

Thirsting for Pragmatism: A Constructive Alternative to Amnesty International's Report on Palestinian Access to Water

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In October 2009, the human rights organization Amnesty International published “Thirsting for Justice,” a twelve-page report assailing Israel’s “discriminatory policies” in the occupied territories regarding Palestinian access to water.¹ For those within the international community who take humans rights and water seriously, the Amnesty indictment was a modest *cause célèbre*. One indicator of international interest is the 84,000 “hits” registered in the Google search engine summary when querying for the report. Another is the 14,000 related emails from outside of Israel received by Israel’s Water Authority.

Given the absence of any methodological descriptions or verifiable statistics about actual water supply trends, it is tempting for Israel’s supporters to ignore the entire Amnesty report as yet another hostile polemic launched by Israel’s ubiquitous adversaries. Yet, an insouciant attitude toward the recent Amnesty water report is unwise. With well over two million members worldwide, Amnesty International is a household name in the free world. In progressive circles, the organization is recognized as a legitimate and often heroic voice that speaks out against repression, atrocities, and more subtle forms of discrimination.

Moreover, for some time, Israel’s environmental movement has joined the international community in calling for recognition of water access as a fundamental human right.² It is well, then, to consider the major claims that emerge from the Amnesty water study and hold them up to the light of empirical data, quantitative trends, and basic hydrology. After setting the record straight, it is possible to focus on constructive and pragmatic solutions. We must separate Amnesty International’s

legitimate assertions from those that are imprecise, exaggerated, or even disingenuous.

The Amnesty Indictment

Thirsting for Justice begins its case by emphasizing the low per capita water consumption among Palestinians, which it sets at slightly above 70 liters per day. This falls far short of the World Health Organization (WHO)-recommended 100 liters per capita level. By way of comparison, Israel's per capita consumption level is close to 300 liters per day. Amnesty claims that this gap is even more egregious when compared to the water consumption of "unlawful" Israeli settlements. The report also refers to some 180,000 to 200,000 Palestinians living in rural West Bank communities that still lack access to running water. For 10 percent of the Palestinians, water must either be purchased from costly tankers, or individual Palestinians must travel "miles" to find water that is "expensive" and of "dubious quality."

The cause of the shortage, according to Amnesty, is Israeli restrictions placed on Palestinian access to the mountain aquifer, "the Palestinian's sole remaining water resource," along with Israel's appropriating their share of the Jordan River. Palestinians can only drill wells after receiving permits from the Israeli authorities and these, purportedly, are "often impossible to obtain."

The report claims that Israel deliberately destroys rainwater-harvesting cisterns and harasses water carriers in order to make delivery more difficult and less reliable. A 2008 incident in Beit Ulla, a village near Hebron, is cited as an example. On that occasion, nine underground rainwater cisterns that irrigated an agricultural project were destroyed by the Israeli army. Cases from 1999 and 2001 in nearby Susya, where cisterns were intentionally ruined, are also described. Water storage tanks on roofs, according to the report, are targets for Israeli soldiers, who "break the monotony of guard duty" by shooting holes in them. This claim is based on quotations from interviews with unnamed soldiers.

Indeed, an entire section of the report, "Denying Water as a Means of Expulsion," suggests a sinister, conspiratorial component to Israeli West Bank water policies. Evidence of the existence of such a component is provided in the form of two specific cases where water tankers were confiscated by Israeli soldiers in the Jordan Valley as part of broader actions in which homes built in a closed military area were destroyed. The proximity of wells serving Israeli settlements near the disputed area is duly noted.

The report does acknowledge that since the mid-1990s, much of the responsibility for water delivery has been in the hands of the Palestinian Water Authority (PWA), an independent government agency. The Palestinian water sector's performance is recognized as being inadequate (resulting in one-third of the water supply being lost to leakages). But this abysmal performance is blamed on Israeli restrictions on the PWA and the inadequacy of funding by international donors. Even the international community's omissions are blamed on Israel because "donors have generally been reluctant to expose and effectively address obstacles which hinder the delivery of water projects." Buried in the general diatribe is a one-sentence acknowledgement that Israeli constraints are "compounded by poor governance, fragmented management, and internal divisions in the PWA."

Finally, the report blames Israel for contaminated water sources. The report highlights the severity of the situation in Gaza, where 90 percent of available water is "polluted and unsuitable for drinking." But responsibility is again placed squarely on Israeli policies: "During more than four decades of occupation, Israel has over-exploited water resources and neglected water and sanitation infrastructure in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. It has also used the territories as a dumping ground for its waste—resulting in the pollution of groundwater resources."

The final section of the report focuses on the hydrological implications of the 2009 Operation Cast Lead in the Gaza Strip, where for twenty-two days Israeli soldiers sought to prevent Hamas military units from bombing the southwestern region of Israel. The ongoing Israeli blockade of Gaza is cited as part of the problem, with a lack of parts, chemical disinfectants, and electrical power purportedly impeding restoration of damaged infrastructure.

Thirsting for Justice contains no bibliography or verifiable tables with quantitative data, but does conclude with a series of recommendations. These include a call for Israel to lift restrictions that deny Palestinians access to sufficient water for personal and domestic needs and to end policies that discriminate against Palestinians and confer privileges to Israeli settlers. The report also recommends an end to the blockade in Gaza so that spare parts and construction materials can be imported to bolster water infrastructure.

The Palestinian Authority is also urged to take measures to protect existing water resources, including a reduction in water delivery losses and increased regulation to ensure water quality standards, especially for mobile water tankers. Amnesty also asks international donors to "take steps to improve coordination and strengthen oversight of implementation so as to maximize existing resources and the utility

of individual projects.” It also suggested that the reporting of interference, which delays water and sanitary project implementation, be improved.

Beyond Polemics—The Palestinian Hydrological Reality

Thirsting for Justice contains so much arbitrary, biased, and anecdotal disinformation that it is easy to lose sight of a basic truth about the region’s water conditions that is contained in the report: The amount of water available to Palestinian communities is inadequate, and its quality is frequently unacceptable. Recognizing this intolerable situation is an important point of departure for all parties when considering solutions. At the same time, the low level of Palestinian access to water is a symptom of a complex reality.

Conducting a discourse over patent inaccuracies and falsehoods is a waste of time and resources, distracting the sides and the international community from constructive and meaningful efforts in areas where progress is both needed and possible. It is well, therefore, to sort out those claims put forward by Amnesty that are baseless, or dubious at best.

So where did Amnesty get it wrong? Why did it adopt Palestinian propaganda rather than empirical hydrological and policy science as a basis for arguments? To begin with, the very fact that the Amnesty report provides a snapshot, rather than an analysis, of overall trends is misleading—in environmental management, it is trends that matter. According to most indicators, the Palestinian water reality has actually improved, indeed dramatically. During the most violent years of the intifada, when Israel was essentially at war with the Palestinian National Authority, actual delivery to the Palestinian municipal and industrial sectors increased substantially.

The 1995 Oslo II Peace Accord, signed on September 24, 1995 in Taba, Egypt, stipulates that Israel increase Palestinian water allocation by 28.6 million cubic meters (MCM). In fact, supply has grown by over 60 MCM: 22 million supplied by Israel directly and 40 MCM more from ninety new wells approved by the Joint Water Committee established under the accord.³ It can be argued that the interim agreement was only designed for a five-year period, and that it is only natural and equitable that adjustments were made subsequently when final accord negotiations faltered. Nonetheless, it is important that this context be clear: Israel has gone far beyond its Oslo II commitments—even as ultimately it will need to go further.

Because of the predominance of water allocations to agriculture, the question of water rights should not focus on total volume of water supplied but, rather, ordinary people’s ability to access it. It is not “quantity,” per se, but availability of

reliable, clean water at the household level that matters from a humanitarian perspective. In this regard, Amnesty's snapshot is simply imprecise. *Thirsting for Justice* speaks of only 70 liters per person per day. But the actual amount is probably twice that. Recently, the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics reported a figure of 132.9 liter/capita/day, even as in some specific geographic pockets, such as the Jenin governorate, levels were substantially lower.⁴

The fact that there are only 200,000 Palestinians who today lack a reasonable connection to running water should be seen as an extraordinary achievement. This means that less than 10 percent of the population lives without running water. The figure compares very favorably with conditions a decade ago; it also surpasses many European countries, such as Romania, where roughly one-third of the population still lives without running water—more than three times the figure for the West Bank.⁵ Recently, US National Public Radio reported that some 400,000 people in Jordan's second-largest city, Irbid, do not have any piped water.⁶

Improvement in the Palestinian sector did not just happen by itself. A World Bank report from April 2009 states that since the mid-1990s, Israel has been responsible for a 50-percent increase in the numbers of West Bank Palestinians who have access to network water supply. The World Bank estimates that 45 percent of municipal and industrial water for West Bank Palestinians and West Bank settlements is now supplied by sources from inside Israel, largely via Mekorot, Israel's national water company.

There are few developing economies that have achieved such dramatic improvements in such a short time. Most of what was accomplished was due largely to initiatives taken by Israel. For instance, the United Nations *Millennium Goals* include a target of 70 percent water access for Africans by 2015. (In 1980, only 35 percent of Africa's population had access to reasonable water sources, and by 2008, this figure had crept to a mere 46 percent.)⁷ In all fairness, however, one must admit that as the planet's poorest continent, Africa does not offer an ideal basis for comparison regarding Palestinian access to water. Jordan, however, is a much more logical point of comparison, as it presumably would still have control of the West Bank had it not attacked Israel in 1967.

Jordan currently reports an annual supply of 169 cubic meters of water per capita; however, this figure is misleading, as over two-thirds go to agriculture. In 1995, Jordanian households were supplied only 90 liters of water per capita a day.⁸ With a 50 percent increase in population during the past fifteen years and no meaningful increased water resources, Jordanian household supply has fallen below Palestinian levels.⁹ Before attacking Israel as a rapacious water hegemon, it would behoove us to consider context: Jordanian per-capita consumption was

3,600 liters per person per day in 1946. It has since plummeted thirty-fold—an order of magnitude larger than the drop in the West Bank.¹⁰

Today, the supply of water to citizens in Palestinian cities is far superior to that of neighboring Jordan and Syria, even though Israel's Water Authority acknowledges that the supply is not adequately reliable.¹¹ In Amman, most households receive water once or twice a week, when they must fill roof-top containers. Damascus is located in a country which, by the arid standards of the Middle East, is a hydro-superpower. Due to massive 60-percent leakages and mismanagement, however, Syrians are without water for more than half of the week.¹² During the recent drought in Cyprus, households had access to running water for only eight hours every two days.¹³ The vast majority of urban Palestinians receive water year-round, albeit for many of them—especially during the summer months—water does not flow in municipal pipes during many days of the week, requiring a backup system of cisterns.

Per capita water access statistics are driven by historical demography. The astonishing geometric growth in the local Palestinian populations since 1967 is ultimately responsible for today's low level of per capita water access. Consider these figures: The West Bank Arab population has roughly tripled during the last two decades, with the population presently estimated to be 2,461,267, with a growth rate of 2.1 percent per year. In Gaza there are an additional 1,551,859 residents with a 3.34 percent per year demographic increase.¹⁴ (In 1989, only 860,000 and 560,000 Arabs lived in the West Bank and Gaza, respectively).¹⁵ Had Palestinian population levels remained steady, per capita water access in Palestine would today be greater than in Israel. It is also worth noting that while the Palestinian birthrate was skyrocketing, in several Muslim countries, such as Bangladesh and Iran, population growth levels decreased by more than 50 percent.¹⁶ If per capita water access is a priority, then countries should adopt sustainable population policies. (This critique is no less valid for Israel, which, for a long time now, has needed to reconsider its unsustainable, pronatal policies.)

Palestinians are understandably unhappy about the increased dependence on Israeli water suppliers that improved household access brings. The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics recently reported that in 2009, 47.4 million cubic meters of water were purchased from Israel.¹⁷ Considering the decades of bitter enmity, for many Palestinians, reliance on Israeli sources feels like occupation perpetuated. Yet, the reality is that rainfall in the region continues to drop and natural water sources are depleting rapidly. Palestinian water experts and politicians alike have taken a consistent position demanding what they believe are full water rights to the mountain aquifer, rather than accepting alternative water sources. Given the political reality, however, if Palestinians choose not to invest in

alternative water production, holding out for well and spring water, dependence on Israel will grow.

For years, Israeli water experts have tried to focus discussions on actual water “needs” (which presumably can be agreed upon), rather than water rights, which remain disputed. Ultimately, the transformation of water into a commercial commodity that can be produced through industrial processes based on brackish or sea water and sold across national borders is an excellent development for the Middle East. A dispassionate, economic “optimization” of water resources is a constructive response to the pervasive scarcity. Privatized or public water sales can go a long way toward diffusing what Professor Hillel Shuval calls the region’s “hydro hysteria,” which characterizes the local water discourse but hardly serves either side’s interests.

Expanding supply is only part of the solution; demand management is even more important. In the West Bank, little progress was made in reducing losses in local water delivery pipes during the thirty years of Israeli occupation and the subsequent fifteen years of limited Palestinian control. Typically, Palestinian experts acknowledge that 30 percent of the scarce water in their cities leaks out of poorly maintained pipes,¹⁸ despite available technologies that readily identify and plug such leaks.¹⁹ This is approximately three times more than Israel loses to leakage.

The Palestinian National Authority, with one billion dollars in annual civil aid since the Oslo Accords, enjoys the status as the world’s largest per capita recipient of international development assistance.²⁰ Whether this money has been invested responsibly and whether Palestinian budgeting priorities serve to further peace in the region is debatable. Regardless of one’s view, even the most avid Palestinian advocates would have a hard time making the case that a fair share of the prodigious humanitarian assistance was allotted to Palestinian water infrastructure. Despite the generosity of the international community, investment in improving municipal water delivery has been insignificant. Leaky water pipes constitute a central part of a problem that could and should have been solved long ago and needs to be at the top of any list of future hydro-initiatives.

Criticism of Israeli policies regarding water development permits or recognition of water rights is not without justification. Yet *Thirsting for Justice* makes no effort to be even-handed or even to mention the proverbial half-filled glass that balances cases where the Israeli-dominated Joint Water Committee stymied progress. In more than a decade of work, the committee *has* approved the drilling of roughly seventy new Palestinian wells and fifty-five requests for well grading.²¹ (There are roughly 500 wells presently operating in the West Bank.) Permits for establishing sewage treatment plants in most major Palestinian cities have been granted. The

pitiful level of implementation has more to do with donor dissatisfaction and mismanagement than Israeli bullying. As a downstream riparian, no one has a greater interest than Israel in Palestinian sewage treatment, whose river restoration efforts are rendered useless by the associated pollution. Israel should do more to support treatment and utilization of wastewater by Palestinian communities, creating an incentive for the maintenance of sewage treatment facilities.

There are surely cases in which Israeli military and civil authorities have been draconian about granting permits for water infrastructure projects. At the same time, concerns about Palestinian hydro-anarchy are not without foundation. It is hard to understand how Amnesty conveniently avoided any mention of the well-documented lawlessness and appalling level of compliance with Palestinian water regulation in the West Bank and Gaza. No sooner had Israel transferred sovereignty of the Gaza Strip to the Palestinian Authority in 1995 than thousands of illegal wells were dug by the local population. Those residents, rather than dealing with the messy demands of a responsible regulatory system, preferred to avail themselves of accessible groundwater, ensuring the destruction of a common resource. The fact that there are many more illegal wells in Gaza than legally licensed ones has had a devastating impact on the Gaza aquifer due to salt water intrusion.

Because of the flow patterns in the underlying sandy-coastal aquifer, the phenomenon does not yet appear to have compromised the quality of Israeli water resources. But the 250 illegal Palestinian wells in the northern West Bank dug since the interim peace accord are in blatant contravention of the Palestinians' international commitments. These sources may provide 10 MCM per year for Palestinian usage but they also negatively affect yields of wells above the Mountain Aquifer inside Israel, and certainly do little to engender goodwill.²² Palestinian water management appears out of control, and this situation is manifested in degraded groundwater quality for both parties. Little wonder that healthy suspicions exist as to the Palestinian political commitment and willingness to enforce environmental standards and hydrological self-discipline.

Another peculiarity of the Amnesty report is the avoidance of any mention of the Palestinian agricultural sector. As farmers utilize two-thirds of Palestinian water resources,²³ some discussion of their needs and relative efficiency are relevant to a serious report on the subject. Rural sections of the West Bank and Gaza have scores of indigent households who pay exorbitant monthly water bills for bottled and tanker water. At the same time, neighboring farmers, with grandfathered rights, basically receive water for free. This does little to encourage efficacious practices and hydro-sustainability.

During the prevailing economic chaos created by the intifada, subsistence agriculture became an important source of food for many Palestinian families. Ultimately, however, Palestinian agricultural yields are not particularly impressive. The sector only employs 112,000 people, with the value of total yields estimated at roughly \$500 million, or 12 percent of GDP.

In light of a fifteen-year average drop of 13 percent in precipitation, Israel's agricultural sector has been forced to face a tough new policy of higher, unsubsidized prices and lower allotments. Many Palestinian experts have called for similar reforms, but their calls go unheeded. During the years of drought, Israeli water allocation cuts to agriculture were implemented equally within Israel and the West Bank. *Thirsting for Justice* seems more intent on slamming Israel than considering how the vast majority of Palestinian water is actually used and whether its agricultural community can do better.

Probably the most unsubstantiated and unfair section of the report is the implication that Israel is exploiting water in order to engage in some sort of ethnic cleansing. Ever since the Bible called for urban planning and open-space protection around cities (Numbers 35:2), zoning has been a critical aspect of ensuring environmental quality and order for citizens, while preserving land resources for future generations. The cases described in the Amnesty report, in which water trucks were temporarily impounded, constitute unfortunate, isolated incidents which were part of a general effort to ensure compliance with zoning prescriptions. For the majority of Israelis who have long since embraced a two-state solution, eliminating the inevitable friction associated with enforcing laws as an occupier is something that a final peace treaty, mercifully, will eliminate. But until then, those unfortunate incidents in which squatters are confronted do not represent a systematic program of oppression, but rather basic law enforcement undertaken by an occupying army. With no information provided about the magnitude of the phenomenon, it is difficult to challenge such conspiratorial contentions with salient facts.

Such shoddy scholarship and tendentious journalism is taken to even greater extremes in the report's insinuation that there is a government policy of encouraging soldiers to take target practice on Palestinian water tanks. Israeli military operations are carefully crafted to avoid causing any civilian damage. Numerous IDF military missions are abandoned due to their impact on innocent people and infrastructure. The fact that after almost a month of furious warfare in Gaza, only \$6 million in water infrastructure damage was reported only confirms the high level of caution exercised.

From its inception, because Israel is vastly outnumbered by its enemies, it has had to rely on a “people’s army” rather than on a professional military force. If such a deplorable, “scorched earth” (or water) military strategy actually exists, there is no way that such orders would have escaped the attention and the angry protestation of the hundreds of thousands of regular Israeli citizens serving as reserve soldiers in the occupied territories. Given the actual reality on the ground, if Israel wanted to truncate water supply, it would be far easier in times of war for Israel to simply turn off the taps (or the electricity)—something it has never done.

The phenomenon of soldiers behaving immaturely, blundering, taking exaggerated liberties, or even showing brutality, is as old as warfare itself. No military can eliminate such anomalies completely. As long as Israel remains an occupying force, there are going to be inexcusable, isolated incidents along with honest mistakes. In its defense, however, the Israeli military does dedicate considerable educational effort to inculcating humanistic values and mandating sensitivity to civilian populations. The IDF is quick to try soldiers who deviate from the civilized norms of the Geneva Convention. There are many areas where the Israel Defense Forces can be criticized. But deliberately sabotaging water resources is simply not one of them.

While Israel needs to be part of a solution to the Palestinian water crisis, it is not the only country that bears responsibility. Claims that Israel has “expropriated” Palestinian Jordan River rights should be considered in this light. The *de facto* “Johnston agreement,” brokered by the US in 1954, allocated the waters of the Jordan River to the five riparians and has since served as a benchmark for extraction. Under the Johnston formula, Jordan receives 45 percent of the Jordan River flow, with Israel receiving 40 percent. Of course, when the agreement was made, the West Bank was part of Jordan. These lands presumably retain their water rights, and a discussion about inequity regarding Palestinian access to the Jordan River should also include the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan—which continues to enjoy its full share of Jordan River flow, even as it only retains 50 percent sovereignty of its original riparian lands.

But such quibbling may obscure the point. The real problem is that the Jordan River only flows when Lake Kinneret (the Sea of Galilee) fills up and spills over, or when the Yarmouk River discharges. In recent years, despite substantial reduction in Israeli pumping from the Kinneret, the lake remains at its lowest level in recorded history—far below levels where water can even reach the Jordan. Left only with sewage and irrigation return flow, the water quality in the Jordan River is nothing short of abominable.

Indeed, the most glaring professional flaw in the Amnesty report is its deafening silence with regard to climate change and shifts recorded in local precipitation patterns. The Jordan River Basin, like the rest of the region, has seen a precipitous drop in rainfall. This no longer looks like a protracted drought, but rather a new and drier equilibrium. Israel's Water Authority reports an average drop in water resources of over 10 percent during the past two decades. Traditional rhetoric demanding water rights assumes a level of water resources that is no longer valid. Sustainable water management for both sides requires immediate additional sources of water—be they from desalinated seawater or recycled effluents.

When Progress is Held Hostage by a Final Accord

This litany of critiques of the Amnesty report in no way exonerates Israel as part of the problem associated with poor water conditions that many Palestinians face. Yet, it also suggests that the Palestinian government and its Water Authority share responsibility for finding a solution. Reports like *Thirsty for Justice*, the primary purpose of which appears to be blaming Israel for Palestinian water woes, are not only substantively inaccurate but tactically foolish. If Palestinians do not begin investing in retrofitting urban water delivery, desalination plants, modern sewage infrastructure, as well as shutting down unlicensed wells and controlling population growth, no reforms and new allocation schemes will be sustainable. In no time at all, the Palestinians will again suffer a severe water shortage. Even if the Israeli government were listening, by focusing solely on an Israeli indictment, results will not be satisfactory. Rather, this only engenders an angry, defensive response, leading to an unproductive propaganda fencing match, which does little to ease the actual hardship of the local Palestinian population.

At the end of the day, nobody with even a modicum of compassion or understanding about hydrology on either side should complacently accept a figure (whether exaggerated or not) of 8 percent Palestinian personal income dedicated to water acquisition for personal use. Nor should there be any tolerance for the economic exploitation by unscrupulous private water suppliers that the statistic implies. The lunacy of the present situation is highlighted by the Israeli desalination plants that literally operate a few kilometers away, which produce 1,000 liters of crystal-clear water for only fifty cents.

To rectify the present situation, however, it is critical that the diplomatic context for the present hydro-asymmetry be squarely placed on the table. Water is but one core issue in the negotiations between Israeli and Palestinian leadership upon which the sides disagree. Given the recent breakthroughs in desalination technology and the resultant decrease in water prices, water allocation is a disputed topic about which Israel can (and ultimately should) make concessions to the

Palestinians. But it is also unfair to expect Israel to unilaterally make irreversible concessions when final status negotiations have not yet begun. At the same time, it is also unacceptable for Israel to use a diplomatic impasse, which may never be broken, as an excuse for not providing Palestinians civilians with a better water supply.

The present deadlock constitutes the most frustrating aspect of the Israeli–Palestinian water dynamic for environmentalists and human rights advocates on both side of the conflict. Water is an area for which relatively inexpensive, technological solutions exist that could expeditiously lead to better quality of life for Palestinians and increased trust between the sides. Yet, such progress is held hostage to the intransigence (on both sides) in areas such as refugees and the “right of return,” the final status of Jerusalem, security, etc. So, the Israelis and Palestinians are left with an interim Oslo-II agreement, which was designed to be stop-gap and temporary. If one is to be realistic, waiting for an equitable and conciliatory final peace accord to be reached before resolving this problem is simply irresponsible. The Israeli–Palestinian water conflict is a classic case in which “perfection is the enemy of the good.” It is time to move beyond the rhetoric that “thirsts for justice” toward less bombastic language that seeks pragmatism.

The only immediate way forward appears to be via the existing cooperative water framework. While the Oslo-II interim agreement is a flawed, ad hoc document that is far from fair in terms of water governance, it remains the “only game in town” for the foreseeable future. Notwithstanding its asymmetrical structure, the Joint Water Committee (JWC) continues to meet and make coordinated decisions. It has the authority to make many decisions that go beyond the scope of the original 1994 accord, as it has done in actual water allocations. The JWC could adopt a bold emergency work plan for 2010–11 and market it with international assistance agencies. The plan should be built around an overarching, common objective: providing 100 liters per day for all Palestinians within two years through the following measures:

- return all Israeli taxes placed on the Palestinians for water services to water infrastructure work in Palestinian cities, so as to start an emergency leak reduction program;
- prioritize water piping infrastructure and a major 100 MCM Gaza water desalination facility in discussions with international donors;
- begin work on Palestinian waste-water treatment facilities for the major Palestinian cities (including East Jerusalem), based on tertiary treatment technology that will allow for the safe recycling of millions of cubic meters of water;
- complete the process of connecting the homes of the remaining 100,000 Palestinians who do not yet receive water to the West Bank water grid;

- create a fast, transparent track for investigating complaints of abuse of Palestinian water facilities by the Israeli army, prosecuting violators, and providing financial compensation to victims;
- launch strict enforcement by the Palestinian Authority of closing unauthorized water wells and begin a comprehensive water-quality monitoring program; and assess water efficiency and pricing policies among the Palestinian agricultural community.

Such an emergency program will not offer the Palestinians any symbolic declarations or the clear demarcation of water rights that they find so important. That will have to wait for a final peace agreement. It also will not address one of the core elements of the problem that ultimately requires a solution: the unsustainable population growth in the West Bank and Gaza. But it will surely constitute progress.

For the international donor community whose generosity and patience has been tried by both sides for years, it would be a welcome avenue for assistance. For the many Palestinians who have never known what a proper shower is, or who must carry water considerable distances for basic use, or who pay exorbitant fees to water tankers—life would be far better. For Israelis, who intuitively understand that one of the benefits of modern civilization is the emergence of running water as a basic human right, it constitutes a step in the right direction.

It is a pity that Amnesty did not place the full weight of its stature and public relations capabilities behind a truly constructive report that promoted peace and cooperation based on sustainable resource management. Sadly, it preferred politically correct allegations to verifiable hydrological trends—and practical and available solutions. Ultimately, its recommendations, while a bit amorphous, are not fundamentally different than those recommended above. But because they are wrapped in anti-Israel rhetoric and falsehoods, they are non-starters for Israel's governmental decision makers. By playing up the Palestinian national persona as "victims" of water sabotage, rather than empowering Palestinian water managers with quantifiable and attainable objectives, *Thirsting for Justice* may actually serve to weaken them.

After so many years of prolonged diplomatic drought, the psychological impact of a meaningful, coordinated initiative to increase Palestinian access to water and the possible momentum that such goodwill could bring to the beleaguered peace process should not be underestimated. Our thirsty region does not need another biased, unprofessional report to move forward. What it needs is a renewed supply of pragmatism.

Notes

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of Government,
Diplomacy & Strategy

Center for
European Studies

Certificate / Master's Program in European Studies at the Center for European Studies

The Center for European Studies is a joint undertaking of the Royal Scientific Society in Amman (Jordan), the Palestinian Al-Quds University in East Jerusalem and the Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya (Israel). The Center was founded by its current director, Avi Primor. Mr. Primor formerly served as Israel's ambassador to the European Union, Belgium and Luxembourg, and the Federal Republic of Germany.

The Center pursues a twofold goal: It aims to prepare students for future cooperation with the European Union in the fields of law, economics, politics and culture. It also aspires to promote understanding and cooperation between our peoples by means of joint studies.

The basic curriculum of the Center's new post-graduate program—comprising seven courses spread over two semesters—leads to a certificate diploma in European Studies issued by the Center for European Studies. Those who successfully complete the first year and wish to obtain a master's diploma spend the second year of their studies at the Heinrich Heine University in Düsseldorf (Germany). At IDC Herzliya, admission to the program is open exclusively to IDC students.

Part of the first-year program is taught in parallel at the three respective Middle Eastern sister institutions, and part is taught jointly via video conferencing, affording the students an opportunity to get acquainted with one another. The second-year program in Germany is taught jointly in its entirety. As such, the Center for European Studies aspires to fulfill its mission of furthering knowledge about the European Union in the Middle East, while promoting peace via daily cooperation.

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