

Establishing new water reservoirs in the occupied Golan

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Within the framework of settling the newly occupied territories and after the seizure of the Syrian land, the Israeli occupation authorities have established water complexes / reservoirs in the occupied Golan since 1968. The motivating goal was to provide the crucial infrastructure for establishing the settler-colonial entities, where irrigated agriculture is the main component of the settlements' economies. The first of these complexes was "Marum Golan". With a capacity of 4.20 million m³, the complex was established to the east of the demolished village of Bab al-Hawa, as part of it is located right on the village's lands.

Toward the end of 2008, the occupation authorities had already built fourteen (14) water complexes in the occupied Golan. These reservoirs are filled with surface water, torrential water and streams' water during the winter by connecting them to natural water channels and channels specially dug for this purpose. The total capacity of these complexes is 41.0 million m³.

Within the same endeavor and aim to support the Jewish settlement movement and the development of the agricultural sector of the settlements, the occupation authorities began to construct a new water complex in April of 2017.

The idea of constructing the "Bar-On" reservoir was developed fifteen (15) years ago, which is now located along the "Marum Golan" reservoir to the east. The project was completed in the summer of 2020. The maximum capacity of this reservoir is 2.0 million cubic meters, and its storage depends on the collection of surface water, from the northern area of Tal Abu Nada ("Har Avital" in Hebrew) to the Quneitra-Mansoura plain ("Emek Habakhah" in Hebrew).

The project was implemented as part of the Jewish National Fund "Kern Kayimet for Israel-Kakal" initiative. In addition, the program received support from the Regional Council for the Golan Settlements "Moutsah Izurit Golan", the Water Association "Meh Golan" (which is owned by twenty-seven (27) settlements in the occupied Golan) and the Israeli Water Authority "Mekorot". The cost of this complex was eighteen (18) million shekels, and the largest contribution to financing it (12.5 million shekels) was by the Jewish National Fund "Kakal".

At the inauguration ceremony of the water reservoir, the head of the Regional Council of Settlements, Haim Rokach, linked the completion of the project to Zionism, saying: "In the

Golan, contemporary Zionism arises, Zionism 2020, Zionism that corresponds to the values and actions of the Jewish National Fund in the development of the country."

Moreover, the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the "Keren Kayemet", Daniel Attar, said at the ceremony: "The reservoir will provide water for agriculture in the northern Golan Heights, including the lands that the 'Keren Kayemet' claimed, within the framework of the same national project, to settle seven hundred and fifty families in the Golan Heights."

The establishment of this water complex is one of several projects in which the "Keren Kayemet" is implicated in order to promote effective agriculture and settlement. This is clear Zionist rhetoric, saying that even in 2020, "*moshavim* (settlement villages) and *kibbutzim* (cooperative villages) are still maintaining and securing the state's borders."

In the summer of 2020, the occupation authorities began establishing another water complex, the "Hoshen" reservoir, located northwest of "Keshet" settlement. This project was also initiated by the Jewish National Fund "Kern Kayemet" and in partnership with the "Meh Golan" company, the water authority "Mekorot", and the Regional Council of Settlements "Golan". The capacity of the reservoir is 2 million m³, extending over an area of 436 dunums, with a cost amounting to 20 million shekels, of which the "Keren Kayimet" contributes 80% of it, which is equivalent to 16 million shekels.

The two projects accompanied the government's plan (approved in 2014) to bring in seven hundred and fifty (750) new families to settle in the Golan under the title, "***We strengthen settlement and agriculture in the Golan***" as a means of establishing the infrastructure to accommodate the new settlers. The establishment of these complexes—in addition to underground water pumping stations from several areas in the Golan—reflects the water policy of the occupation authorities, which is based on seizing water in order to support and develop their settlement project.

Ten (10) of the reservoirs built on the Golan Heights depend on collecting surface rainwater, composed mainly of the water resources of Lake Tiberias (Lake Tiberias basin). However, the occupation authorities do not see this as a breach of the lake's water supply. Firstly, because it controls the lake exclusively, and secondly, because these water complexes constitute an alternative to pumping water from Lake Tiberias to the north in order to secure the needs of the settlements' residents and their economies, which would have constituted a great financial burden, in the long run.

As for the other five reservoirs, they are located to the east of the rainwater dividing line. They also depend on collecting surface rainwater that forms part of the Yarmouk River water sources, with a total capacity of 16.5 million m³.

Settlements meet their water needs for agriculture from these reservoirs, including wastewater pools after being refined and rehabilitated, from natural sources such as the Ram Pool which has a capacity of 6.5 million m³, and from water springs. In years with scarce rain supply, the occupation authorities supplied the reservoirs with water from the wells of artesian water pumping stations that they established in many areas of the Golan. These include the "Aloneh Habshan wells" which are located on the lands of the destroyed village of Juweza; "the Shamir wells" which are located on the slopes of the western Golan, north of "Shamir" settlement; "the wells of Mansoura" located in the Quneitra Plain; "the wells of Ram" in the Al-Yafouri Plain; and the "Mitzar Wells" on the land of the destroyed village of Al Yaqousa.

The occupation authorities have continued digging artesian wells in different areas along the cease-fire line, in order to prevent the flow of water to the Syrian side. The second channel in the TV media of the occupation authorities mentioned: ***"Israel is carrying out water excavations that prevent the flow of water to Syria; the excavations have been carried out to this day in secret, through the Mekorot' company and the 'Meh Golan' company. For the first time, official sources state that these water excavations are providing them with 3 million m³ per year."***

The water authorities: "Meh Golan" and "Mekorot" had connected the "water complexes" together, through pipes and water channels from north to south, in order to supply the southern reservoirs with the surplus water from the northern reservoirs. The amount of rainfall in the north of the Golan is three times more than that in its southern. In order to achieve the transfer of water from artesian wells to and between water reservoirs, the occupation authorities rehabilitated the "Tab line" pipeline, which used to carry oil from Saudi Arabia to the Zahrani port in Lebanon, crossing the Golan, from its southeast near Tal Al-Faras, to its northwest near the village of Ghajar. Transport of oil via the "Tab Line" ceased after the occupation of the Golan.



Water reservoirs in Occupied Golan					
	Name of the reservoir	Established	Capacity Million m/cubic	Basin	Coordinates
1	Bental (MaromGolan)	1968-1974	4,2	Yarmuk	33°08'23"N 35°46'55"E
2	Heetal (Nov)	1970-1974	5.0	Yarmuk	32°48'49"N 35°47'11"E
3	Butmiyya	1974	0.3	Yarmuk	32°56'12"N 35°52'20"E
4	Keshet	1978	0.15	Sea of Galilee	32°59'07"N 35°48'43"E
5	Bne Zfat (Ramthaniyya)	1979	1.2	Sea of Galilee	33°01'19"N 35°49'08"E
6	Yusifin	1981-1983	0.30	Sea of Galilee	33°02'05"N 35°46'33"E
7	Bne Yisrael	1984-1980	6.5	Sea of Galilee	32°51'04"N 35°47'21"E
8	Rawiya	1984-1983	5.0	Sea of Galilee	32°52'23"N 35°46'43"E
9	Sha'abaniyya (Dalyut)	1984-1983	1.5	Sea of Galilee	32°53'56"N 35°46'50"E
10	Dvash (Bazelet)	1984-1983	4.0	Sea of Galilee	32°55'02"N 35°46'32"E
11	Al Sheikh	1995	0.35	Sea of Galilee	32°99'31"N 35°36'31"E
12	Kattef	1998	5.0	Sea of Galilee	33°03'09"N 35°48'43"E
13	'Uravim	2001-1999	2.5	Sea of Galilee	33°08'29"N 35°43'57"E
14	Qunaytra	2007	5.0	Yarmuk	33°07'52"N 35°48'56"E
15	Baroon	2017-2020	2.0	Yarmuk	33°08'39"N 35°47'17"E
16	Hoshin	under building since 2019	2.0	Sea of Galilee	32°98'79"N 35°80'16"E
	Total		45.0 million m/cubic		

The legality of water appropriation in the Golan

The Israeli occupation authority seized land and water resources according to military orders issued by the military commanders who governed and administered the occupied Golan. On March 24, 1968, the military commander issued Military Order No. 120 in which he appointed a person, who was entrusted with all powers related to water works (including access to water sources) and to implement the provisions of the order in any place where water works are conducted. The order prohibits any person from carrying out any work related to water without a license issued by this person. Under the order, the Syrian residents who remained in the

occupied Golan were allowed to continue extracting the same quantities of water that they used before the occupation for drinking and agricultural uses, under the same conditions, unless the official orders otherwise.

After the annexation of the Golan in December 1981, the water resources were governed by the Israeli Water Law of 1959. The Water Law has provisions for public ownership of water resources and their subordination to the state; leaving these resources at the disposal of development and to meet the needs of citizens. The law also stipulates that ownership of the land does not entail ownership of the water resources in or under it. Any operation involving the use of water sources requires that the person hold a license issued by the Water Authority.

The policy of seizing water resources in the Golan is in violation of international law, including the provisions of the Hague Convention Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land 1907. These provisions dictate that “the occupying State shall be regarded only as administrator and usufructuary of public buildings, real estate, forests, and agricultural estates belonging to the hostile State, and situated in the occupied country. It must safeguard the capital of these properties, and administer them in accordance with the rules of usufruct” (Article 55).

The Hague Treaty permits the occupying power to intervene in the economic life of the region. This includes confiscating private property; appropriating public movable property; using immovable property of the state that has sovereignty over the occupied territory (including water resources) to fulfill the security requirements related to the military operations and movements of the occupying forces within the occupied territory; to cover the expenses of the military occupation; or for the welfare of the civilian population of the occupied territory. However, according to the provisions of the agreement, the occupying power is prohibited from carrying out any economic activity in the occupied territory in order to achieve economic gains for the benefit of the occupying power, its citizens, or its national economy. Thus, the policies of seizing the Golan water resources that have been pursued by the Israeli occupation authority since 1967 and using them for illegal settlement and the associated agricultural or industrial projects, or transferring water into the territories of the occupying power, is considered illegal by virtue of their violation of international law.

Sources

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