

# **A Quick Tour of Water & the Arab-Israeli Conflict**

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<http://www.d-n-i.net>

# Overview

- **Perspective on the Historical Continuity of the Water Issue**
- **Perspective on Surface & Subsurface Hydrology**
- **The Horns of Israel's Legal & Moral Dilemmas**
- **Will the "Roadmap" Offer a Pathway Out of the Cul de Sac?**

## 1919 Zionist Proposal to Versailles Peace Conference

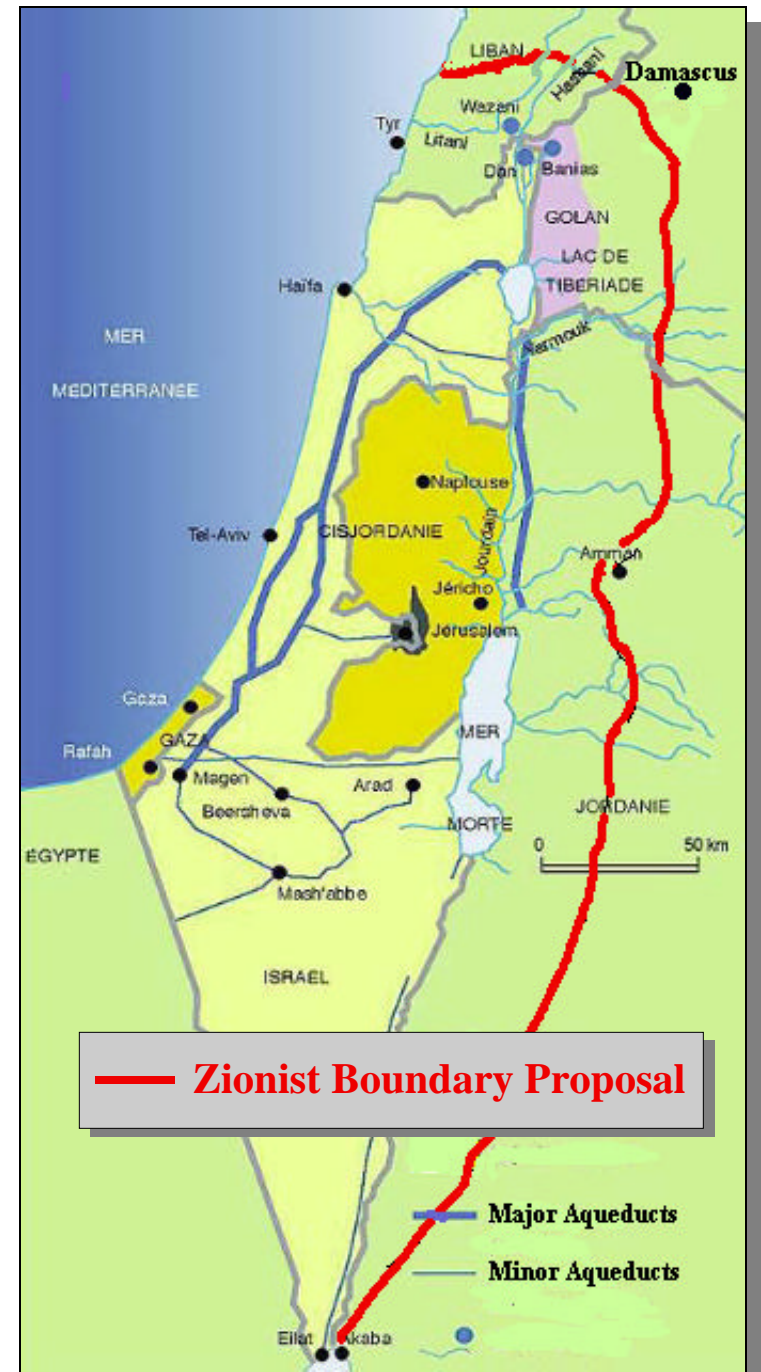
“The economic life of Palestine ... depends on the available water supply. It is, therefore, of vital importance not only to secure all water resources already feeding the country, but also to be able to conserve and control them at their sources.”

“The Hermon is Palestine's real "Father of Waters," and cannot be severed from it without striking at the very root of its economic life.”

The **fertile plains east of the Jordan**, since the earliest Biblical times, have been linked economically and politically with the land west of the Jordan. The country which is now very sparsely populated, in Roman times supported a great population. It could now serve admirably for colonisation on a large scale. A just regard for the economic needs of Palestine and Arabia demands that **free access to the Hedjaz Railway** throughout its length be accorded both Governments.

### Sources:

- Jewish proposal for Jewish Homeland, 1919 :From the Proposals Presented by the Zionist Organisation to the Paris Peace Conference, 1919  
<http://www.eretzyisroel.org/~samuel/parispeace.html>
- (Boundary) - Mark Tessler, A History of the Israeli - Palestinian Conflict, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 1994
- Background Map - Le Monde Diplomatique



## Sharon's Interview with Ha'aretz Magazine, 12 April 2001

Sharon responded to a question by Ari Shavit about whether or not evacuation of the settlements is out of the question, by posing 2 rhetorical questions:

1. "Is it possible today to concede control of the *hill aquifer* [in the West Bank], which supplies a *third of our water*?"
2. "Is it possible to **cede the buffer zone** in the Jordan Rift Valley?"

Sharon's questions go the heart of the water issue from Israel's perspective

## Mini-Crisis in Lebanon, Sept 2002

**The Lebanese began a project to divert a small amount of water from the River Hasbani to supply water to parched villages in South Lebanon.**

Note: The Hasbani, rises in Lebanon and flows south for 30 miles before entering Israel and joining the River Jordan which empties into the Sea of Galilee. It provides 10 percent of Israel's water, according to a report in Maariv, Sept 17, 2002

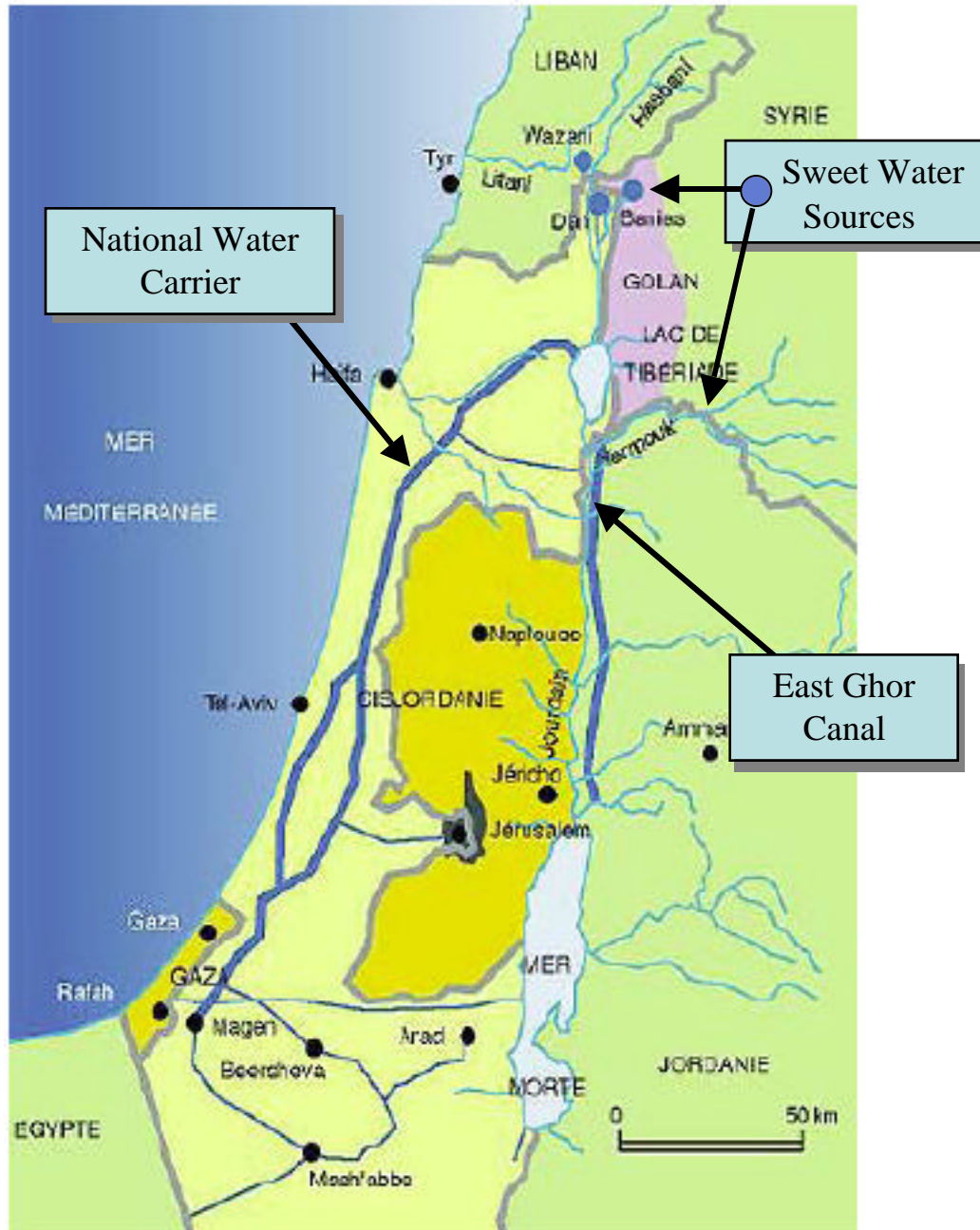
10 Sept 2002: Ariel Sharon tells the Israeli army radio the diversion would be a "casus belli", or "grounds for war". [BBC, 10 Sept 2002]

17 Sept 2002: Israeli Defense Minister Ben-Eliezer tells Maariv ``It must be clear that **Israel will not ignore a water issue, because it is our elixir of life.**”

**By making its riparian claim to upstream water resources a casus belli,  
Sharon & Ben-Eliezer revealed the heart of the moral issue from  
Israel's Perspective**

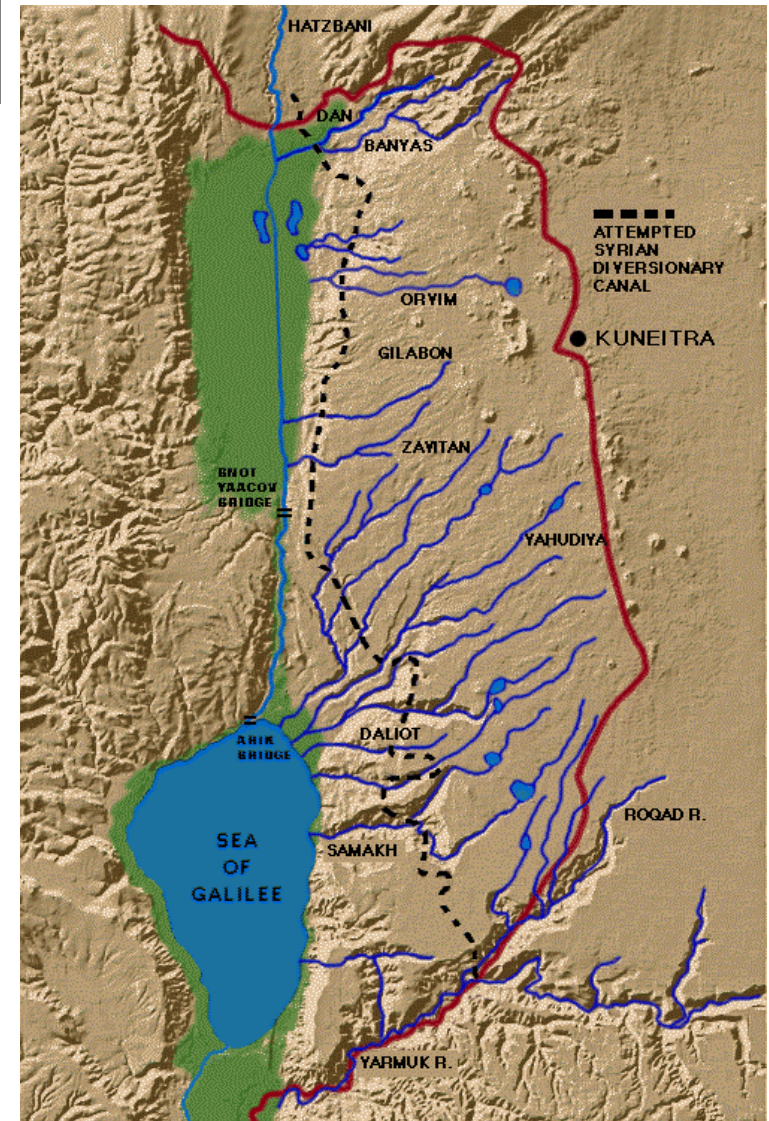


# Rechargeable Surface Hydrology

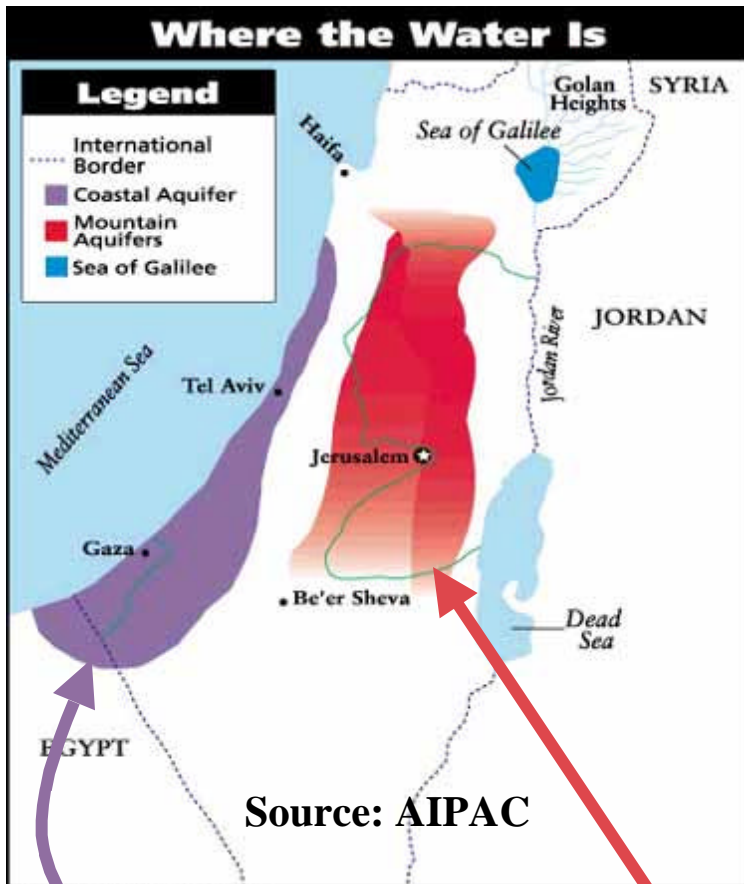


Total ~ 720 mcm/yr (45%)

## Surface Water on the Golan



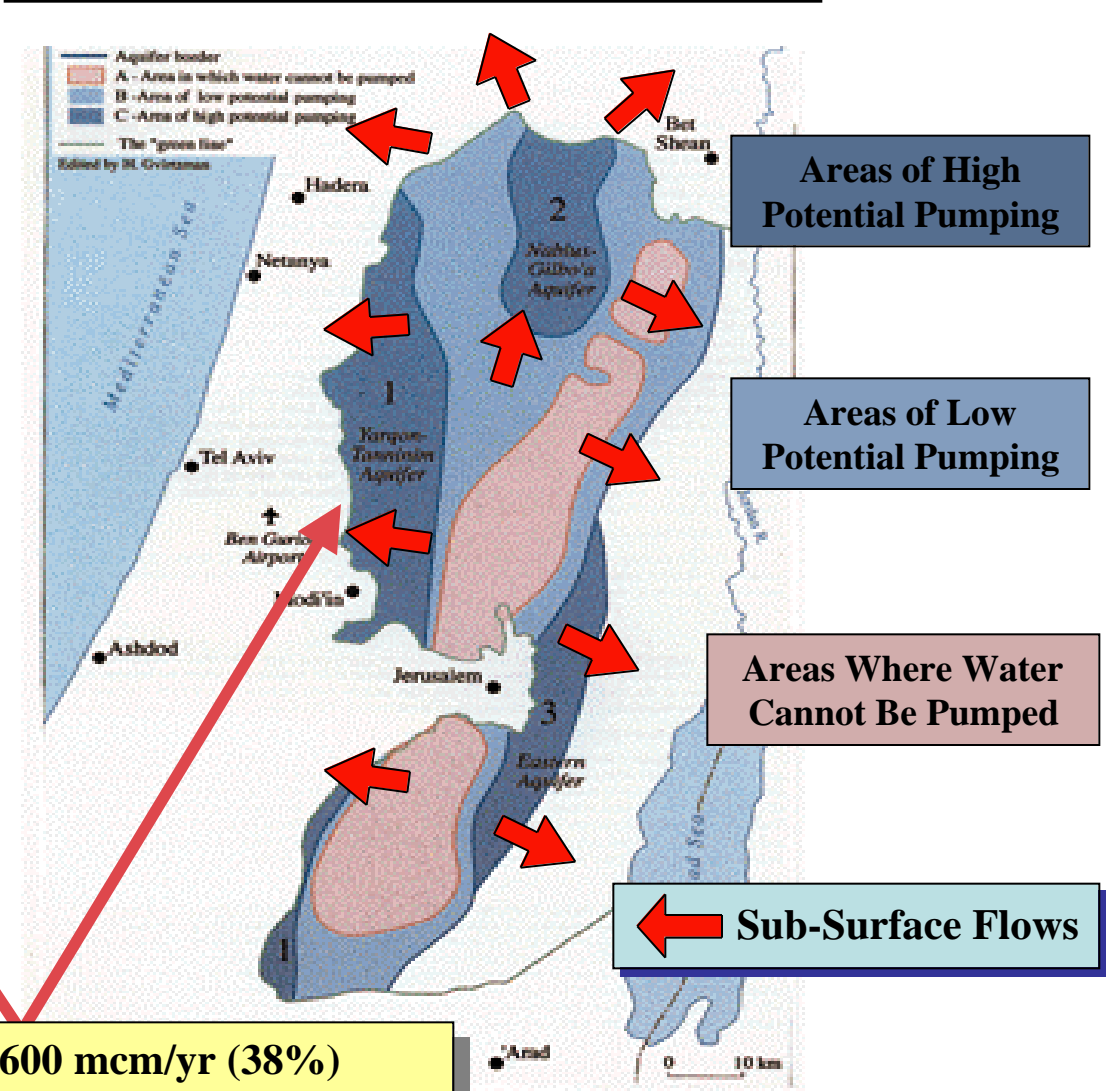
# Rechargeable Sub-Surface Hydrology



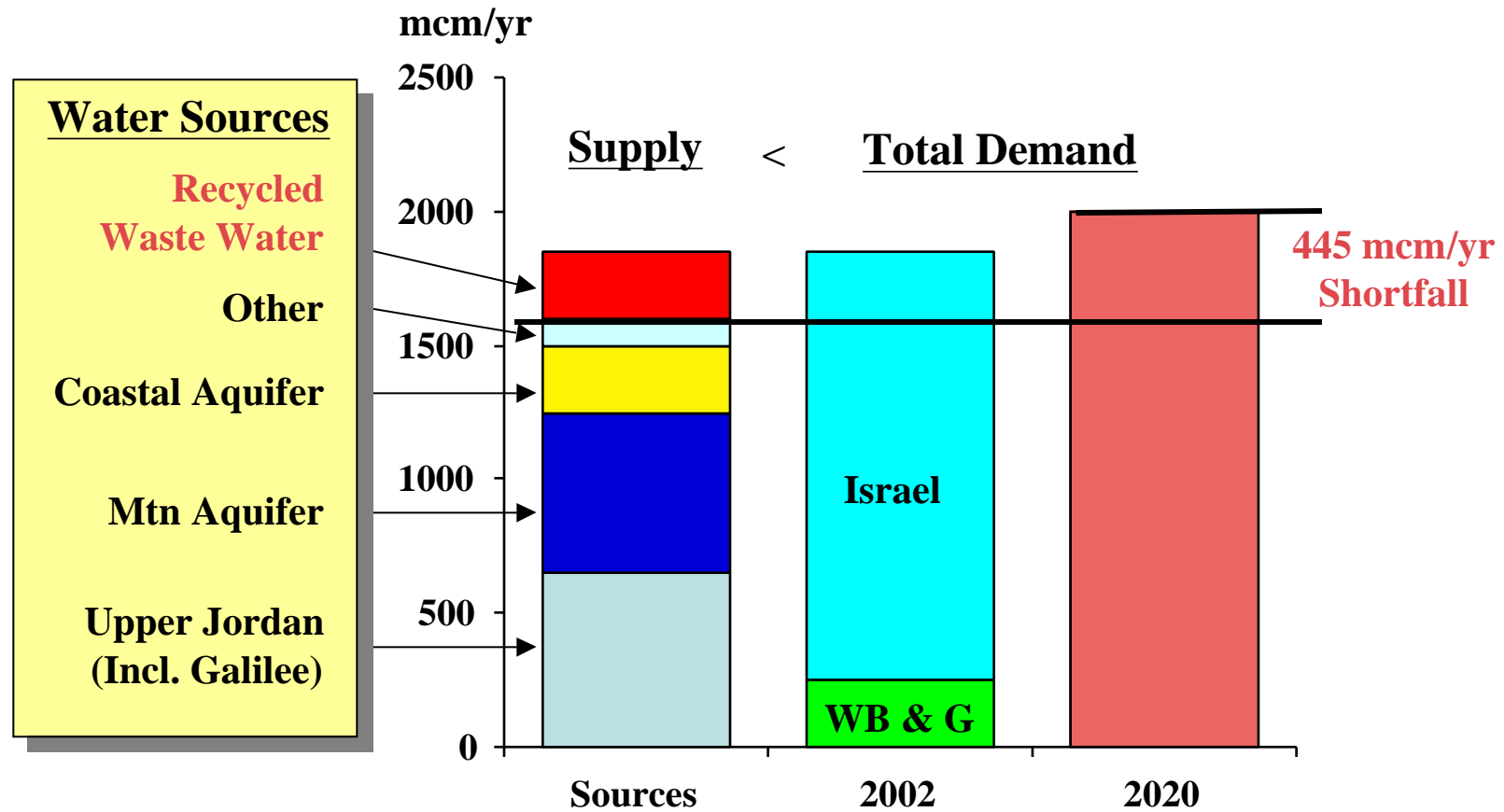
**Coastal Aquifer ~ 250 mcm/yr (16%)**

**Mountain Aquifer ~ 600 mcm/yr (38%)**  
 (90% of Ann'l Replenishment Area is under West Bank)

## West Bank Replenishment Area & Flows



# Water Deficit - Israel & Occupied Territories



**Note: Supplies are Shrinking**

- Population growth
- Saltification of aquifers from over pumping/Pollution
- Agricultural / Business Use

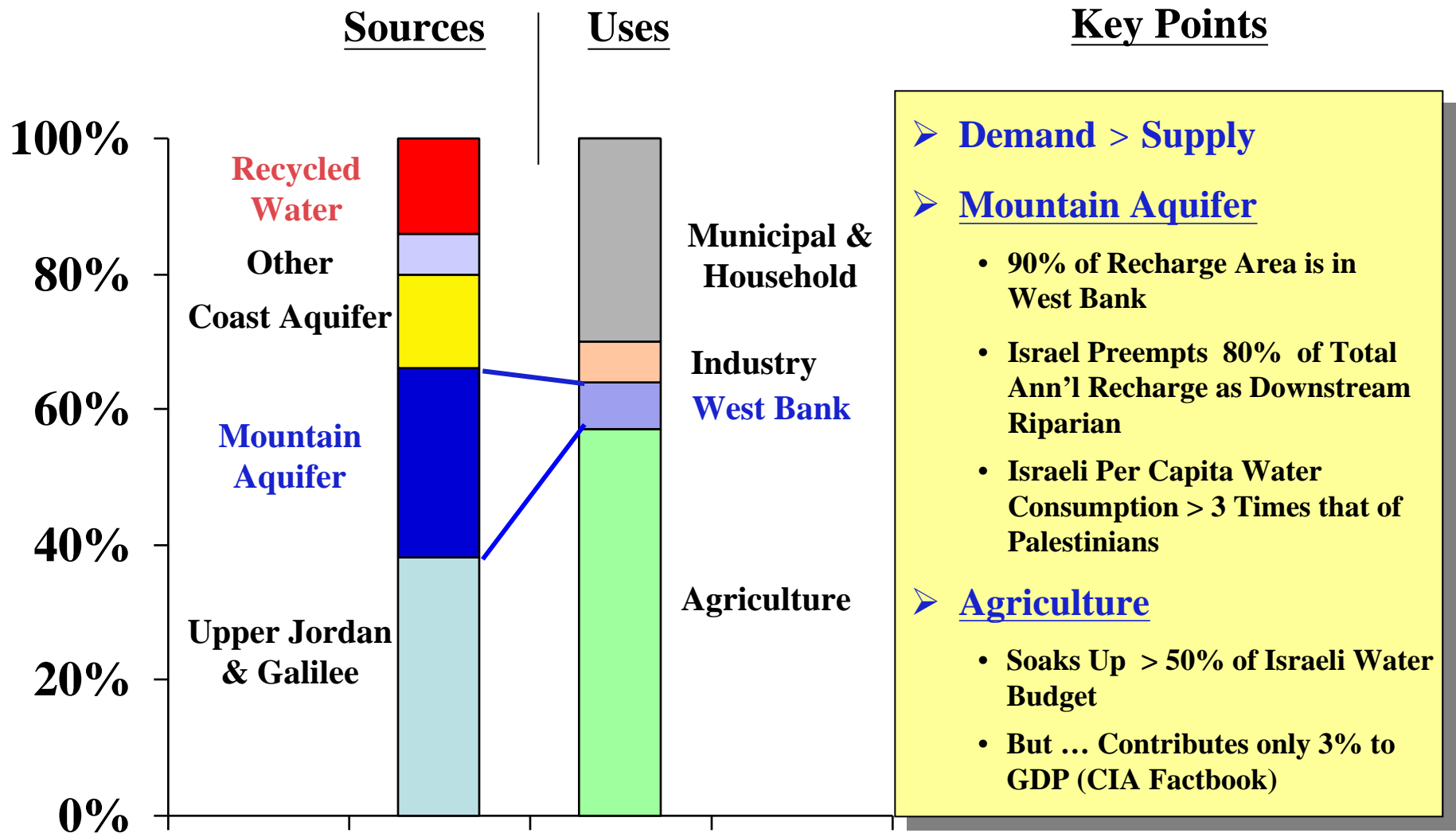
Israel Water  
Commision Est.  
(2000)

Ha'aretz Nov 24, 2000 &  
Multiple Sources

Supply #s are approximate



# Israel's Water Budget



## Camp David Preserved the Unequal Water Allocation (December 2000)

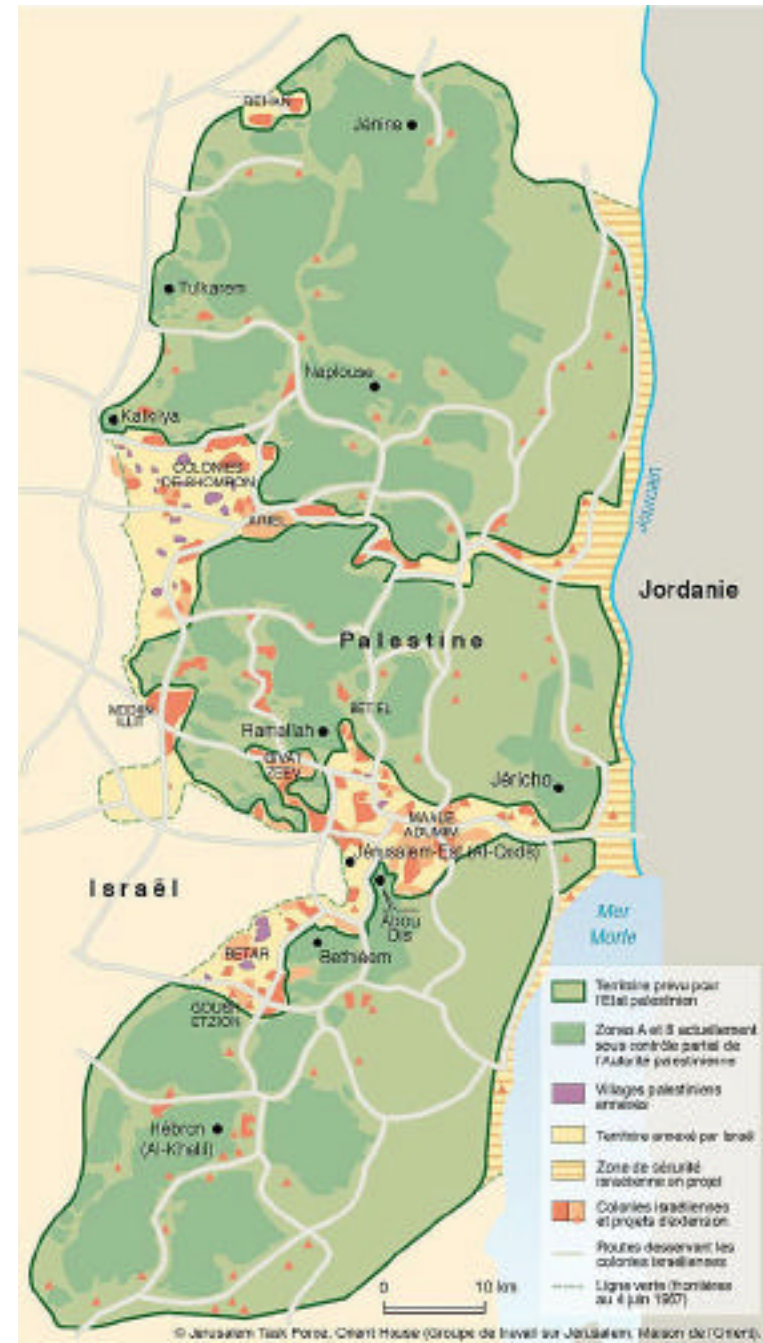
### Key Points wrt Palestinian State:

- **3 Separated Cantons**
- **Network of Access Roads Inside Each Canton**
- **Eastern Border is West of Jordan River**
  - i.e., Israeli Security Zone

### Implications wrt to Water:

- **Israel Maintains its Downstream Riparian Claim on 80% the Mountain Aquifer's recharge**
- **But ... the Security Zone Preempts Equivalent Palestinian Downstream Claim on Upper Jordan Water Resources**

Source: The Orient House, Jerusalem  
<http://MondeDiplo.com/maps/IMG/artoff2076.jpg>



## 2 Problems with respect to Water

Israel consumes more water than nature replaces.

A viable Palestinian State can not be surrounded by Israel,

... but ...

A Palestinian state with an eastern border on the Lower Jordan would  
“internationalize” 2/3 of Israel’s Water supply

Impale Israel on the horns of two dilemmas

# (I) Israel's Legal Dilemma

## Israel Demands Downstream Riparian Claims on its Neighbor's Water

- Bombed Syrian diversion projects in Golan in early 1960s; occupied Golan in 1967.
- Threatened War over small Lebanese diversion of Hasbani in 2002
- Preempts 80% of annual recharge of Mountain Aquifer while 90% of recharge area is under the West Bank. ([Sharon's 1st Question](#))

... While at the same time ...

## Israel would Deny Equivalent Downstream Riparian Claims by its prospective neighbors in a Palestinian State

- By Insisting on a thin Security Zone along Lower Jordan River although there is no threat from Jordan ([Sharon's 2nd Question](#))

## (II) Israel's Moral Dilemma

WATER is not, as Ben-Eliezer says, "our" elixir of life.  
WATER is the everybody's elixir of life in a desert

The most basic of human rights is the Individual's Right to Life,  
...and in a desert ...  
the right to life necessary includes fair access to water

... but ...

To evolve a pathway toward sustainable & fair access to water on a per capita basis,  
Israel must reduce the size of its agricultural sector, because  
>50% of its Water Budget produces only 3% of its GDP

...which pits ...

### Israel's Heroic Zionist Ideals

The farmer/warrior making the  
desert bloom while defending himself



### Israel's Liberal Humanistic Ideals

The sense of a democratic morality based on  
the rule of law & the idea that each  
individual has value



## Will the “Roadmap” Create a Pathway Out of the Cul de Sac?

The road map to a final comprehensive settlement of the Israel-Palestinian Conflict by 2005 purports to be --

- “performance-based” & “goal-driven”
- with clear phases, timelines, target dates, and benchmarks aiming at progress through reciprocal steps”

This language clearly implies an ability to measure progress, but the only reference to water -

“Revival of multilateral engagement on issues including regional water resources, environment, economic development, refugees, and arms control issues.”

Contains no unequivocal commitment to resolve the water dispute  
Contains no performance parameters for measuring progress

# Final Comment

Over Long Term It Will be Necessary to:

Evolve a regional solution

-- involving Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Palestine, & Israel  
( & *perhaps* Turkey & Iraq) --  
perhaps via a Quartet-driven variation of a the 1950's  
Johnston Commission.

**Lebanon is a key to a regional solution**

- Only state with a water surplus
- But ... With the exception of the the Hasbani, most of Lebanon's water is contained w/i its own borders

**=> No Obligation to Share it**

