



'WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM MY FRIENDS': EXAMINING THE LOGIC BEHIND ISRAEL-JORDAN-UAE WATER FOR ELECTRICITY DEAL

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Abstract: In November 2021, Israel, Jordan, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) began evaluating the feasibility of an agreement under which Israel would supply Jordan with desalinated drinking water and Jordan would provide Israel with electricity generated by solar systems located in Jordan and built by a UAE company. Since both water and electricity can be produced independently – Jordan can desalinate its own water, and Israel can generate electricity from solar power – the article questions the rationale behind this project. It concludes that the agreement's foundation, both in terms of engineering and legal structure, is heavily rooted in political and psychological theories of trust building. If successful, this initiative could pave the way for broader regional cooperation and normalization.

Keywords: Desalinated water, electricity, Israel, Jordan, regional cooperation, trust building, UAE

Abstrak: Pada November 2021, Israel, Yordania, dan Uni Emirat Arab (UEA) mulai mengevaluasi kelayakan perjanjian di mana Israel akan memasok air minum desalinasi ke Yordania, sementara Yordania, sebagai imbalannya, akan menyediakan listrik bagi Israel yang dihasilkan oleh sistem tenaga surya yang terletak di Yordania dan dibangun oleh perusahaan UEA. Karena air dan listrik dapat diproduksi secara mandiri - Yordania dapat melakukan desalinasi airnya sendiri, dan Israel dapat menghasilkan listrik dari tenaga surya - artikel ini mempertanyakan alasan di balik proyek ini. Artikel ini menyimpulkan bahwa fondasi perjanjian ini, baik dari segi teknik maupun struktur hukum, sangat berakar pada teori-teori politik dan psikologis dalam membangun kepercayaan. Jika berhasil, inisiatif ini dapat membuka jalan bagi kerja sama dan normalisasi regional yang lebih luas.

Kata kunci: Air desalinasi, Israel, Jordan, kerja sama regional, kepercayaan, Listrik, UEA

INTRODUCTION

Israel and Jordan, two neighboring Mediterranean countries, share a land border and have limited regional water resources, both of which face increasing water scarcity. This growing challenge prompted a 2021 initiative through a mutual declaration and Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to explore a regional water-to-electricity agreement.¹ Under this plan, Israel would provide Jordan with desalinated drinking water, whereas Jordan would supply Israel with solar-generated electricity from systems built and operated by a UAE company.

¹ Israeli Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure, "Declaration of Intent Between the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, the State of Israel and the United Arab Emirates" (Israeli Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure, 2020), https://www.gov.il/BlobFolder/news/press_221121/en/DOI_221121.pdf.

Described as the largest cooperative project between the two nations since their peace agreement, the idea originated from a 2020 report by Ecopeace Middle East, an environmental NGO active in Israel, Jordan, and the Palestinian Authority.²

The development of desalination technology offers an artificial solution for water scarcity. Although desalination has been known for some time, both Israel and Jordan hesitate to adopt it on a large scale because of its high cost. If each country had pursued desalination independently, this technology might have reduced its mutual dependence on shared, insufficient natural water resources, and with lower costs over time, it might have fulfilled most, if not all, of their water needs.³

In recent years, Israel has established several desalination facilities that convert Mediterranean seawater into drinking water. Jordan, which lacks access to the Mediterranean, announced in 2021 plans to build a desalination plant in Aqaba, using water from the Red Sea. The project, estimated to cost \$1 billion, is expected to take five years to complete and aims to meet Jordan's water needs for two centuries.⁴ Despite this, under the water-for-electricity agreement, Jordan opted to receive desalinated water from Israel.

This decision faced criticism within Jordan, with opponents raising concerns about increased interdependence and Jordan's reluctance to support the Palestinians in their ongoing conflict with Israel.⁵

The region's naturally hot climate, exacerbated by desertification, provides favorable conditions for solar energy production. Israel and Jordan have significantly expanded their solar energy infrastructure in recent years. However, solar farms require large amounts of land, which poses a challenge for Israel because of their small size and rapidly growing population. Israel chose to preserve its land for housing and infrastructure, opting to purchase electricity from solar farms located elsewhere. While Israel could allegedly achieve energy independence by installing solar panels on rooftops, Jordan's proximity and willingness to collaborate presents a convenient alternative.

² Gidon Bromberg, Nada Majdalani, and Yana Abu Taleb, "A Green Blue Deal for the Middle East" (Palestine: EcoPeace Middle East, December 2020), <https://ecopeaceme.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/A-Green-Blue-Deal-for-the-Middle-East-EcoPeace.pdf>; Reuters, "Israel and Jordan Move Forward with Water-for-Energy Deal," News, Reuters, November 8, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/business/cop/israel-jordan-move-forward-with-water-for-energy-deal-2022-11-08/>.

³ Zaria Gorvett, "Mediterranean States Must Work Together to Adapt to Water Scarcity – Prof. Ralf Ludwig," Magazine, Horizon, April 27, 2015, <https://projects.research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/en/horizon-magazine/mediterranean-states-must-work-together-adapt-water-scarcity-prof-ralf-ludwig>.

⁴ Amman, "Drought-Hit Jordan to Build Red Sea Desalination Plant," News, France 24, 2021, <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20210613-drought-hit-jordan-to-build-red-sea-desalination-plant>.

⁵ Serena Bilanceri, "Water for Energy: A Controversial Deal in a Thirsty Region," Organization, Friedrich Naumann Foundation, April 4, 2022, <https://www.freiheit.org/middle-east-and-north-africa/water-energy-controversial-deal-thirsty-region>.

This arrangement has been criticized in Israel for unnecessarily increasing its dependence on Jordan for electricity, with critics arguing that it compromises Israel's energy independence and exposes the country to potential political pressure in the event of regional tension. Particular concerns have been raised because of Jordan's close ties with Iran.⁶

Thus, the water-for-electricity agreement represents a political choice for mutual interdependence, despite risks and opposition. This study explored the rationale behind this decision. Section 1 briefly reviews the history of Israel-Jordan relations, with a focus on water disputes. Section 2 examines the Declaration and the MOU that initiated the project and assesses their legal implications and underlying motivations. Section 3 analyses the psychological, political, and economic factors that drive this initiative. Section 4 concludes.

DISCUSSION

1.1 The History of Israel-Jordan Relations and Water Dispute

The Emirate of Transjordan was established in 1921, following the partition of the former Ottoman territories between the UK and France. It became a British protectorate until Jordan gained its independence in 1946. Similarly, Israel declared its independence in 1948, after a long period of Ottoman rule and a British mandate from 1917 to 1948. Despite their parallel history, the two nations have been in conflict since 1948. During the Arab-Israeli War that year, Jordan captured and annexed the West Bank, only to lose it to Israel during the 1967 war.⁷

Despite the hostilities, informal contacts and limited cooperation based on mutual interests have occurred between the two countries. In 1988, Jordan renounced its claim to most of the disputed territory and, in 1994, the two nations signed a peace agreement. Since then, their relationship has involved limited cooperation, though generally maintaining what is described as a "cold peace."⁸

⁶ "Israel Renews Water-Sharing Agreement With Jordan Despite Strained Bilateral Ties," Organization, Foundation for Defense of Democracies, May 19, 2024, <https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2024/05/19/israel-renews-water-sharing-agreement-with-jordan-despite-strained-bilateral-ties/>.

⁷ Zachary Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East: The History and Politics of Orientalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511606786>; Joseph Nevo, "East and West of the Jordan River," in *King Abdallah and Palestine*, by Joseph Nevo (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1996), 3–9, https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230378834_1.

⁸ Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East*; Nevo, "East and West of the Jordan River."

1.2 The Regional Water Scarcity and History of its Treatment

Jordan and Israel share access to both the Red Sea and Dead Sea, and many of their respective territories consist of desert land.⁹ They also rely on the Jordan River, which is a freshwater resource that is insufficient to meet the growing demands of both nations. Several factors exacerbate water scarcity in the region,¹⁰ including desertification driven by global warming; the need for Jordan, Israel, and neighboring countries (Syria and Lebanon) to share the shrinking water supply; and rising demand due to population growth,¹¹ urbanization, and increased agricultural and industrial activities. Consequently, the Middle East is the most water-scarce region in the world,¹² and Jordan is particularly vulnerable.¹³ Fresh water forms only 2.5% of the global water supply. Israel's population has grown from 600,000 citizens upon its establishment to more than 9,842,000 citizens by the end of 2023.¹⁴ Jordan's population grew from 586,200 in 1952 to over 11,384,900 by 2024.¹⁵ Currently, one out of six people on Earth does not have adequate access to safe freshwater. By the middle of the 21st century, up to three-quarters of the world's population had experienced serious water scarcity.¹⁶ By 2050, the water deficit in the Middle East is expected to reach approximately 2 billion cubic meters.¹⁷

As in others, water management in this region is heavily influenced by cultural and political factors. Historically biased water policies have continued to affect the availability, quantity, quality, and cost of water.¹⁸ In 1993, political scientist Miriam

⁹ Eric Abitbol, "Giving the Dead Sea a New Life: Have All Options Been Responsibly Considered?," *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development* 3, no. 1 (September 2006): 94-99, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15423166.2006.774964252571>.

¹⁰ Itzchak E. Kornfeld, "The Middle East: Climate Change, Water Insecurity and Hydro-Diplomacy," in *Global Environmental Law at a Crossroads*, ed. Robert V. Percival, Jolene Lin, and William Piermattei (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2014), <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781783470853.00012>.

¹¹ Jim Yoon et al., "A Coupled Human-Natural System Analysis of Freshwater Security under Climate and Population Change," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 118, no. 14 (April 6, 2021): e2020431118, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2020431118>.

¹² Itzchak E. Kornfeld, "A Water Solution for the Middle East Conflict," *Environmental Law Reporter* 33, no. 10207 (2003), <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1016899>.

¹³ Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure, "Jordan, Israel, and the UAE Sign MoU to Advance Project Prosperity, Targeting COP 28 for Implementation Plan Development," Government, Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure, August 11, 2022, https://www.gov.il/en/pages/press_081122.

¹⁴ Israeli Bureau of Statistics, "Israel Population 1950-2024," *Macrotrends*, 2024, <https://www.macrotrends.net/global-metrics/countries/ISR/israel/population#:~:text=The%20current%20population%20of%20Israel,a%201.51%25%20increase%20from%202022>.

¹⁵ Israeli Bureau of Statistics.

¹⁶ Thomas Bernauer and Anna Kalbhenn, "The Politics of International Freshwater Resources" in: *Potential Global Strategic Catastrophes: Balancing Transnational Responsibilities and Burden-sharing with Sovereignty and Human Dignity*, ed. Nayef R.F. Al-Rodhan (LIT, 2009).

¹⁷ Kornfeld, "The Middle East."

¹⁸ Clive Lipchin, "A Future for the Dead Sea Basin: Water Culture among Israelis, Palestinians and Jordanians," in *Water Resources in the Middle East*, ed. Hillel Shuval and Hassan Dweik (Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer Berlin Heidelberg, 2007), 87-107, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-540-69509-7_9.

Lowi compared the Middle Eastern water dispute with three others around the world: The Euphrates case, involving Turkey, Syria, and Iraq; the Indus Basin rivalry, involving India and Pakistan; and the Nile Basin conflict involving Egypt and Sudan, showing that cooperation between neighboring countries does not always arise from the recognition of shared interests.¹⁹ Water allocation has long been a source of tension in this region.

One of the earliest proposals to allocate water to the Jordan River Basin was made by the Ottoman Turkish Empire in 1913. Recognizing the importance of water management in the region, Britain, during its League of Nations mandated Palestine, granted Palestine Electric Company a 70-year franchise in 1926. Led by the Palestinian Jewish engineer Pinhas Rutenberg, the company was allowed to use water from the Jordan and Yarmouk rivers to generate electricity for both Israel and what is now Jordan, through a facility located at Naharayim, on the border between the two. This arrangement functioned effectively until the end of the British mandate, which ignited regional conflicts that followed.

In the 1950s, Israel initiated infrastructure projects to divert water from the Jordan River to Negev, a desert region in southern Israel. This move sparked hostility from neighboring Arab states, which accused Israel of disrupting the regional status quo. In response, U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower sent a "special water ambassador" to the region to negotiate a compromise, which became known as the Johnston Plan. The plan allocated 38% of Jordan River's water to Israel, with the remaining share going to Arab states, of which Jordan received the largest portion. Although Israel and the Arab League's technical committee accepted the plan in 1955, the Arab League's political committee rejected it, fearing that approval would imply the political recognition of Israel.²⁰

After the 1957 war, both Israel and Jordan began constructing water infrastructure, each claiming to act in accordance with the Johnston Plan while accusing the other of violating it (FAO 2009). Syria, another key player in the regional water conflict, made several attempts between 1964 and 1966 to divert the sources of the Jordan River within its territory in order to block its flow into Israel. The Jordan River has three sources: the Lebanese Hatzbani River, the Banias River originating in Syria, and the Dan River originating in Syria and Israel. A joint effort by Syria,

¹⁹ Miriam R. Lowi, *Water and Power: The Politics of a Scarce Resource in the Jordan River Basin*, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 1993), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511598708>.

²⁰ Moshe Shemesh, "Prelude to the Six-Day War: The Arab-Israeli Struggle Over Water Resources," *Israel Studies* 9, no. 3 (October 2004): 1-45, <https://doi.org/10.2979/ISR.2004.9.3.1>; T. Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Six-Day War," in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, n.d., <https://www.britannica.com/event/Six-Day-War>; Haddadin, "Negotiated Resolution of the Jordan-Israel Water Conflict," *International Negotiation* 5, no. 2 (2000): 263-88, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15718060020848767>.

Lebanon, and Jordan to divert river water away from Israel ultimately contributed to the outbreak of the 1967 war, which ended these diversion attempts.²¹

1.3 The Legal Bases for Bilateral and Regional Cooperation

1.3.1 The 1994 Peace Agreement between Israel and Jordan

The significant economic disparity between Jordan and Israel (Israel's GDP per capita for 2023 was 52,261 \$ while Jordan's GDP per capita was 3,974\$),²² appears to be one reason for the 1994 peace agreement, along with its subsequent accords, which required Israel to supply Jordan's specified quantity of drinking water. The peace agreement had the potential to increase Jordan's water supply by over 25% shortly after signing the agreement.²³ International rules addressing international/transboundary water issues are underlined by the doctrine of equitable utilization as developed in The Helsinki Rules on the Uses of the Waters of International Rivers.²⁴ The interpretation of 'equitable share' of water between the parties changed during the years, according to their agreement.²⁵

Article 6 of the Peace Agreement between Jordan and Israel of 1994,²⁶ outlines both nations' commitment to adhering to the water allocation plan detailed in Annex II. ²⁷ It also acknowledges that "the subject of water can form the basis for the advancement of cooperation" between the two countries. The article explores ways to increase available water resources through "projects of regional and international cooperation" and envisions "trans-boundary water transfers," "development of existing and new water resources," and "mutual assistance in the alleviating of water shortages."

²¹ Shemesh, "Prelude to the Six-Day War."

²² Trading Economics, "Jordan GDP Per Capita PPP" (2024). <https://tradingeconomics.com/jordan/gdp-per-capita-ppp>

²³ Sharif S. Elmusa, "The Jordan-Israel Water Agreement: A Model or an Exception?," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 24, no. 3 (April 1995): 63–73, <https://doi.org/10.1525/jps.1995.24.3.00p0026m>.

²⁴ International Law Association, "The Helsinki Rules on the Uses of the Waters of International Rivers" (n.d.), https://unece.org/fileadmin//DAM/env/water/meetings/legal_board/2010/annexes_groundwater_paper/Annex_II_Helsinki_Rules_ILA.pdf.

²⁵ Samer Talozzi et al., "What Constitutes an Equitable Water Share? A Reassessment of Equitable Apportionment in the Jordan-Israel Water Agreement 25 Years Later," *Water Policy* 21, no. 5 (October 1, 2019): 911–33, <https://doi.org/10.2166/wp.2019.143>.

²⁶ Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Treaty of Peace Between the State of Israel and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, October 26, 1994. <https://www.peaceagreements.org/viewmasterdocument/594>

²⁷ Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Annex II: Water and Related Matters," Government, Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1999, <https://mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/Peace/Guide/Pages/Israel-Jordan%20Peace%20Treaty%20Annex%20II.aspx>.

The agreement specifically addressed desalination in a limited context. Articles 2(d) and III (5) of Annex II entitle Jordan to a quantity of water desalinated from saline springs, which originally flowed into the Sea of Galilee but were diverted by Israel to reduce its salinity. These provisions were included because of Jordan's argument that Israel's diversion of the springs had effectively contaminated the lower Jordan River, making it unusable for Jordan for over 30 years. As a result, it was considered fair for Israel to desalinate water for Jordan's benefit.

Article 19 of the Peace Agreement focuses on energy cooperation, envisioning the interconnection of electricity systems between the two nations. Paragraph (1) specifically highlights the solar energy. This commitment was later elaborated upon in a 1996 agreement (Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1996) that emphasized the "optimal utilization" of energy resources and cost savings while recognizing the geographic proximity of the two countries. Specific provisions addressed the interconnection of electricity grids (Article 1) and cooperation on solar energy both bilaterally and with third parties (Article 2(1)).

The peace agreement has been followed by additional cooperation agreements, such as, the trade and cooperation treaty World Bank (1995),²⁸ a special agreement on the development of Eilat and Akaba 1996,²⁹ and a QIZ (Qualified Industrial Zone) agreement 1998.³⁰

These additional cooperation agreements led to limited but growing collaboration between countries. Apart from the political disagreement regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and domestic drawbacks on both sides, administrative and political failures of the Israeli government in managing mutual connections with Jordan could have contributed to this situation.³¹ In recent years, the success of joint projects has paved the way for further cooperation, as reflected in the substantial growth in trade between the two nations from 2020 to 2022, signaling a shift in their relationship. In 2020, trade between them amounted to a total of 249.6 million \$ (39.4 million \$ export from Israel and 210.2 million \$ import to it). In 2023, the total trade

²⁸ World Bank, "Agreement of Trading and Economic Cooperation between the HKJ and the Government of the State of Israel (SI)," 1995, <https://wits.worldbank.org/GPTAD/PDF/archive/Isreal-Jordon.pdf>; Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Annex II: Water and Related Matters."

²⁹ Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Agreement on Special Arrangements Between Aqaba and Eilat Between the Government of the State of Israel and the Government of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. (1996). https://www.gov.il/he/Departments/dynamiccollectors/mfa-accords?skip=0&Treaty_Name=&Parties=Jordan

³⁰ Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Agreement Irbid Qualified Industrial Zone Between the Government of the State of Israel and the Government of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. (1998). https://www.gov.il/he/Departments/dynamiccollectors/mfa-accords?skip=0&Treaty_Name=&Parties=Jordan

³¹ Zielińska Karolina, "Israel and the Arab States: Between Conflict and Interdependence," OSW COMMENTARY, April 4, 2023, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2023-04-04/israel-and-arab-states-between-conflict-and-interdependence>.

between them amounted to 448.1 million \$ (76.2 million \$ export from Israel and 371.9 million \$ import to it).

1.3.2 The Abraham Accords: Facilitating UAE Participation

The signing of the Abraham Accords in 2020 significantly strengthened UAE-Israel relations. Gulf states, which are situated thousands of kilometers away from the territories in conflict, were never directly involved in hostilities emanating from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. They refrained from official relations with Israel, not to protect their own interests but rather to express identification with the Palestinians. Unofficially, economic and political relations, including informal trade and security connections between Israel and these states, have been limited for many years.³² Among the four countries involved in the accords, Morocco, Bahrain, Sudan, and the UAE, the UAE has emerged as the most active partner in its engagement with Israel.³³

The Treaty of Peace, Diplomatic Relations, and Full Normalization between the United Arab Emirates and the State of Israel, signed on September 15, 2020, outlines various potential areas for economic collaboration. Article 5 specifically mentions innovation, trade, and economic relations, with a focus on energy, environment, and water. Politically, the treaty includes mutual commitment to fostering peace and stability throughout the Middle East (Article 4). This project appears to leverage both the Abraham Accords and the 1994 Israel-Jordan peace agreement as legal frameworks for cooperation.

2.1 The Declaration and Mou Initiating the Project

2.2.1 The Declaration

The project in question has yet to result in formal legal agreements among partners. The Declaration of Intent for the Water-for-Electricity Initiative, which had been secretly negotiated since September 2021 under U.S. sponsorship, was signed in Dubai by Israel, Jordan, and the UAE in November 2021.

The preamble to the declaration outlines the parties' intentions and objectives, including:

³² Moran Zaga, "Were the Abraham Accords a 'Game-Changing' Move? First Year Test," 2021, <https://mitvim.org.il/publication/abraham-accords-as-a-game-changer-a-year-after-moran-zaga-september-2021-hebrew>; Yoel Guzansky, "The United Arab Emirates: Proactive in War and Peace," *INSS Insight*, August 23, 2020, <https://www.inss.org.il/publication/uae-proactive-in-war-and-peace/>; Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, "Israel and the Arab Gulf States: Drivers and Directions of Change," *Baker Institute for Public Policy*, September 19, 2016, <https://www.bakerinstitute.org/research/israel-and-arab-gulf-states-drivers-and-directions-change>.

³³ Emily Sorkin, "The Abraham Accords: The Culmination of a Decades-Long Normalization Process between Israel and the UAE" (Boston University, 2021), <https://hdl.handle.net/2144/42494>; Nellie Munin, "Israel's Trade Alliances Strategy: Enjoying the Best of All Worlds," *International Journal of Law and Public Administration* 4, no. 2 (November 25, 2021): 23, <https://doi.org/10.11114/ijlpa.v4i2.5409>.

1. Building "bridges for collaboration in the Middle East through projects that make accessible renewable energy and abundant and sustainable water supply"
2. Enhancing "the harnessing of renewable energy and sustainable water in the region"
3. Emphasizing the strategic significance of "regional interconnectivity and energy and water security"
4. Achieving these goals through public-private partnerships.

Similar to the 1994 peace agreement, the economic disparity between Israel and Jordan explains why Jordan's pressing water needs are particularly highlighted in the preamble despite both countries facing water scarcity.

The declaration outlines two key components of the project: (i) *Prosperity Green* – a clean energy program in Jordan to supply electricity to Israel. (ii) *Prosperity Blue*: a sustainable water desalination program in Israel to provide desalinated water to Jordan.

The declaration specifies that the output of each facility is exclusively for the other party's needs. It is cautiously worded and outlines only limited commitments, including a review of relevant laws and regulations to determine any necessary adaptations; the examination of practical aspects such as production, transportation, and infrastructure development; and the facilitation of discussions between representatives to improve coordination and consultation. It also addresses the granting of permits and approval required to conduct technical and economic feasibility studies (Article 1).

The declaration identifies potential stakeholders for each party (Article 2), calls for good faith efforts (Article 3), and provides for information exchange (Article 4). Importantly, Article 5 emphasizes the political nature of the declaration, stating that it "is solely the expression of the Parties' intention and does not create or affect any legal rights or obligations under international law."

The parallels between this declaration and the water and electricity provisions in the 1994 Israel-Jordan peace agreement underscore how the project seeks to leverage new, environmentally friendly technologies to realize the vision of that earlier agreement, which also serves as a legal foundation for this cooperation.

2.2 The MOU

The signing of the MOU in November 2022, one year after the Declaration of Intent, signaled progress toward the project's implementation.³⁴ The MOU noted that feasibility studies for both components of the project have been ongoing and thus far indicate "positive potential prospects" for both.

The MOU also provided more specific details regarding the scale of the project. The *Prosperity Green* component (electricity) will involve a 600 MW solar farm with energy storage, while the *Prosperity Blue* component (water) will involve Israel exporting 200 million cubic meters of desalinated water to Jordan annually – 50 million more than was agreed upon in the 1994 peace treaty.³⁵ The cost of constructing a desalination plant is estimated to be \$500 million, with an additional \$50-100 million required for a pipeline to Jordan.³⁶

The MOU was signed during the UN COP27 climate conference in Egypt, in the presence of the U.S. climate envoy John Kerry and the UAE climate envoy and industry minister Sultan al-Jaber. It sets a timeline for the next phase of the project, with a commitment to continue developing plans ahead of COP28, which was scheduled to take place in the UAE in November 2023.³⁷ Similar to the Declaration's signing at the Dubai Expo 2021, the setting of the MOU signing highlights the influential political role played by third parties, such as Egypt, the U.S., the UAE, and the international community, in the project.

Like the Declaration, the MOU emphasizes that it is merely an expression of intent by the parties and does not create any legal rights or obligations under international law. Essentially, this was another political act.³⁸

In public international law, political declarations made by state representatives can sometimes be interpreted as creating legal obligations (e.g., the case of "Legal

³⁴ Danny Zaken, "Israel, Jordan, UAE to Expedite Water-for-Power Project," News, Globes, November 7, 2022, <https://en.globes.co.il/en/article-israel-jordan-uae-to-expedite-water-for-power-project-1001429012>; Danny Zaken, "Israel and Jordan to Speed up Water for Electricity Deal," News, Globes, January 30, 2023, <https://en.globes.co.il/en/article-israel-and-jordan-to-speed-up-water-for-electricity-deal-1001436842>; Zaken.

³⁵ Laith Al Junaidi, "Jordan, Israel and UAE sign MoU to swap solar power for water." *AA Middle East*, November 8, 2022 <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/jordan-israel-uae-sign-mou-to-swap-solar-power-for-water/2732972>

³⁶ Zaken, "Israel and Jordan to Speed up Water for Electricity Deal."

³⁷ Sue Surkes "Israel, "UAE Sign New MOU on Deal to Swap Solar Energy for Desalinated Water," *The Times of Israel*, November 8, 2022, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-jordan-uae-sign-new-mou-on-deal-to-swap-solar-energy-for-desalinated-water/>.

³⁸ Ariel Oseran, "Israel, Jordan, UAE Ink 'water-for-Energy' MOU," News, I24news, November 8, 2022, <https://www.i24news.tv/en/news/israel/diplomacy/1667907954-israel-jordan-uae-sign-water-for-electricity-mou>.

Status of Eastern Greenland" Norway v. Denmark [1933].³⁹ The clear indication in both the Declaration and the MOU that they are political rather than legal in nature is designed to prevent such interpretations. This cautious approach may reflect a genuine need for more time to assess the project's feasibility or political caution, which the latest events prove justified. Nevertheless, progress has been made in this area. In Jordan, land for solar farms has been identified, and in Israel, the government prioritizes the project at the end of 2022, assigning leadership to the National Security Council, the Minister for Strategic Affairs and Public Diplomacy, and the Ministry of National Infrastructure.⁴⁰

The Declaration and MOU could be seen as political trial balloons, allowing the parties to gauge domestic political reactions and gradually prepare public opinion before committing it legally. The contrast between the leaders' political will to move forward with the project and their reluctance to make a binding legal commitment may be explained by the factors discussed in the following chapter.

3.1 The Logic Underlying the Project

This section provides political explanations for the implications of the project and its manner of initiation.

3.1.1 Dominant Power

Mirumachi and Allan explored the role of power, particularly asymmetric power dynamics, in water disputes, noting that disparities in power can increase the weaker party's suspicion that the stronger party may exploit its advantage.⁴¹ Lowi observed that states in dominant positions often see no need to cooperate to resolve disputes when the status quo benefits them.⁴² In peacebuilding contexts, these disparities can raise concerns regarding the unequal distribution of benefits.⁴³

To address these challenges, Israel and Jordan in previous water agreements moved away from the rigid language of international water law. Instead, they adopted a more flexible, interest-based legal discourse, achieving a compromise that

³⁹ Permanent Court of International Justice. "Legal Status of Eastern Greenland" (Norway v. Denmark), [1933] P.C.I.J. Ser. A/B, No. 53, 71. <https://ijl.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Excerpts-from-Eastern-Greenland-Case-PCIJ-1933.pdf>

⁴⁰ Zaken, "Israel, Jordan, UAE to Expedite Water-for-Power Project"; Zaken, "Israel and Jordan to Speed up Water for Electricity Deal."

⁴¹ Naho Mirumachi and John Antony Allan, "Revisiting Transboundary Water Governance: Power, Conflict Cooperation and the Political Economy," vol. 1215, 2007.

⁴² Lowi, *Water and Power*.

⁴³ Galia Press-Barnathan, "The Neglected Dimension of Commercial Liberalism: Economic Cooperation and Transition to Peace," *Journal of Peace Research* 43, no. 3 (May 2006): 261-78, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343306063931>.

incorporated aspects of international law while also accommodating the needs of the dominant riparian party.⁴⁴

The Declaration of Intent and the MOU reflect similar arrangements. They reaffirm Israel's commitment to supply water to Jordan, even though this commitment—enshrined in their peace agreement and upheld over the years—has not fully alleviated Jordanian concerns.⁴⁵

3.1.2 *Soft Power*

Zeitoun et al. (2011)⁴⁶ emphasized the significant role that soft power can play in shaping transboundary water disputes, pointing out that in such conflicts, the "first among equals" holds a greater capacity to leverage soft power to influence the outcome.

The water-for-electricity agreement incorporates elements of soft power but with a different aim:

1. In the bilateral sphere, the deal addressed Jordan's concern that Israel, as an economically stronger party, might exert soft power pressure. To counterbalance this, the project makes Israel dependent, to a certain extent, on the electricity supplied by Jordan. Furthermore, the agreement was initiated through soft political instruments rather than legal frameworks.
2. In the global sphere, the deal was shaped by external soft power pressure from a stronger global actor: the United States. It was also supported by an economic incentive for Jordan, provided by the UAE in the form of job-creating investments and a broader international forum to which both parties voluntarily report, acting as a soft power safeguard against potential domestic resistance.

3.1.3 *Does This strengthen the Opponent's vision?*

Scholars suggest that Israel's reliance on the West Bank's subterranean water supply, along with the importance of water to the Zionist vision—considered crucial to the economic sustainability of the Jewish state and its agricultural needs—has hindered the prospect of resolving regional water disputes.⁴⁷ However, as Israel's dependence

⁴⁴ Itay Fischhendler, Aaron T. Wolf, and Gabriel E. Eckstein, "The Role of Creative Language in Addressing Political Asymmetries: The Israeli-Arab Water Agreements," in *Managing Water in the 21st Century: Challenges and Opportunities - Proceedings of the 8th Rosenberg International Forum on Water Policy*, 2016, 69–94.

⁴⁵ Šā' ūl Miš'al, Ranan D. Kuperman, and David Boas, *Investment in Peace: The Politics of Economic Cooperation between Israel, Jordan, and the Palestinian Authority*, 1. publ (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2001).

⁴⁶ Mark Zeitoun, Naho Mirumachi, and Jeroen Warner, "Transboundary Water Interaction II: The Influence of 'Soft' Power." *International Environmental Agreements: Politics, Law and Economics* 11, no. 2 (2011): 159-178.

⁴⁷ Lowi, *Water and Power*; Lipchin, "A Future for the Dead Sea Basin."

on these natural freshwater sources diminishes with the rise of artificial water desalination, this critical factor in Arab countries' considerations is gradually losing significance.

3.1.4 Dispute and Conflict

Mwagiru et al. differentiated between disputes and conflicts. In disputes, parties disagree over specific, tangible interests, such as water needs, which are quantifiable and therefore negotiable.⁴⁸ Conflicts, on the other hand, involve deeper value-based issues, such as the perception of rights that are non-negotiable, such as the right to land in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which forms a broader context for the regional water dispute. Consequently, disputes are generally more solvable than conflicts are.⁴⁹

Recognizing this distinction, the project reflects the parties' decision to prioritize a practical solution to their respective water scarcities, rather than forfeiting these pragmatic benefits to maintain declarative opposition in the Israeli-Palestinian political conflict.

As an added benefit, the project also allows both parties to meet their carbon reduction commitments, thereby contributing to regional environmental improvements.⁵⁰

Despite these advantages, progress was slow as both parties' leaders had to navigate cautious public opinion. Many on both sides, unaware of the distinction between conflict and dispute, tended to expect a unified solution. Thus, Jordanian citizens protested against the current project, and MPs walked out of a session on it, contending that it continued to legitimize the Israeli illegitimate occupation of the Palestinian territories.⁵¹

3.1.5 Conflict (or dispute) and Cooperation Co-Existence

Mirumachi argued that conflict and cooperation can coexist in transboundary water interactions.⁵² This project aligns with that view, promoting limited cooperation on

⁴⁸ Makumi M. Mwagiru, Macharia Munene, and Njeri Karuru, *Understanding Conflict and Its Management* (Nairobi: Centre for Conflict Research, 1998).

⁴⁹ Mohamed Shatanawi et al., "Conceptual Frame of Water Conflicts in the Mediterranean," n.d., <https://www.idaea.csic.es/meliaproject/node/79>.

⁵⁰ Serena Bilanceri, "Water for Energy: A Controversial Deal in a Thirsty Region," Organization, Friedrich Naumann Foundation, April 4, 2022, <https://www.freiheit.org/middle-east-and-north-africa/water-energy-controversial-deal-thirsty-region>.

⁵¹ Bilanceri; Memo, "Israel, Jordan, UAE renew 'energy for water' agreement at COP27," November 8, 2022 <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20221108-israel-jordan-uae-renew-energy-for-water-agreement-at-cop27/>.

⁵² Naho Mirumachi, *The Transboundary Waters Interaction NexuS (TWINS) Framework to Understand Coexisting Conflict and Cooperation*. (Routledge, 2015).

mutually beneficial issues without tying it to a broader resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Politically, these two major regional shifts provided momentum for this arrangement. First, the 2020 Abraham Accords altered the political landscape by increasing Israel's legitimacy in the Arab world. These agreements not only encouraged Israel to strengthen ties with its Middle Eastern neighbors but also made substantial economic contributions to the participating countries, reshaping the region's political balance of power.⁵³

Second, Israel's discovery of natural gas in the Mediterranean Sea has bolstered its political and economic standing.⁵⁴ Together, these developments reduced the centrality of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in regional politics and paved the way for a more pragmatic approach to cooperation.

These shifts also spurred new regional collaborations, particularly with Abraham Accords' partners. Jordan, for its part, seemed inclined to participate in these ventures by activating relevant provisions in its agreements with Israel, rather than opting to remain on the sidelines. Article 19 of Israel-Jordan's peace treaty and Article 1 of the agreement for its implementation specifically foresee mutual collaboration between the parties regarding oil and gas exploration and utilization. Jordan's participation in a regional gas pipeline project, through which gas is transferred from the Israeli gas reservoir Leviathan in the Mediterranean Sea to Egypt and the Middle East gas forum, is an indication of this pragmatic approach.⁵⁵

3.1.6 The Potential Effect of Current and Future Political Scenarios

The current conflict raises a critical question: can the considerations outlined above withstand present and future political dynamics?

Several pessimistic scenarios could undermine initiatives, such as the one discussed, potentially abandoning the current pragmatic approach of addressing 'disputes' before 'conflicts.' For instance, regional instability might lead to a shift in the Jordanian regime, replacing it with one that represents Jordan's Palestinian population more intensively. Such a regime could disregard the peace agreement with Israel and dismiss peaceful initiatives on an ideological basis. This change could immediately jeopardize Jordan's access to water supplies from Israel under existing agreements, threatening the project's viability in the short term. In the medium and

⁵³ Zaga, "Were the Abraham Accords a 'Game-Changing' Move? First Year Test"; Nellie Munin, "A New Horizon? Assessing the Abraham Accords' Economic and Political Effect on Israel," *Athens Journal of Mediterranean Studies* 9, no. 1 (December 19, 2022): 11-24, <https://doi.org/10.30958/ajms.9-1-1>.

⁵⁴ Munin, "Israel's Trade Alliances Strategy."

⁵⁵ Anat Roe, "Gas Supply Agreement to Egypt Through Jordan Enters Into Force. Livyatan Will Flow 0.5 BCM by the End of the Year," *Calcalist February 26* (2022).

long term, the project could become contingent on resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Although extreme, this scenario is not implausible, and it would be worth considering how such a regime might need to account for the stances of influential global actors, such as the U.S. and the UAE, to maintain stability.

Additionally, the rise of Iran and its allies as regional powers with a hostile agenda could drastically alter the landscape, hindering any peaceful initiatives (or near-future hopes for them), including the project in question.

Another scenario could involve a shift in U.S. or UAE policy regarding the Middle East. Such a change could also destabilize projects like the one discussed, which depend heavily on the support of influential players. However, this shift is unlikely in the present study. Both the U.S. and the UAE were among the project's initiators, aligning it with their broader regional vision and reinforcing their political influence. These strategic interests have grown stronger in a world divided along two geopolitical axes. This vision is unlikely to change, even following upcoming U.S. elections, as both the current administration and its predecessor (now aiming for re-election) have shown consistent support.

In the Israeli-Jordanian political context, the failure of the discussed project may not be significant in isolation. However, it could symbolize a broader breakdown in efforts to foster peaceful coexistence and cooperation for regional welfare, potentially risking a reversion to a "cold peace" or even a relapse into open conflict.

Hitherto, however, despite recent suspensions, none of the three parties involved has been formally withdrawn from the project. Amid the current conflict, they appear united by a shared interest in countering the Iranian regional threat. Overcoming this threat could strengthen regional cooperation and pave the way for a community of moderate nations to commit peaceful coexistence. Such a scenario would bolster support for projects, similar to that under discussion.

3.2 The Psychological Explanation

This section examines the development of Israel-Jordan relations reflected by the project, in light of psychological explanations for trust-building.

The trust literature reflects two key traditions in trust research.⁵⁶

1. The behavioral tradition views trust as a rational-choice behavior, exemplified by cooperative actions in strategic situations such as game theory scenarios.

⁵⁶ Roderick M. Kramer, "TRUST AND DISTRUST IN ORGANIZATIONS: Emerging Perspectives, Enduring Questions," *Annual Review of Psychology* 50, no. 1 (February 1999): 569-98, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.50.1.569>.

2. The psychological tradition seeks to understand the intrapersonal dimensions of trust, including expectations, intentions, emotions, and individual dispositions.

Both approaches offer insights into how mistrust can evolve into trust, which may help to explain the processes underlying the current project.

In *behavioral* tradition, the essence of trust is the decision to cooperate.⁵⁷ Even parties with a history of distrust can rebuild trust over time, influenced by consistent cooperative behavior.⁵⁸

Nevertheless, such an analysis requires a cautious approach, considering other possible reasons for fluctuations in cooperation, such as regional political fluctuations in the case of Israel and Jordan, such as the current ones, emanating from the ongoing war in the region.⁵⁹

From this perspective, trust is driven by rational considerations; for example, Jordan's choice to support Israel's water development initiatives strategically over the years, while other Arab nations have opposed them, can be viewed as a rational decision aimed at securing benefits.⁶⁰

The *psychological* tradition, on the other hand, focuses on the cognitive processes that underpin trust. Distrust, according to this approach, is defined as a "lack of confidence in the other, a concern that the other may act to harm one, that he does not care about one's welfare or intends to act harmfully, or is hostile."⁶¹ In the post-1994 Jordan-Israel peace agreement literature, some scholars have voiced concerns that Israel might interpret the ambiguous aspects of the agreement to its advantage.⁶² In 1995, further apprehensions were raised that "Israel's goal is to segment the [Jordan-N.M.] River and conclude bilateral treaties with each of the Arab riparian's, which would place it at the hub of the river management system, instead

⁵⁷ Roy J. Lewicki, Edward C. Tomlinson, and Nicole Gillespie, "Models of Interpersonal Trust Development: Theoretical Approaches, Empirical Evidence, and Future Directions," *Journal of Management* 32, no. 6 (December 2006): 991-1022, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206306294405>.

⁵⁸ Lewicki, Tomlinson, and Gillespie.

⁵⁹ Herbert W. Kee and Robert E. Knox, "Conceptual and Methodological Considerations in the Study of Trust and Suspicion," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 14, no. 3 (September 1970): 357-66, <https://doi.org/10.1177/002200277001400307>.

⁶⁰ Anders Jägerskog, "Why States Co-Operate over Shared Water: The Water Negotiations in the Jordan River Basin," in *Water Resources in the Middle East*, ed. Hillel Shuval and Hassan Dweik (Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer Berlin Heidelberg, 2007), 195-202, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-540-69509-7_19.

⁶¹ Trudy Govier, "Is It a Jungle Out There? Trust, Distrust and the Construction of Social Reality," *Dialogue* 33, no. 2 (1994): 237-52, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0012217300010519>. Gina Ann Garcia, *Becoming Hispanic-Serving Institutions: Opportunities for Colleges and Universities* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019).

⁶² Elmusa, "The Jordan-Israel Water Agreement."

of being one of the parties in an integrated management system.”⁶³ Similar mutual suspicions continue to criticize the current water-for-electricity project.

McAllister identified two essential components of trust-building: the willingness to be vulnerable to another party's actions and positive expectations about the party's intentions, motivations, and behavior despite uncertainty.⁶⁴ Positive experiences, or trust "rewards," can enhance trust⁶⁵, and when these experiences benefit a broader population, public support for trust-building measures may increase.⁶⁶ If successful, the water-for-electricity project could serve as a positive and trust-enhancing experience with far-reaching effects.

The *two-dimensional* approach to trust posits that relationships are inherently complex, with trust and distrust often coexisting. This perspective suggests that "trust allows the possibility of undesirable behavior by the other to be removed from consideration.”⁶⁷ For instance, during the 1960s and the 1970s, despite the formal state of war, Israeli and Jordanian leaders secretly and tactically followed Johnston's plan.⁶⁸ Similarly, during the severe regional drought of 1998/99, the Joint Water Committee, formed by the 1994 peace agreement, negotiated a temporary arrangement adjusting water allocations based on availability, despite the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict.⁶⁹

The proposed water-for-electricity project fosters interdependence between the parties, which could reduce mutual suspicion and ease concerns, making it easier for both sides to "accept vulnerability to the actions of the other party." The prospect of expanding the supply of freshwater and electricity signals "positive expectations" from all stakeholders. In such a scenario, the interests of the weaker state can align with those of the stronger state, particularly when new opportunities and political conditions emerge to further these interests—a phenomenon referred to as the "influence effect.”⁷⁰

⁶³ Elmusa; Hilal Khashan, "Partner or Pariah? Attitudes Toward Israel in Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan," *Policy Paper*, no. 41 (April 1, 1996), <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/partner-or-pariah-attitudes-toward-israel-syria-lebanon-and-jordan>; Elmusa, "The Jordan-Israel Water Agreement."

⁶⁴ D. J. McAllister, "AFFECT- AND COGNITION-BASED TRUST AS FOUNDATIONS FOR INTERPERSONAL COOPERATION IN ORGANIZATIONS.," *Academy of Management Journal* 38, no. 1 (February 1, 1995): 24-59, <https://doi.org/10.2307/256727>.

⁶⁵ Gareth R. Jones and Jennifer M. George, "The Experience and Evolution of Trust: Implications for Cooperation and Teamwork," *The Academy of Management Review* 23, no. 3 (July 1998): 531, <https://doi.org/10.2307/259293>.

⁶⁶ Press-Barnathan, "The Neglected Dimension of Commercial Liberalism."

⁶⁷ Lewicki, Tomlinson, and Gillespie, "Models of Interpersonal Trust Development."

⁶⁸ Geoffrey Borthwick, "Confirmation Bias and Related Errors," January 1, 2000, <https://doi.org/10.15760/etd.128>.

⁶⁹ Olivia O. Green and Aaron T. Wolf, "Institutional Resilience and Climate Variability in International Water Treaties: The Jordan River Basin as 'Proof-of-Concept'," *Hydrological Sciences Journal* 56, no. 4, 2012: 703-710.

⁷⁰ Press-Barnathan, "The Neglected Dimension of Commercial Liberalism."

The *transformational* approach to trust suggests that trust evolves over time and in response to the relationship dynamics.⁷¹ Three distinct types of trust are commonly recognized.

1. Deterrence-based trust: This form of trust is rooted in whether the other party consistently keeps its words. Initially, trust starts at a negative level, and both parties prioritize safeguarding their vulnerabilities.⁷² Deterrence-based trust can be strengthened through repeated interactions, multifaceted engagements, and the threat of reputational damage for breaking trust.⁷³ Williamson later termed this "calculated-based trust" (CBT), highlighting its reliance on both the vulnerability and mutual benefits derived from transactions.⁷⁴
2. Knowledge-based trust (KBT): This type of trust stems from knowing the other party well enough to predict their behavior. This is reinforced by regular communication, "courtship," and repeated interactions across various domains.
3. Identification-based trust (IBT): This highest level of trust occurs when one party identifies with the other, internalizing its preferences. This often emerges from a blend of deterrence-based and knowledge-based trust. IBT is strengthened when both parties share common goals and values and their collaboration becomes more frequent and intense.

Parties may transition between the different phases of trust as their relationships evolve. A shift from calculated-based trust (CBT) to knowledge-based trust (KBT) indicates a shift away from focusing on differences in emphasizing shared interests. By contrast, moving from KBT to identification-based trust (IBT) signals a desire to build a common identity while maintaining each party's distinctiveness.⁷⁵ Applied to the water-for-electricity deal, this shift suggests that Israel-Jordan relations have progressed from CBT to KBT, aiming to highlight communalities by fostering repeated, multifaceted cooperation through initiatives, such as the discussed project.

Mayer et al. argue that the outcomes of trust-based actions provide feedback, which can reinforce or alter perceptions of the other party's trustworthiness, creating a feedback loop that evolves over time.⁷⁶ In the Israel-Jordan context, the progression from informal cooperation to a formal, albeit "cold" peace – gradually warming

⁷¹ Lewicki, Tomlinson, and Gillespie, "Models of Interpersonal Trust Development."

⁷² Debra L. Shapiro, Blair H. Sheppard, and Lisa Cheraskin, "Business on a Handshake," *Negotiation Journal* 8, no. 4 (October 1992): 365–77, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1571-9979.1992.tb00679.x>.

⁷³ Lewicki, Tomlinson, and Gillespie, "Models of Interpersonal Trust Development."

⁷⁴ Oliver E. Williamson, "The Economics of Organization: The Transaction Cost Approach," *American Journal of Sociology* 87, no. 3 (November 1981): 548–77, <https://doi.org/10.1086/227496>.

⁷⁵ Lewicki, Tomlinson, and Gillespie, "Models of Interpersonal Trust Development."

⁷⁶ Roger C. Mayer, James H. Davis, and F. David Schoorman, "An Integrative Model of Organizational Trust," *The Academy of Management Review* 20, no. 3 (July 1995): 709, <https://doi.org/10.2307/258792>.

through specific, successful collaborations—reflects this feedback loop. Although domestic political resistance and external fluctuations may occasionally cause setbacks, such interactions ultimately enhance trust. If this water-for-electricity project succeeds, it could further strengthen cooperation between the two nations.

While psychological approaches to trust-building typically focus on individual relationships, interstate relations, though seemingly impersonal, are still driven by individuals. Political decisions, such as those involving water allocation in the 1994 Israel-Jordan peace treaty, are made by people, not abstract entities.⁷⁷ In the current project, regular meetings between teams from both countries during the year between the declaration and signing of the memorandum of understanding (MOU) fostered personal trust among negotiators, which in turn influenced the project's development.⁷⁸

Rousseau et al. emphasized the role of institution-based trust, where broad institutional support helps build trust within organizations. While this project is not managed under the auspices of a formal organization, it benefits from a similar structure: the involvement of external factors, such as the U.S. and UAE, who are perceived as neutral or objective brokers.⁷⁹ Additionally, the global community's oversight, with both parties reporting progress, provides an institutional framework that supports trust-building.

In the current unstable regional environment, trust among neighboring countries is essential to counter the common Iranian threat. Past and ongoing bilateral and regional projects such as the one discussed may have contributed to the establishment of this trust. Ongoing cooperation between the parties to address this challenge offers hope for the continuation and strengthening of this collaborative spirit and for the potential advancement of the discussed project once the threat is neutralized.

3.3 The Economic Explanation

This section analyzes the Israel-Jordan water-for-electricity project through the lens of economic and trade dynamics, particularly in relation to trust building, and explores how these factors intersect with political considerations.

The literature on trade conflict debate presents two competing perspectives: liberals argue for a strong link between trade and peace, suggesting that economic

⁷⁷ Matthew Weiss, "The Definition of the Situation and Its Impact on Israeli-Jordanian Water Relations," in *Western Political Science Association 2010 Annual Meeting Paper*, n.d., <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1582782>.

⁷⁸ TRTWorld, "Jordan Sign MOU to Move Ahead with Water-for-Energy Deal," November 8, 2022.

⁷⁹ Denise M. Rousseau et al., "Introduction to Special Topic Forum: Not so Different after All: A Cross-Discipline View of Trust," *The Academy of Management Review* 23, no. 3 (1998): 393-404, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/259285>.

interdependence promotes peaceful relations, whereas realists contend that trade alone cannot bring about peace without first addressing political and security issues.⁸⁰ The Israel-Jordan relationship illustrates both views. The formalization of the 1994 peace treaty, followed by a prolonged "cold peace," aligns with the realist approach, whereas the significant growth in trade between the two nations in recent years supports the liberal view.

In peacebuilding, trade is rarely viewed as isolated from political considerations. Both quantitative and qualitative analyses of the role of trade in peace emphasize the importance of mutual economic dependence. Such interdependence is seen as a deterrent to hostility during times of crisis, but beyond this "negative" outcome, it can also have a positive constructive impact by deepening peace.⁸¹ Economic interdependence, particularly when it benefits broad sectors of the population, may help upgrade relations from a "cold peace" toward "normal" or even "warm" peace, where relations are more stable and cooperative.⁸²

The water-for-electricity project exemplifies this as it promises to increase the availability of freshwater and electricity, benefiting large segments of both populations. This meets the key criterion that peacebuilding efforts should involve a broad community, not just elite groups, for sustainability. This conclusion emanates from an analysis of the conflicts between Israel and Egypt, Japan, the Philippines, and Indonesia.⁸³

However, challenges remain, especially regarding the domestic balance of winners and losers in this process. Certain groups may benefit from the continuation of conflicts. For example, Israel's national electricity company, a powerful monopoly with significant political influence, has historically resisted efforts to introduce competition into its electricity sector. Overcoming such vested interests is crucial to project success.

The current conflict poses a significant regional challenge to the fragile balance between economic cooperation and trust-building. In Jordan, longstanding political ideologies shaped by decades of conflict – particularly among the Palestinian-origin population (which comprises 2-3 million of the country's 11 million citizens) – could heighten resistance to collaboration. Similar fears and suspicions are also present among Israelis, creating a substantial obstacle for leaders on both sides because the

⁸⁰ Press-Barnathan, "The Neglected Dimension of Commercial Liberalism."

⁸¹ Press-Barnathan.

⁸² Benjamin Miller, "When and How Regions Become Peaceful: Potential Theoretical Pathways to Peace1," *International Studies Review* 7, no. 2 (June 2005): 229–67, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2486.2005.00482.x>.

⁸³ Press-Barnathan

importance of popular and grassroots support for the success of such initiatives is crucial.⁸⁴

To address these challenges, leaders should remain hopeful and adopt an optimistic outlook to convey this vision to the public. They can emphasize the importance of regional economic collaboration, especially in light of shared external threats, while highlighting tangible project benefits, such as job creation, infrastructure improvements, and access to essential resources, such as water and energy. Leaders could also reassure the public by detailing safeguards in place to protect national interests and explaining how these projects align with security priorities. Engaging civil society and business leaders as advocates may further strengthen public support and foster a foundation for trust.

Third-party economic involvement plays a key role in facilitating trade and cooperation among former adversaries. However, the functions of these third parties vary between the different phases of peacebuilding. During the peace treaty conclusion phase, third parties, like the United States in the case of the Israel-Jordan peace agreement, offer incentives to encourage rivals to sign peace agreements. In the implementation phase, their role shifted to providing ongoing political and financial support.⁸⁵ In the case of the water-for-electricity project, the U.S. offers political backing, while the UAE supplies financial investment, ensuring project viability.

Any shift in U.S. or UAE policy could have a decisively negative impact on the project. While a policy change for political reasons appears unlikely, as discussed, regional instability can still deter investors on economic grounds. However, in the context of the Abraham Accords, UAE investors appear to be supported by the UAE government. This governmental backing may mitigate investment risks and strengthen confidence in a project's stability.

Changes in global energy policy could pose another risk to the project. However, from a pragmatic standpoint, this initiative aligns with the global push for green energy, which likely garners support from international forums. Consequently, the risk of adverse effects from shifting energy policies was minimal.

On the Israeli side, the significant deficit caused by the war could lead to short-to medium-term efforts to deprioritize the project. However, it is hoped that the recognition of the project's regional political importance will counteract such pressures.

⁸⁴ Glen Segell, "Revisiting Nasser Style Pan-Arabism and Pan-Africanism Prompted by the Abraham Accords," *Insight on Africa* 14, no. 1 (January 2022): 24-39, <https://doi.org/10.1177/09750878211048161>.

⁸⁵ Press-Barnathan, "The Neglected Dimension of Commercial Liberalism."

While concerns about the deepening interdependence between Israel and Jordan are valid, the limited scope and reversibility of the project should mitigate these fears (as well as financial concerns). Both parties retain alternatives, making the risk of enhanced interdependence manageable. This perspective concerns potential dangers while acknowledging the broader benefits of economic cooperation in strengthening peace.

Unfortunately, the suspension of the project due to the current war could risk its long-term feasibility. Jordan's initiative to establish its own desalination facility in Aqaba, anticipated to be operational by 2026, could lessen its incentive to participate in the mutual project, since this new facility is projected to meet Jordan's water needs for the next two centuries.

CONCLUSION

In 2006, Press-Barnathan noted regarding the relations between Israel, Jordan, and Egypt: "if the goal is to advance peace, then the pure economic logic of comparative advantage has to be ignored at times." Indeed, the project under examination is not driven solely by economic rationale but aligns with broader strategies recommended for trust-building initiatives. Beyond its immediate benefits, the project holds the potential for broader regional impacts.

Similar to the 1994 Israel-Jordan water agreement, this project does not aim to solve the region's overall water scarcity issues, which also involve Syria, Lebanon, and Palestinians. However, if successful, it could serve as a model for cooperation that other regional players and sectors can replicate. The cumulative effect of similar projects could gradually reshape regional dynamics, benefiting all involved, particularly with enhanced coordination and collaboration. Broader adoption of this model, which reduces reliance on scarce natural water resources, could pave the way for a comprehensive approach to managing the Jordan River Basin, an area with inevitable ecological consequences.

Advancements in desalination and solar energy technologies, coupled with cost reduction, have increased the feasibility of such cooperation. These innovations could enable more efficient water production and energy sharing and further promote regional collaboration. However, the recent war that began on October 7, 2023, between Israel and some of its neighbors, demonstrated the fragility of peace-enhancing projects. Although Jordan is not directly involved in the conflict, the war has led to the suspension of this project, underscoring the dependence of such trust-building initiatives on broader national and international political stability. Even promising peace-building efforts can be easily disrupted by political tensions, which may override the genuine trust developed between parties.

It is hoped that a swift resolution to the current conflict will enable the resumption of this project and contribute to renewed normalization and peace-building efforts in the region. If revived, it could become a cornerstone for future regional cooperation, stabilizing and building trust among moderate actors across the Middle East as part of a broader, new vision for the region.

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