

## WSJ Op-Ed: When Ideology and Pragmatism Collide

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### Cape Town May Dry Up Because of an Aversion to Israel

**The Palestinian Authority accepts the Jewish state's help on water projects. South Africa refuses it.**

By Seth M. Siegel

Cape Town, South Africa, has designated July 9 “Day Zero.” That’s when water taps throughout the city are expected to go dry, marking the culmination of a three-year drought. South African officials aren’t responsible for the lack of rain, but inept management and a devotion to anti-Israel ideology needlessly made the situation worse.

Even before Israel declared statehood in 1948, its leaders focused on water security as closely as they did military preparedness. Mostly desert, Israel would need adequate water to thrive. In the decades since, the country has developed an apolitical, technocratic form of water governance.

Conservation is taught from kindergarten. Market pricing of water encourages everyone to waste nothing. Sensitive prices have driven innovation. Israelis helped create desalination, drip irrigation and the specialized reuse of treated wastewater in agriculture. Although Israel is in the fifth year of a drought, today its citizens can reliably count on abundant water.

Cape Town is another story. Its reservoirs began receding more than two years ago. This problem turned into a crisis because of subsidy-distorted water pricing, inefficient irrigation, and a lack of desalination facilities and a long-term plan. In 2016 officials from Israel’s Foreign Ministry recognized the problem and alerted national, provincial and local governments in South Africa. Israel has trained water technicians in more than [100 countries](#), and it offered to bring in desalination experts to help South Africa.

South African officials ignored or rebuffed the no-strings Israeli proposal. It would be admirable if South Africa’s rejection came from a can-do attitude, in a statement of national self-sufficiency. But it appears to have been for ideological reasons that South African officials wanted no help from Jerusalem.

The leadership of South Africa’s dominant political party, the African National Congress, aligns itself with the Palestinian cause. Although the two countries have diplomatic ties, South Africa under the ANC has refused to develop warm relations with Israel. This antagonism goes back to

the 1960s, when current Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas lived in Moscow with exiled ANC leaders, and Yasser Arafat often visited. Students and leaders of the two movements were supported by the Soviet Union, and they shared revolutionary aspirations.

Even more confounding, the South Africans turned to Iran for help. In April 2016, when there was still enough time for a smart plan to make a difference, South Africa's water minister visited Tehran. She brought home a [memorandum of understanding](#) in which Iran agreed to help develop South Africa's water infrastructure.

Unlike Israel, Iran is not known for its water-management expertise. Anger over water shortages was a feature of the recent Iranian protests. Even before the South African visit, a former Iranian agriculture minister predicted that as many as 50 million Iranians—around two-thirds of the population—would need to be uprooted because of growing water scarcity.

As in South Africa, Iran's water shortages can't be blamed only on the weather. Water infrastructure projects in Iran are controlled by the Revolutionary Guard Corps, which diverts water to favored ethnic and political groups. In Tehran largely untreated sewage is discharged into nearby waterways, a waste of water that creates health hazards. Years of regime-encouraged overpumping of groundwater has left agricultural districts without water for crops.

Two months after the South African water minister's Iran trip, Israel brought a team of water professionals to Cape Town. Neither the mayor, also strongly hostile to Israel, nor any senior municipal official would see them.

If the South Africans are snubbing the Israelis out of solidarity with the Palestinians, they might want to consider this: The Palestinian Authority has worked with Israel on a range of water projects since 1995. Israel offers training for Palestinians in wastewater management, infrastructure and security. Israel also provides the Palestinian Authority with more than half the water for domestic consumption by Palestinians in the West Bank. And it pipes more than 2.5 billion gallons of water into Hamas-controlled Gaza each year.

Why does South Africa feel compelled to be so anti-Israel? The question has no rational answer.

*Mr. Siegel is author of "Let There Be Water: Israel's Solution for a Water-Starved World" ( St. Martin's Press), recently out in paperback.*