

The Impact of the War in Gaza on Israel-Jordan Cooperation

by [Saud Al-Sharafat \(/experts/saud-al-sharafat\)](/experts/saud-al-sharafat)

Jan 31, 2024

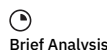
Also available in

[العربية \(/ar/policy-analysis/athar-alhrb-fy-ghzt-ly-altawn-byn-alardn-wasrayyl-fy-mjalat-altaqt-walmyah\)](/ar/policy-analysis/athar-alhrb-fy-ghzt-ly-altawn-byn-alardn-wasrayyl-fy-mjalat-altaqt-walmyah)

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

[Saud Al-Sharafat \(/experts/saud-al-sharafat\)](/experts/saud-al-sharafat)

Dr. Saud Al-Sharafat is a former Brig. Gen in the Jordanian General Intelligence Directorate, as well as founder and chairman of the Shorufat [Center for the Study of Globalization and Terrorism]. His writings mainly focus on issues pertinent to globalization and international terrorism.



Brief Analysis

The Gaza war's impact on Jordan has been significant and at times uncontrolled, with a primary focus on demands to halt all forms of "bilateral cooperation" with Israel. However, the implementation of the energy for water project is likely only a matter of time, although contingent on cessation of hostilities.

The war in Gaza has cast a dark shadow over the promising water and energy cooperation projects between Jordan and Israel. Water and energy are among the most economically and politically sensitive sectors in contemporary Jordan due to the country's chronic water shortage and the difficulty of securing energy sources for local use. Jordan imports more than 96 percent of its energy needs, with an annual import bill exceeding \$3 billion, according to official statistics.

The Gaza war has had a direct impact on Jordanian public opinion, with increasing demands that the country withdraws from all its commitments, treaties, and agreements with Israel and halt all forms of cooperation. So far, however, it appears these demands have disrupted only one project, Project Prosperity—or energy for water agreement—which is sponsored by the United Arab Emirates with U.S. approval.

Although the project has been suspended, it will likely resume after the war ends, since both parties have an interest in this type of cooperation. Indeed, despite the current tensions, this type of coordination is almost inevitable given the respective situations of both countries, and as one of the most important means of interconnection and networking that can help mitigate armed crises and conflicts between them.

The Foundations of Cooperation

The peace treaty between Jordan and Israel, signed on October 26, 1994, was based on a fundamental pillar—cooperation—and opened the door for the first time in modern history to water and energy cooperation between the two. As Israeli historian Avi Shlaim noted in his book *Lion of Jordan: The Life of King Hussein in War and Peace*, the word "cooperation" appears twenty times in the treaty.

Literature covering the peace treaty negotiations between Jordan, Israel, and the United States [mentions \(https://sgp.fas.org/crs/mideast/RS22876.pdf\)](https://sgp.fas.org/crs/mideast/RS22876.pdf) that they "discussed issues related to water quotas as one of the most complex issues, and plans for a canal linking the Red Sea to the Dead Sea, connecting the electricity grids, and transforming the arid Arab Valley into a flourishing agricultural and industrial center." In the end, Israel agreed to provide Jordan with fifty million cubic meters of water annually and to cooperate in finding additional sources of potable water for the Hashemite Kingdom. Both sides committed to alleviating water scarcity by developing new water sources, preventing pollution, and reducing water wastage.

Article 19 of the 1994 [peace treaty \(http://www.kinghussein.gov.jo/peacetreaty.html\)](http://www.kinghussein.gov.jo/peacetreaty.html) regulates energy cooperation, and the agreement includes a special appendix that discusses bilateral interconnection and gas pipelines that govern the relationship between the two sides. In general, Israel has committed to implementing these provisions, and both parties have maintained this spirit of cooperation despite some political setbacks, mainly related to Israel's domestic policy and changes in Israeli governments from moderate to extremist, which have often led to political tensions between the two countries.

Challenges and Opportunities

Jordan faces challenges related to a scarcity of energy resources, including the worsening problem of water scarcity, which has become one of the country's top national security challenges and creates a recurring annual crisis for decision makers, especially in the summer.

However, Jordan's political opposition and some Jordanian water experts strongly deny the existence of this problem and reject any opportunity to cooperate with Israel on water and energy, citing a number of reasons. One of the most significant is that in their opinion, Jordan can independently meet its local water and energy requirements and does not need to cooperate with Israel. They also express skepticism about international and local reports highlighting the seriousness of the energy and water challenge.

Nevertheless, an analysis of the numbers and a 2023 study published by the Jordanian Ministry of Water and Irrigation, titled "[National Water Strategy \(2023–2040\) \(https://www.mwi.gov.jo/EBV4.0/Root_Storage/AR/EB_List_Page/national_water_strategy_2023-2040.pdf\)](https://www.mwi.gov.jo/EBV4.0/Root_Storage/AR/EB_List_Page/national_water_strategy_2023-2040.pdf)," as well as international reports, especially from the World Bank, indicate the depth and seriousness of the problem, and strongly suggest that Jordan must secure its needs by collaborating either with Israel or with another party. The Jordanian study notes that Jordan is considered one of the poorest countries in terms of per capita share of freshwater, as this share in 2021 was only 61 cubic meters, which is lower than the internationally recognized absolute water poverty line of 500 cubic meters per person per year.

Several Jordanian water and energy experts have confirmed that Jordan's annual water needs amount to about 1.4 billion cubic meters for all uses, but only about 950

million are available, resulting in a water deficit of approximately 400 million cubic meters. As a result, Jordan has become one of the rare countries that supplies water to its population only once a week, as the water available is sufficient for only two million people, while Jordan's population was estimated (<https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/jordan/summaries/>) to be 11.1 million in 2023 and is expected to exceed 12.5 million by 2040.

Because Jordan faces a real challenge in bridging the growing gap between water demand and available supply, the strategy document emphasizes that in the future, the country will rely mainly on seawater desalination projects and higher-quality treated water. Notably, it includes the Project Prosperity (energy for water) project and another future project, the Aqaba-Amman Water Desalination & Conveyance Project (https://www.unescwa.org/sites/default/files/event/materials/Mitigation_Jordan_Project_Fact_Sheet_RE%20Desalination%20Plant%20%2814Sept22%29.pdf)

Israel is considered a pioneer in desalinating water and produces more water than it needs. With five major desalination plants and around thirty smaller ones, it produces more than 585 million cubic meters of desalinated water annually. In addition, Israel is focusing on a strategic shift toward clean energy production, aiming to generate 30 percent of its electricity from renewable sources by the end of the current decade, and has been making efforts over the past decade to increase renewable energy production. Furthermore, it plans to achieve net-zero carbon emissions by 2050.

From here, the Israeli Ministry of Energy issued what is known as the "Low-Carbon Energy Economy Roadmap by 2050" in mid-April 2021. This roadmap includes a set of programs to meet the objectives of the roadmap, with the aim of establishing bilateral relationships with neighboring countries, including Jordan. Jordan has attracted their attention due to its suitable geographical location for regional renewable energy development. When facing challenges in achieving its renewable energy goals, such as the scarcity of land for solar farms and limited storage technology, Jordan's vast, sparsely populated areas in the south and northeast make it ideal for solar energy production. Moreover, the relatively lower cost of renewable energy production in Jordan, attributed to land prices and cheaper labor, means that, according to classical economic theory, Israel could gain a 'relative economic advantage' by procuring renewable energy from Jordan at a lower cost than producing it domestically. Consequently, the two countries can collaborate and mutually benefit from their comparative advantages in water and energy economies.

This means that there is potential for cooperation between the two countries, as Israel has expertise in water desalination and Jordan has favorable geographic conditions for renewable energy production, particularly solar energy, at a relatively lower cost. This could lead to a mutually beneficial water and energy partnership.

Cooperation in Exchanging Energy for Water

The war in Gaza has not affected existing cooperation projects between the two countries, especially water allocations guaranteed by the peace treaty, nor has it affected Jordan's agreement to purchase gas from Israel, signed in September 2016 after Egypt suspended gas exports to Jordan.

As Jordan is actively seeking solutions to its water shortage problem and aims to increase its energy production. To this end, prior to the war it entered into the energy for water agreement with Israel, under which Israel will sell water to Jordan and purchase electricity from Jordan, with financing from the UAE.

According to media reports, the agreement stipulates that Jordan will export annually to Israel around 600 megawatts of electricity generated from solar energy, and Israel will provide Jordan with 200 million cubic meters of desalinated water. This would cover approximately half of Jordan's estimated annual water deficit of 400 million cubic meters.

Israel's goal in this agreement is to secure 30 percent of its energy needs from renewable sources by 2030 (<https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/govt-approves-plan-for-30-percent-of-israels-energy-to-be-renewable-by-2030-646886>), especially since it currently imports a significant percentage of its oil from distant countries that are involved in international crises, such as Azerbaijan, which supplies about half of Israel's oil and gas needs.

The War Has Disrupted but Not Prevented Cooperation

The Gaza war's impact on Jordan has been significant and at times uncontrolled, with a primary focus on demands to halt all forms of "bilateral cooperation" with Israel (the peace treaty, gas agreement, and energy for water agreement). In response, the Jordanian Parliament and Ministry of Foreign Affairs took swift action that succeeded in containing the demands of the Jordanian street.

On October 13, 2023, just six days after the war began, Jordanian Parliament speaker Ahmed Safadi called on the parliamentary legal committee to review all agreements with Israel and provide instructions so that the government could make them contingent on the cessation of hostilities in Gaza. The Jordanian Parliament voted unanimously in favor.

Within three days of the vote, on October 16, 2023, Jordanian foreign minister Ayman Safadi announced that Jordan would not sign the energy for water agreement during the Gaza war. Furthermore, in an interview with CNN's Becky Anderson on November 17, he stated that negotiations on the agreement had stopped, since circumstances "will not allow any form of interaction with the Israelis," adding that the peace treaty between the two countries would become a "document gathering dust."

On the other hand, it appears that the gas agreement will not be suspended despite the war. In the past, this agreement has faced widespread objections from the Jordanian public and the Parliament, which has twice voted to have it canceled. However, the government responded firmly and clearly, calling it "non-binding" and arguing that implementing the agreement is in Jordan's interest because of its need to enhance energy security.

In the same vein, the implementation of the energy for water project is likely only a matter of time, although contingent on cessation of the war in Gaza. It is highly likely that the pause will be temporary and that the government will respond to the Parliament as it did with the gas agreement, especially since many Jordanian water experts emphasize the project's benefits. Importing water from Israel is more cost-effective and efficient than developing the capacity for desalinating water domestically.

Furthermore, opponents of the project serve specific interests within Jordan, claiming to defend the country's interests and support the Palestinian people. Yet given the significant and pressing needs of the Jordanian people to secure better access to water, it is arguable that these voices are sacrificing Jordan's interests in the service of other parties.

In conclusion, the United States can play an influential role in the success of this cooperation by continuing to sponsor the energy for water project and working toward its success. It can do so by leveraging its deep influence on all parties and its extensive experience in this field dating back to the 1950s, during the Eisenhower administration, when it positively and firmly intervened in the conflict between Jordan and Israel over the Jordan River waters. The importance of this issue also underscores that Jordan-Israel water cooperation will become the cornerstone of cross-border reconciliation.

Joint projects require cooperation rather than competition, pushing countries, institutions, and individuals to seek and protect their common interests and thus facilitate the process of collaboration, which should act as a catalyst for rational dialogue between nations and significantly reduce the resort to war and armed conflict. ❖

RECOMMENDED

ARTICLES & TESTIMONY

[The Only Way to Stop Hamas Is to Stop Iran from Rebuilding It](#)

Jan 31, 2024

◆
Michael Singh,
Matthew Levitt

[\(/policy-analysis/only-way-stop-hamas-stop-iran-rebuilding-it\)](#)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

[The Islamic State Hits Turkey After Years of Plotting](#)

Jan 30, 2024

◆
Aaron Y. Zelin

[\(/policy-analysis/islamic-state-hits-turkey-after-years-plotting\)](#)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

[Kataib Hezbollah Secretary-General Tries to Forestall U.S. Strikes](#)

Jan 30, 2024

◆
Michael Knights,
Hamdi Malik

[\(/policy-analysis/kataib-hezbollah-secretary-general-tries-forestall-us-strikes\)](#)

TOPICS

[Arab-Israeli Relations \(/policy-analysis/arab-israeli-relations\)](#)

[Energy & Economics \(/policy-analysis/energy-economics\)](#)

REGIONS & COUNTRIES

[Israel \(/policy-analysis/israel\)](#)

[Jordan \(/policy-analysis/jordan\)](#)