

Water as a Weapon: From Historical Prohibition to Zionist Practice

Water, the most fundamental necessity for life, has been weaponized throughout history - used to starve, sicken, displace, and destroy civilian populations. International law, developed through centuries of war and reflection, has explicitly outlawed the poisoning, destruction, or denial of access to water sources. Yet in the modern era, we find a state - **Israel** - that has repeatedly violated these norms, both historically and systematically, in its colonization and occupation of Palestinian land. From biological warfare in 1948 to infrastructural sabotage in the West Bank and siege tactics in Gaza, the use of water as a weapon remains a consistent feature of Zionist policy.

This essay traces the history of water weaponization, its prohibition under international law, and the evolution of Israeli tactics from outright poisoning to structural domination. It also explores how the failure of early Jewish revenge plots in postwar Europe helped catalyze a redirection of violence - culminating in the long and ongoing assault on Palestinian life through the control and destruction of water.

Weaponizing Water: A Historical Overview

The deliberate poisoning of water sources has long been condemned as a heinous act of war. Ancient and medieval examples abound, from besieging armies contaminating wells with corpses to the use of natural toxins. As the laws of war evolved, such acts became legally and morally intolerable.

- The **Hague Convention IV (1907)** prohibits the use of poison or poisoned weapons (Art. 23(a)).
- The **Geneva Protocol (1925)** bans chemical and biological weapons, including in water.
- The **Biological Weapons Convention (1972)** and **Chemical Weapons Convention (1993)** reaffirm these prohibitions.
- The **Rome Statute of the ICC (1998)** defines the use of poisoned water as a war crime under Article 8(2)(b)(xvii).

By the 20th century, such acts had become **customary international law**, binding on all states and actors. Yet these norms were quickly violated during the establishment of the Zionist state in Palestine.

Operation “Cast Thy Bread” and Zionist Water Poisoning (1948)

In 1948, during the Nakba (the forced displacement of over 750,000 Palestinians), Israeli militias and scientific units carried out deliberate biological warfare operations against Palestinian civilians. One of the clearest examples of this was the poisoning of water supplies with **typhoid bacteria**:

- **Acre (May 1948)**: Zionist forces contaminated the municipal water supply with typhoid, causing mass illness. The Red Cross intervened. This was the first known use of bacteriological weapons by Zionist forces and was coordinated by **Unit 131** of the Haganah.
- **Gaza (June 1948)**: A similar plan was foiled by Egyptian authorities. Zionist operatives carrying biological agents were arrested before deployment.
- **Villages like Biddu, Beit Surik, and 'Ayn Karim** saw their wells or reservoirs contaminated or destroyed, causing illness and displacement.
- **Ein al-Zeitun and multiple villages in the Galilee** had their wells permanently sabotaged, often in conjunction with massacres or mass expulsions.

These operations violated multiple provisions of the **Hague Regulations**, even in effect at the time, and fit within the doctrine of **Plan Dalet** - a broader strategy for depopulation and deterrence.

From Poisoning Germany to Poisoning Palestine: A Shift in Target, A Birth of Impunity

In 1945, the **Nakam group** - a network of Holocaust survivors committed to vengeance - plotted to poison the **water supply** in German cities such as Nuremberg and Munich. They infiltrated municipal water systems and obtained access maps, intending to kill millions using arsenic. But the plot failed when British authorities intercepted their leader and the poison was dumped into the sea.

Unable to reach or punish the Germans - geographically distant and politically protected - the group's rage did not dissipate. It was **redirected**. A far more accessible and unprotected target was nearby: the **Palestinian people**. These were the same people who, during the Holocaust and the years leading up to it, had in many cases **offered refuge to Jews** when no Western state - including the U.S. and the U.K. - would accept them, as exemplified by the **Evian Conference** of 1938.

Just three years later, Zionist forces would poison Palestinian wells - not in revenge for the Holocaust, but as a tool of colonization and displacement. To justify this, they constructed a lie: that **Palestinians, not Germans, were responsible for the Holocaust**.

The most repeated version of this lie claims that **the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin al-Husseini**, "incited" or co-planned the Holocaust with Hitler. This claim collapses under scrutiny of the historical timeline but remains **a staple of Israeli propaganda**. Even today, hasbara accounts and Israeli politicians continue to repeat this distortion, calling Palestine supporters "Islam-Nazi" or "Palinazis" - a narrative inversion meant to erase German guilt and justify Zionist violence against Palestinians.

Modern Tactics: Settler Violence and Structural Control

While biological attacks have ceased, the weaponization of water has continued in more insidious forms - particularly in the West Bank, where the Israeli occupation regime has designed an elaborate system of **structural deprivation**:

- **Settler Vandalism**: Settlers routinely **bathe in communal cisterns**, smash irrigation pipes, shoot rooftop water tanks, and block access to springs.
- In **July 2025**, settlers diverted water meant for over 30 Palestinian villages to fill a **private swimming pool** in a nearby settlement.
- **Cistern sabotage** includes filling wells with **rocks, concrete, or trash**, rendering them useless.

This settler violence is **enabled by state policies**, particularly those rooted in **Military Order 158 (1967)**, which **requires Palestinians to obtain permits for any new water installation**, including **rainwater collection**. Permits are almost never granted.

The Mekorot Regime: Institutionalized Apartheid

Israel's national water company, **Mekorot**, oversees a system in which:

- **52%** of extracted water goes to Israel.
- **32%** to illegal settlements.
- **Only 16%** remains for Palestinians, who number in the millions.

Meanwhile, Palestinians in the West Bank receive as little as **20–50 liters per day**, far below the **WHO's minimum** of 100 liters. Settlements enjoy irrigated farms and swimming pools. This is not scarcity - it is supremacy.

In **Area C**, over-extraction by Israel of the **Mountain Aquifer** has caused Palestinian wells to dry up or become saline. In places like **Bardala** and **Al-Auja**, agriculture is collapsing. The land itself is being killed. This is **ecocide**.

Criminalizing the Sky: Rainwater as Contraband

Even the sky is not free. Under **Military Order 158**, rainwater collection is criminalized. Cisterns built without permits are:

- **Demolished** by Israeli forces.
- **Confiscated** as "illegal infrastructure".
- **Punished** by water cutoffs (e.g., a village in 2017 lost its entire water supply for five days).

These practices violate the **Fourth Geneva Convention**, **Hague Regulations (1907)**, and the **human right to water** under the **ICESCR**. Israelis consume at least **four times** as much water as Palestinians.

Gaza: Siege as Environmental and Biological Warfare

In Gaza, water has become not just a commodity - but a weapon of **siege**. Since 2007, Israel has blocked or bombed critical infrastructure:

- **Desalination plants** destroyed.
- **Sewage treatment facilities** targeted.
- **Fuel for water pumps** denied.

As of 2025:

- **Over 97%** of Gaza's water is undrinkable.
- Children suffer from **chronic waterborne illnesses**.
- Since **March 2, 2025**, Gaza has entered **IPC Phase 5 famine**, with weakened immune systems making even minor cases of **enteritis** potentially fatal.

When images of **emaciated Palestinian children** circulate online, Israeli hasbara accounts dismiss them as victims of "genetic diseases." The same claim was once made by Nazis about victims like **Anne Frank**, who died not in a gas chamber, but of **typhus**, a **water-borne illness** in Bergen-Belsen. The echoes are chilling.

Conclusion: Poisoning Water, Poisoning Memory

Water has always been a weapon. But in the Zionist project, it has become a doctrine - a means of removal, punishment, and domination. From 1948 to the present, wells have been poisoned, aquifers plundered, and thirst criminalized. In Gaza, children die for lack of clean water. In the West Bank, entire communities are forced to abandon their land.

And yet, even as their water is stolen or destroyed, Palestinians are blamed - not only for resisting, but for the crimes of others. A population that helped save Jewish refugees from the Holocaust has become **its scapegoat** - not because of what they did, but because they were nearby.

To weaponize water is to **wage war on life itself**. And to shift the blame for genocide onto its survivors' victims is to **poison truth**. If there is to be peace, there must first be justice. And justice begins by **unmasking the weapon**, naming the crime, and returning the water - both physical and moral - to those from whom it was stolen.