the Red-Dead Sea Project Agreement. While Israel rejected the agreement, it insisted on introducing it in the “deal”, to indicate to the United States and Europe that it is working towards regional cooperation. However, implementation and commitment are another matter, especially if there is to be some benefit to others. Their strategy has changed in the absence of new water resources to control in the West Bank.

The new strategy is described as selling water to anyone who needs it, with payment. Israel has sea water to tap, as well as the best desalination technology, and has abundant cheap energy, by which I mean “Mediterranean gas”.

While the new strategy is economically and politically profitable, it is also problematic, given the controlling and occupying Palestinians and Arab water resources, and the related consequences of international community confrontation and legal problems.

Control of the northern part of the Dead Sea and the Jordan Valley of the Palestinians has a hidden reason for its inclusion in the “deal”, which is related to the future of the Israeli potash industry in the Dead Sea, an industry which generates billions for the Israeli economy through the sale of potash salts and Dead Sea products.

In light of Israeli unwillingness to proceed with the Red-Dead project with Jordan and the Palestinians, Dead Sea environmental degradation will continue to the point where the Dead Sea may almost completely dry up. The Israeli water and borders planners know that the shores of the Dead Sea are receding and shrinking towards the north, “i.e. towards the borders of the West Bank on the Dead Sea”. Furthermore, Jordan has insisted over the past years that the state of Palestine borders the Dead Sea basin and has rights. Therefore, the Palestinians have been introduced as an active partner in the Red Dead Sea Project, a fact that the “deal” completely ignored.

To illustrate this point in numbers, the length of the western shore of the Dead Sea today is about 54km, of which only 18km is within Israel’s 1948 borders and the remaining 36km is located within the borders of the 1967 West Bank borders. If the waters of the Dead Sea continue to recede to the north, in the absence of the implementation of the Red-Dead Project, it is expected that over the next 25 years there will be no Dead Sea shore within Israel’s 1948 borders. As a result, the billions of US dollars of economic benefits which are generated as a result of the exploitation of the Dead Sea waters will surely disappear. This is why Israel insists, among other apparent reasons, on annexing the Palestinian areas of the Jordan Valley along the northern shores of the Dead Sea.

Water is a fundamental human right and a bridge to cooperation between nations, and it is not permissible to use it as a weapon to oppress and intimidate people, nor to pass political deals that are dead on arrival.

Within this context, it’s necessary to remind the international community, donors and international organisations, which have continuously repeated the need to regulate the fair use of water and its rights within riparian countries through many charters and conventions. These agreements started with the resolutions of the Association of International Law at its meeting in Helsinki in 1966, to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Non-

Navigational Uses of International Watercourses (UN Watercourses Convention) in 1997 (effective and in force since in 2014), which emphasised the principle of the participation of the states in watercourses and that the use should be fair and reasonable among all riparians.

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The writer is chairman of the Middle East Water Forum. He was Jordan's minister of water and irrigation, minister of agriculture and a former member of the Jordanian Parliament. He contributed this article to The Jordan Times.

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