

## Obstacles to Arab-Israeli peace: Water

By Martin Asser BBC News - 2 September 2010



Satellite image of Eastern Mediterranean The region supports large populations on the margins of some of the world's driest deserts

"(...) In the 1967 war Israel gained exclusive control of the waters of the West Bank and the Sea of Galilee, although not the Litani. Those resources - the West Bank's mountain aquifer and the Sea of Galilee - give Israel about 60% of its fresh water, a billion cubic metres per year. Heated arguments rage about the rights to the mountain aquifer. Israel, and Israeli settlements, take about 80% of the aquifer's flow, leaving the Palestinians with 20%.

(...) Palestinians say water politics are just part of the injustice of occupation. [They] say they are prevented from using their own water resources by a belligerent military power, forcing hundreds of thousands of people to buy water from their occupiers at inflated prices. Moreover, Israel allocates to its citizens, including those living in settlements in the West Bank deemed illegal under international law, between three and five times more water than the Palestinians. This, Palestinians say, is crippling to their agricultural economy. (...) Although Israel says this is a temporary security measure, the barrier encroaches deep onto occupied territory - especially areas of high water yield. (...)

### Replenishable resources

Sources in million cubic metres per year:

- Sea of Galilee - 700
- Mountain Aquifer - 370
- Coastal Aquifer (Gaza) - 320
- Other - 410

(Source: Israeli government)

(...) Stalled negotiations on Syria's dispute with Israel over the Golan Heights - occupied by Israel in 1967 and annexed in 1980 - also foundered on water-related issues. (...) Syria wants an Israeli withdrawal to 5 June 1967 borders, allowing Syria access to the Jordan and Yarmouk rivers. Israel wants to use boundaries dating back to 1923 and the British Mandate, which give the areas to Israel.

Former UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali may not have been right when he said in the 1990s that the next war in the Middle East would be about water not politics, but a future war over water is not out of the question. (...)

**Questions. 1. What strategic water resources has Israel got under control since the Six-Day war?**

**2. Comment on the underlined sentence. Rephrase key ideas from the text.**

**3. To what extent do water issues stall negotiations between Israel and Syria?**

**4. "The Arab-Israeli conflict is also a conflict over water resources": sum up the main ideas in 5 or 6 points (if you want, draw a spider diagram).**

