

Interview on The Hugh Hewitt Show

Date : July 12, 2018

Starts at 5:30 [Link to Interview](#)

TRANSCRIPT

HH: Get ready. This is a, I've been waiting, looking forward to this for so long. Seth Siegel is my guest. You can follow him on Twitter, @SethMSiegel. He's the author of *Let There Be Water: Israel's Solution For A Water-Starved World*. And I can say this without hesitation. If ever there was an unlikelier book for me to pick up, it's one about water, *Let There Be Water*. And yet it is now among that handful of books which has rocked my worldview like *The Looming Tower* and changed the way I look at everything, because it is so fascinating. Seth Siegel, welcome to the Hugh Hewitt Show. Congratulations on *Let There Be Water*.

SS: Thank you, Hugh. That's quite an opening for me. Thank you. I love it.

HH: Well, let's talk a little bit about this and why it impacts me. I thought I knew Israel pretty well. I've been there. You know, I've always wanted to broadcast there for a month. But I never understood the water dynamic. I just, I didn't have any idea about it. So let me give you the floor to just sort of start out. When the British mandate is in effect, there is no state of Israel. They say you can't move people into this country, because there is no water. That's where it begins.

SS: That's right. It really begins there. The Zionists, and that's what they were called before they were Israelis. They realized the fact that water is going to be as essential to them as good security, good intelligence, immigration absorption and other essential parts of good governance. And they start thinking about water in a way that frankly just about nobody else in the world was at that time. This accelerates, and tragically, ultimately, in May of 1939, just before the start of World War II when the British announced a complete ban on all Jewish immigration to what is then called Palestine. And this accelerates the need of the Zionists to prove to the British that there's more than enough water in the envelope of what is today Israel, Gaza and the West Bank to absorb millions of people. The British used as an excuse that they can't allow the immigration, because they said there's just not enough water there. And tragically, tragically, the British did not respond to that. But when the state was founded in May of 1948, they had, the Israelis then had an advanced, sophisticated plan on how to have a dynamic water future.

HH: Now Seth Siegel, at the end of this book, and I've become something of an apostle of this book. I'm telling people on airplanes. I'm showing it to them saying read this book. I've come to the conclusion that at least for developed countries, drought is a choice, and not for undeveloped countries, necessarily. The environment conspires against countries by wreaking drought upon them. But for a developed country, given what Israel has learned and made in the past 70 years,

drought is a choice.

SS: You are completely correctly, except I would amplify it and say it's even to some degree even for developing countries. I say in my book, and I've come to believe this, is that water problems are a proxy or a substitute for bad governance. Water problems are not like tsunamis or earthquakes. They don't come at you all of a sudden. They come at you slowly. They give you lots of warning. And especially today, maybe not a hundred years ago, but especially today with the World Bank and the IMF and foreign aid from the Europeans and the Americans, it's really only because of a choice whether for a developed country or a less developed country that they have severe water problems. And that is really the clarion call of my book, is that we are in a world where for all kinds of macro reasons, there is going to be a water crisis coming. And the choice to be by governments is do we accede to that, or do we go over that and figure out a way to overcome this coming problem?

HH: Now I am not an optimist for reason we're going to talk about. We're going to talk about this segment and next segment, and then we're going to have an extended conversation which we will post at Hughhewitt.com. I am not an optimist because of the politics of water. But I want to do the science of water first, primarily three things – drip irrigation, sewage and desalinization. There are lots of other aspects. We can't cover an entire book in a conversation in two segments and off air. But these are the three scientific breakthroughs that the Israelis led that are available to the world if the world would but just take them.

SS: That's correct, and I would add a fourth one, non-GMO rethinking of plants. The Israelis decided in the 1950s, and there's a long, wonderful story about it that I tell in the book about how it came about. But in the 1950s, Israel becomes a world seed superpower. And what they realize is, is that what you grow in a plant, extra leaves, longer roots and so forth, is also a choice. And every one of those choices requires more or less water, and therefore they, the fourth area in addition to precision agricultures and drip irrigation, the reuse of sewage to a sophisticated and advanced degree, and the, as what they called in the 1950s when it was still science fiction, the desalting of the sea, which today now Israel is the world's leading desalinization superpower.

HH: Now let's walk through them, and by the way, Norman Borlaug is a hero to me, because he invented super seeds.

SS: Yes.

HH: But the Israelis picked up on that, and this is part four which we will come to. But let's begin, if we can, with desalinization, because right now, there are people driving to work in California. And we're all on water restriction. We were when I left there. There are going to be water restrictions forever. And I'm not against conservation. Certainly, your book actually makes me more of a conservation apostle. But desalinization, not just in Carlsbad, California is described. It's everywhere in the world, and there's no reason it can't be everywhere in the world.

SS: That's right. It's a political choice, and I think it's actually foolish and a form of really silly ideology that has gotten us into the position of rejecting it. It's kind of a 21st Century Luddite thinking that somehow or other, desalinization is going to lead to an apocalypse. The creation of water, the key argument against it is a liberal argument and a conservative argument. The liberal argument is a stronger argument against it. The liberal argument is it's going to add to the use of carbon fuels. And two answers to that. First is it depends on what you choose as your energy source. But second of all is the amount of water needed for a family of four, for a full day, for robust, ample living that could be produced by desalinization, is equivalent to a standard size refrigerator. And you don't hear people saying today let's throw out our refrigerators, let's throw out our computers, let's throw out our air conditioners. It's part of modern life, and desalinization gives you an insurance policy that allows you to have all the water you know you will need if you live within, say, 50 or 100 miles to the seashore.

HH: And there are technology advancements. Actually, the history, this is a history of science book as well as a book about Middle East conflict as well as a book about...

SS: Very much.

HH: It's just about everything, because water is about everything. I have a friend, David, who I won't say his last name, head of a huge North American automobile company used to tell me on the patio of my church every Sunday that the world will go to war over water before it goes to war over anything else, that water shortage, because it is so essential, will drive conflict. And I kind of believed him. I really believe him at the end of *Let There Be Water*, but I also now know it's unnecessary, Seth Siegel.

SS: Yes, and actually, I used to believe the exact same thing. Like lots of your listeners, I had heard the mantra or the expression that the wars of the 21st Century will be fought over water. But I know believe that that's actually not true. Wars are expensive and they leave countries in ruin. And for less money than it costs to wage war, a country can build out its water infrastructure and have the same kind of water security that Israel does. The reason I picked Israel as the model is not only because they are the world's leader and thought leader and technology leader in water, is because Israel is located in the driest region in the world. The country has had the fastest rate of population rise in the world since it achieved independence. It has had the third-fastest rate of economic growth after Singapore and South Korea, in the world. And it has suffered terribly from the effects of less rain from climate change. And despite all that, in Israel today, everyone has all the water they want to use. So I said to myself that is the model for everybody else. And they started this, Hugh, I have to point out, you said before developed countries. Israel starts this in 1952. Israel was a poor less developed country in 1952. And so the model from that is that yes, of course today Israel is an economically advanced country like Europe or America. But it wasn't always the case. And they still took steps forward to fix their water future.

HH: Seth Siegel, it's kind of staggering to realize what they have done. I loved the quote where an

Israeli water team goes to China, and the Chinese say Jews are smart. Jews are smart. And I just laugh out loud, because in fact, as to water, the Jews have really got the playbook.

SS: Well, you know it's a common, I know that, I know, Hugh, that you are a reader of the Bible.

HH: Yes.

SS: I've been a listener of yours for a long time. So what Israel has combined, and this book is also the story about Israel. It's a story about overcoming nearly insurmountable obstacles. But what Israel is, is, for listeners of yours who don't know the country well, is really a fascinating synthesis of an ancient, rooted thought and society, and a modern society in ferment. And it is that ancient thought about what would be called the Biblical traditions that helps to start to drive this process. You know, the word water appears in the Hebrew Bible, let alone the Christian Bible, it appears in the Hebrew Bible over 600 times. It's a water-suffused document. And so the people of Israel in their culture, baked into their culture, was the idea that they had to do something always about water. It's not a surprise that the Zionists who come out of that tradition come ahead and develop a sophisticated and advanced water society.

HH: Now I've got to also shock my audience. This is how profound the book, *Let There Be Water*, is when you read it. Everybody knows I'm a free market capitalist, and I believe in the market. But you have persuaded me, and I don't even think you set out to persuade people, that all water ought to be collectively owned, that there is a place for one aspect of socialism in a free market economy, which is water.

SS: Well, I'll tell you what. Let's say that I can agree with you part of the way on that, because now, you might be more of a free marketeer even than I intended with my book, but, which is to say that certainly, the American model is insane.

HH: Yes.

SS: Just, you come from California. In California, there are over 3,000 separate water utilities, water authorities, flood districts, irrigation districts. How in the world can you come up with a coherent water plan for your country, your society, your state, your region if everyone is bumping into each other? And how do you have coherent thinking? You can't. Texas has over 5,000 separate water authorities, utilities and so forth. In the country at large, in the United States, we have over 55,000 separate water utilities. How in the world are we going to ever come up with a coherent plan for good, safe, abundant water with that kind of Tower of Babel confusion?

HH: And when we come back from break, we'll continue to talk about this. And we're going to talk about sewage, because believe it or not, what goes down the toilet matters to our futures incredibly. Seth Siegel, stand by. I'll be right back with him.

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HH: And I've long thought, Seth, and we're going to continue the conversation after the show ends today, and we'll post the entire thing at Hughhewitt.com. And eventually, Duane will transcribe all of it so that people can get the idea they've got to go and read it. Did you know, Seth, when you set out, you had to tell stories to get readers? That's what, whether it's Simcha Blass, whether it's any of the amazing characters who populate Let There Be Water, you have to draw people into an argument by making it a story.

SS: That's exactly right. I knew from the very beginning that if I was going to grab readers, and this is, by the way, Hugh, this is a total Cinderella story, you know. I was a businessman. I write this book. I wrote, you know, it was like a mid-life crisis without getting a red sports car or a girlfriend. You know, I write this book more for fun than anything else, like you know, probably like three-quarters of your listeners out there, and sent it out to an agent. And two weeks later, he calls me and tells me, you know, one of the biggest publishing companies in the world wants your book. You know, I'm like really? And they said to me, you know, we have a low expectation for this book. It's going to, you know, sell a couple of thousand copies. And its third week out, it becomes a New York Times bestseller, and now it's out in 50 countries in 15 languages. So this is a total Cinderella story about this book. But what I knew from the very beginning was that you couldn't just lecture at the reader. You had to share gee whiz, wow stories. You had to make them either laugh or cry or have goose bumps with some regularity. Of course, it also has to have integrity. It has to all be true. It also has to be footnoted. But I needed, I knew that I needed to be able to grab the reader and not let go of him or her at any point throughout the text of the book.

HH: You know, Seth, my, the Fetching Mrs. Hewitt, my wife to whom I've been married 36 years and a day, did a jig when this book came out. I was reading to her parts of it, because she grew up taking Navy showers. She's a Marine Corps brat, right?

SS: Right.

HH: And so she takes Navy showers, which is where you get wet, you lather, you turn off the water, you lather up, and then you rinse off. I take 18 minute showers. I love showers. I'm a water user extraordinaire, because I grew up on the Great Lakes.

SS: Yup.

HH: You know, one-fifth of the surface water in the United States is right there in Lake Erie and its colleagues in the Great Lakes. So I'm a water waster. This persuades me that there's a culture of water that Israel built that it's patriotic to not blow your water, and all of it can be used.

SS: Well, that's the key part of it, is that even for people who, I'm amazed they let you in California taking 15 minute showers. But the good news even for people who take long, long

showers, or for listeners who have, you know, children who are in the shower for God knows how long or why, what goes down the drain in Israel is not just wasted. And that's one of the crises we have in the United States, is that even in dry places, we use water in most places only once, although I predict with Israel as the model, the world will very soon be reusing water. And what Israel does, and they decided to do this really starting, again, when they had no money in the early 1950s, they made a decision that they would sooner or later have water problems just because of the region, because of the climate and so forth. And they just made the decision that they had a huge source of water in sewage. And they figured out a way to treat it to an ultra high pure level, that you could drink it if you had to, but they figured psychologically, people just won't want to do that. So they spent about 30 years and billions of dollars building out a parallel national water infrastructure system. And they now reuse about 90% of all of the sewage, everything that goes down the dishwasher, shower, bath, and even, frankly, the toilet. They treat it to a pure level, they put it in special pipes, it's sent to farms, and it's used mostly for drip irrigation in farms in mostly in the northern part of the Negev Desert.

HH: You know, Seth Siegel, I brought out Let There Be Water on Saturday night. We had a dinner party for 8 old friends. And I said we're going to talk about sewage for a little bit, and they all looked at me, what, are you out of your mind? And I said, and I'm going to become an apostle for dual flush toilets. And they looked at me. Are you out of your mind? And I had to define sewage as everything that goes down the drain, everything in every drain. So then they being to widen their scope a little bit. And all, so much of it is wasted. Israel does, catches about 90% of it. I think Spain is in second place with 20%.

SS: About.

HH: And the rest of the world is behind Spain. And after you read Let There Be Water, you say to yourself what, are we nuts? Why aren't we doing this?

SS: Well, think about this. In the United States, in 1972, we passed a law called the Clean Water Act, a federal law, that requires basically all of the sewage in the United States to be taken to a municipal treatment plant, not all, because there's septic tanks and things like that, but a lot of our sewage, and to take it and to treat it to a fairly good level of purity. And then you know what we do with the water? We dump it in the Great Lakes. We dump it in a river. We dump it into the Mississippi. We dump it in the Atlantic and the Pacific, when we could be making use of that water for either agriculture or for public lawns or for municipal purposes and for science and for industry, and we just don't do that. And this is what I think is going to be one of the great transformational ideas. The science exists to make sewage as clean as any water you could ever want to drink. And therefore, let's clean it to the level we need it for scientifically, commercially, for when you're growing a non-edible crop. Make it a certain level of cleanliness when you're making an edible crop. Make it better. When you're using it to make microchips, make it even better. That's the future of water, and that's the future of sewage. Sewage is going to go from yuck to wow. I promise you that.

HH: It is, 100%, because of Let There Be Water. Now let's talk about the geopolitics starting closest to Israel, with Gaza, the West Bank and Jordan, then moving to Turkey and Iran, then moving to the world where Israel uses water as a means of diplomacy. Let's start with Gaza. There is a crisis. I was unaware of it until I read Let There Be Water. I really was. They're going to have a drought of epidemic proportions and an environmental catastrophe if they do not move.

SS: That's correct. It, this is, this is one of the examples where you just want to say your head explodes, because people, but mostly the leaders of Hamas, have preferred to elevate ideology over the wellbeing of their own people. Less than 15 miles from the northern border of Gaza is an Israeli desalinization plant that is ready, willing and able to provide large amounts of water for Gaza, number one. Number two is Israel is prepared to allow Gaza to build as many desalinization plants as they would like funded by the Europeans, to be sure. But they won't allow the cement and the wiring and the metal to be brought in that's going to be used to build terror tunnels and to build rockets and missiles to be used against Israel. So they need to have some security. Now what the Hamas people are saying is tough luck. And therefore, what's going on in Gaza is because they are so bad at water management, and they have so completely overdrafted the aquifer there, the ocean, the Mediterranean Sea, rather, is starting to drip into their aquifer. And it's salinating the water. So within a matter of another few years, the aquifer there is going to be too salty to use for any purpose. And this is not something that is a natural consequence of what has to be. It's the opposite. It's only happening because of the worst form of governance. They are preferring to let their people suffer rather than to come to an understanding with Israel. And I don't care what your politics is. This sounds like bad ideology.

HH: Oh, the people, they're going to die of thirst. There are 12,000 wells in Gaza, only 2,000 of them have been permitted, which means that many people are looting the common resource for the Gaza people, and polluting as well as looting, and it ends badly rather quickly. You know, there's this lily pond effect, Seth Siegel. If it takes a day for a lily to reproduce, and it takes 30 days for the lily to cover half a pond, how many more days does it take to cover the pond? The answer is always one day. And that's what I kind of get the sense is going on in Gaza, that they're on a very rapid descent to a disaster.

SS: Yes, they are. And this is something that is so unnecessary. I predict, by the way, the irony and the painful story here is that the only solution to the Gaza water crisis is not going to come out of the hands of the Hamas government or the people of Gaza, because they don't have the technological knowhow. The solution is going to have to come from Israel. I'll tell you one of the things since you talked about sewage, on a number of occasions, and I got a chance in my book, I did 220 interviews. I interviewed 20 Palestinians, including several former heads of the Palestinian water authority. And they told me, two of them off the record, one on the record, they told me that on several occasions, Israel has come to the Palestinians and offered to buy all of the sewage, buy, pay money, for all of the sewage produced in Gaza, treat it and either return it to the Gazans so they could use it for their agriculture, or alternatively, to provide desalinated water in exchange for that water. And nonetheless, the government there has said no. Why would they do that?

HH: It is deeply disturbing to read this. Let's also go the West Bank. Areas A, B and C, the West Bank, the Oslo Accord divided the West Bank into Areas A, Areas B and Area C. Therefore, what was originally a great idea now stands in the way of efficient water management, as does politics, because it used to be that the Palestinians would come and learn water management and engineering from the Israelis. They won't do that because of politics anymore. The consequences are the West Bank should not have a water problem.

SS: The West Bank definitely should not have a water problem. There, again, it's a governance issue. The Palestinians in the West Bank, they don't issue proper water bills. And by the way, to some of your listeners may not understand the scope of which Israel provides assistance to their neighbors. Let me just make clear. 60%, and this is Palestinian numbers. These are not Israeli numbers. 60% of the water used in Palestinian homes in the West Bank comes directly from Israel. So the idea that you know, Israel is starving the Palestinians or whatever, every time Israel is given an opportunity, and this is what I learned from my book, every time Israel is given an opportunity, the research for my book, every time Israel is given the opportunity to help the Palestinians, they jump at the opportunity to do that. They like the idea of having a prosperous, friendly neighbor if at all possible. Israel used to train almost all of the water engineers in the West Bank. Even do this day, students come from West Banks towns and cities to Israeli institutions to learn water engineering, water administration. And those students who do that are subject to all kinds of abuse, and I interviewed some of them as well, abuse by their neighbors, even by family members who call them normalizers, that they are normalizing the relationship with Israel by having the audacity of going and getting a Master's degree or a PhD in an Israeli institution.

HH: Now the model for how to actually do it is the Kingdom of Jordan. Now we're going to talk after this about how Turkey and Iran used to follow the Jordan model. They don't anymore, with dire consequences for both countries, for political reasons. But the Kingdom of Jordan has fully embraced cooperation with Israel on water, which is crucial because of the river and because of the sea, and because of the Dead Sea. But expand a little bit on how you actually do this if you want to embrace the future and you want to take care of your people.

SS: Well, there's lots of ways, and I think you have it exactly right. For all kinds of, you know, public PR reasons, the Jordanians don't speak very loudly about this. But again, I spoke to Jordanian water people to understand the story from their perspective. Israel is really Jordan's partner in their water needs. So for example, and there are very few people who live in the southern part of the country of Jordan, you know, the Red Sea. And therefore, it's not, and it's a very dry area. Further north where the population is, they don't have any outlet to fresh water, and they have very little, they have one river. They have very little in the way of fresh water. And Israel partners with the Kingdom of Jordan in allowing the Jordanians to bank in the Sea of Galilee, where Jesus famously walked, to allow them to bank water in the Sea of Galilee, and then whenever they need to withdraw it, to withdraw whatever they need. That's number one. Number two is to a degree, again, that most people don't realize, about 10% of the water in the Kingdom of Jordan, and more in recent years because of the Syrian civil war refugees, also comes from Israeli

sources, Israel helping a neighbor. And then the most exciting thing that could be happening, and it keeps getting interrupted by the dopey politics of the region, but the most exciting thing is a Jordanian-Israeli and even Palestinian partnership to take water from the Red Sea, and although it's south, it's far higher altitude than the Dead Sea, to let by gravity to let that water flow down to the Dead Sea, let it be, let it be a source of hydroelectric power, and then at the Dead Sea, to desalinate that water, take the brine, the salty remains, and put it into the Dead Sea to stabilize it, to take the extra water, and Israel will build some desert farms there. Israel excels in desert farming. And then they're going to take an equal amount of water and build a spur into Amman, Jordan, and gallon for gallon give the Jordanians in their capital as much water as they're getting from this partnership. And in addition, to help, to thank the Palestinians for their, for not objecting or blocking this, they are going to build a spur into Hebron, a very populated Palestinian city, and also provide lots of fresh, new water for them, too. So it's a win-win-win. It binds the three economies together, and it's, I hope, a triumph of smart pragmatism over stupid counterproductive ideology.

HH: Now let's talk about where it used to be pragmatic. Iran, when the Shah was the shah, Turkey when it was pre-Erdogan, would suck up everything that Israel would give them when it came to water. And Israelis would be greeted warmly in the remote parts of Iran. I love that portion of your book that talks about water diplomacy. But the mullahs were always refusing. And as a result, now, Iran teeters on the brink of water disaster, Turkey, too, and they don't have to be there. I mean, Israel would go right back to helping them, wouldn't it?

SS: There's not a question in the world. In fact, a few weeks ago, the Prime Minister of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu, created a short two or three minute video which was fascinating where he spoke, and it was subtitled in Farsi, the language of Iran, and spoke about how Israel has this advanced water society, and Iran is on the verge of water collapse. And he said please allow us to help you. Please allow us to help you come and figure out your water future. A former agriculture minister of Iran, his name is Isa Kalantari, wrote a few years ago that as many as 50 million out of 85 million, 50 million Iranians in the next few years may have to be relocated because they'll be living in areas that have run out of water. And the story I think you're alluding to that I tell in my book is that in 1962...

HH: Yes.

SS: There was a catastrophic earthquake in Iran, and it destroyed an ancient and very important irrigation system that the country had used. And the Shah had heard already in '62 that the Israelis had very advanced and sophisticated ways of irrigation. And he reached out to the United Nations, and within 24 hours, three Israelis hydrologists arrived in Iran from Israel and helped to rethink their system. Well, within a matter of a year, there were a couple of hundred, and within a matter of five years, there were several thousand Israeli hydrologists, geologists, statisticians, mathematicians, working nationally on the Iranian water profile, on their agriculture, on their cities, on their sewage treatment, and on and on and on. Well, it comes to 1979, it's sort of like that movie Argo, where everybody has to run and leave Iran very quickly. These water people from Israel all have to get

out very, very fast, and they do, and I interviewed loads of them. It was just fascinating story, all of them old men and women now, but a very fascinating story. And within a matter of a few years, Iran starts to fall into decay because the people who had running the program, the Israelis were gone. Their partners in Iran had either been executed or exiled, because they had been collaborating, quote unquote, with, God forbid, the Israeli water people. And now today, it is believed that Iran is just about out of water. It is now true that Iran has the worst water efficiency in terms of agriculture than any country in the entire world. So how is this? Is it because they're busy building nuclear bombs rather than focusing on their country, because they're busy focusing on ideology? And again and again, pragmatism should be the rule when it comes to water. People everywhere, everywhere, could have high quality water and abundant water. And the model for that is Israel.

HH: Now I also want to stress Israel uses water diplomacy originally because they felt a bond with the original Zionists, with the people of Africa emerging from colonialism as Israel emerged from the mandate. And then Golda Meir and others just had a heart for Africa. So they went everywhere to try and clean up the water. And I don't know, did you ever read the Ghost Map, Seth?

SS: Oh, God, loved that book.

HH: What a great book, right?

SS: Loved that book. Oh, God, yes.

HH: Your book is like that. And so they know what cholera does. They know how it can kill people, so they went everywhere. China wouldn't let them in for a long time, but now big arm. Water diplomacy, what an eye opener to me, what the Americans ought to be doing in a similar fashion.

SS: Well, I actually, I couldn't agree with you more. I called this concept in my book hydro diplomacy. And I believe that you know, we are very good at, I don't know how good we are. I'll leave that to you and to your listeners at how good we are at our diplomacy. But what we can say is we have a large bureaucracy in our foreign policy and foreign aid programs. And what I think is a mistake is that we don't have somebody thinking about water as a tool of diplomacy. We give away billions and billions of dollars a year for water projects, but that's very tactical, very micro, very in the field. And I think that America should not only be thinking about how to fix our own water problems, but that we have lots of ways that we can interface with the world at large, like the Israelis, and use hydro diplomacy as a way of reaching out and helping others, and using those tools to enhance these bilateral relationships.

HH: Now let's switch to the reality. I've told people, I've hinted at them at the science. They don't have, I'm not a science guy, right?

SS: Nor I.

HH: I'm like Bill Bryson. And so I love the fact you wrote this book for people like me. They don't have to be worried about the science. They'll be engrossed by the details. I want to talk politics now. Israel made some key decisions as only a new country could, and I talked with my friend, Daniel Silva, about this. I'm as astonished by Israel's military and its intelligence capability, and now I add water to it. They did the things that they had to do to succeed, and as a result, they do them better than any power of their size or remotely close to them, perhaps as well as anyone in the world does. Has any other "new country" done anything like this, Seth?

SS: Well, there are two other countries that have good water systems, but I didn't profile them, and I'll explain why. Australia has a pretty good water system, but they run it at a huge loss whereas in Israel, there's not a penny of government subsidy. I didn't make that point early when we were talking about, you know, the centrality of the water supply there. Israel does not subsidize its water at all. They use, although it's socialistic in one way, it's market forces in the other way, because they charge the full price for the water, and therefore, people have to make decisions whether they want to use more or less water based on real economic data and real price signals that pricing gives to people. So Australia is good, but not a good example because of the heavy subsidies from the government. The second country that I thought of reviewing was Singapore, which is a tiny country. And the reason I chose not to focus on them is because it's an authoritarian state, and they mandate behaviors.

HH: Right.

SS: And I want to keep the profile on something where without a mandate, we could get to positive outcomes, because they believe in incentives, but not in coercion. And I think that therefore, Singapore, although they have a very good water story, is not the one you want to have. But Hugh, I think what you're driving at, and if I may help square the circle for you, is that what's happening, though, is although we read in the newspapers frequently about how Israel is isolated, and countries going far away from them, what's fascinating to me is that in just in the last few years, the degree to which the developing world is finding a way to vote against Israel at the UN, but finding a second way, a second pathway through water, through hydro diplomacy, to partner with Israel. Just last year, over 6,000 government officials from around the world, water people from around the world, came to Israel to learn from Israel. And that's a significant number of people.

HH: That's remarkable, yeah. That's remarkable.

SS: That's a significant number of people, so that, so that, and some of these countries are countries that are voting against Israel. Now they also, now Israel doesn't bring in for training program countries that don't have diplomatic relations with them. But what they do allow is their companies to trade with countries that don't have diplomatic relations. And I'll tell you something that was shocking to me when I found it out. I interviewed many, many heads of water-themed companies in Israel, and I asked them for the list of countries that they did business with, and I told them I won't tie your name to it, because I don't want to get you in trouble. But it was amazing. It

was amazing. Countries that you think, not Iran, but countries other than Iran that you think would have nothing to do with Israel, it's not true. These countries come to Israel and say here's what we need. Set up a bogus company in Turkey or in Cyprus, let your Israeli executives come via some third point than Israel. They can fly, we will welcome you into our country, and you help us with our water needs and technology and planning and servicing and so forth. And it really has been a fantastic story that I estimate from just this tally that I made that there are at least 140 countries around the world that are buying Israeli water technology. And I think that is a great statement about the way that the road to peace, because that's how China and Israel started having diplomatic relations, was by having this backdoor, quiet relationship.

HH: And a road to plenty. When people learn from Let There Be Water how drip irrigation can exponentially expand food supply by not just doing efficiency, but by using the plants you referred to in the beginning of our conversation to grow what ought to be grown wherever it is being grown, the world doesn't have to be hungry. The world doesn't have to be thirsty. If you take away those two demands, it can do a whole bunch of things. Let me, as we, we have about ten minutes left, Seth. I want to cover two things in particular. Shimon Peres, and I've never been a Peres big fan, right? I've always been a cheerleader from the West for Likud. But when he wrote the greatest Jewish contribution to the world has been dissatisfaction, I thought that is just brilliant. That is a true insight into what drives them here. And the technological boon, I've read Start Up Nation. I know about all of the assessments of why the Israeli economy is booming. But I never quite understood that they had done this with water, and they'd made water into a profit center as well as a technology center. It's a business school book as well as being a political science book as well as being just a great read.

SS: It might also be a leadership book.

HH: Yes.

SS: It's the story of a country that faces nearly insurmountable obstacles and figures out a way around it. You know, and I think that we could be talking as well, and you referenced it before about your conversation with Daniel Silva, you know, Israel built out a fantastic intelligence service because they had to. They built out a great military because they had to. But Israel didn't really have to. People say to me all the time, well, Israel had no choice. But why do you say Israel had no choice when you don't say the same thing about Egypt or Jordan or other countries around the world that have bad water systems? Israel definitely had a choice. They could have restricted immigration. They could have imported more food rather than growing their food. They could have had crappy water. They could have had fewer people on a water grid. They could have done lots of things. Israel made an important decision to rethink how their country was going to be and what they wanted their country to do. And I think that when we think about water around the world, it's as good a symbol as any when you look at a country as to who they think they are and what the relationship of government is to their citizenry. And Hugh, if I can make one comment about America right now is that I think, obviously we have a crisis in governance right now. And one of

the reasons is that many people have lost faith in their government. And I think that having lots of small wins showing the country that things are working right is a way to help restore and calm the country down a little bit. And water, and water infrastructure, is one of those ways to do it.

HH: Now I want to conclude, Seth, with my last ten minutes with you, about California. I now live in Virginia. I live on a river now. I live on the Potomac. I have water everywhere. But I come out of 30 years of living in California. And as I read your book, I kind of wept, because it's such a balkanization. Nobody believes the government about anything with regards to water. This is perhaps the crucial understanding is that I don't trust any money that they charge for water to go to water. It's not like the gas tax going to the highway fund. If they charge for water, it will vanish into the endless deficit that is the California public employees union imbalance, because we have unfunded pension liabilities of billions of dollars. And so I just, I don't believe it's possible to fix. And I also don't believe if they don't do obvious things like putting a desalinization plant in Huntington Beach where there's an empty, old Southern California Edison plant, if they don't do the obvious stuff, why would I ever believe they're just not charging for water to pay off the public employee unions? It's really quite a credibility gap that I don't think could ever be bridged.

SS: Well, I actually agree with you, Hugh, and it's one of the reasons why I wrote this book, because I think that we need to have a citizens awareness and a citizens revolution. And I can't thank you enough for having me on your show and on your podcast, because of that, by arousing the citizenry, by getting government officials to think about this, there will have to be changes. And what we have right now is a system that just really isn't working. What we have is a system where we are raiding our water fees on a routine basis. You know, I'm sure your listeners are all aware of Flint, Michigan. But what I bet they're not aware of, and this gets me angry, actually, is that Flint, just before the crisis was announced, had the single highest water rates in the entire country. But, but, only 20% of those water fees went to water.

HH: Yeah, isn't that crazy?

SS: So why would any citizen trust their government for not stealing from them? Now in Israel, by the way, it is against the law for a single penny of water fees to go to anything other than water programs. So therefore, there's no possibility of it. Now people may not love, you know, paying their water bill every two months, but the reality is, is that if they don't pay their water bill, they know they're not going to be getting high quality water. And so it creates a social compact, and that idea of society pulling together and working together actually works pretty well.

HH: So my, what I was left with, and this is what I wanted to bounce off you, the federal government has control of commerce. You're a lawyer. You know this, the Commerce Clause.

SS: Yeah.

HH: We'll never, ever figure out water solutions for a climate changing world. And I don't care if

people believe in it or not. Admiral Stavridis told me that the Arctic is melting, so stuff is going on. If we're ever going to get ahead of the drought curve in America, we have to have a rational water policy. That doesn't mean heavy-handed regulation, but it does mean one market. It does mean one national approach. That's where Congress ought to go. They ought to seize control from these little, tiny water buffalos in every city in the country and lay down the law about how we're going to do water.

SS: You know, I'm writing another book right now also about water, and that is one of the key recommendations that I make. So maybe you'll actually have me back on your show at some point. But I will tell you that this is a problem that needs to be fixed. And the western part of America which has the most severe water problems have water problems that are in part the making of bad water law and bad water policy. About 150 years ago, Hugh, the railroads wanted to get people to move out to the west, decided the best way to do that was to use water as an incentive. And so they got all the state legislatures in the west to pass these laws that said that anybody who came out to be a miner or a farmer or a rancher would get water rights basically in perpetuity. Anything you used today, your son would get, your grandson, your great-granddaughter. Everybody, and it would be a hereditary right. And that made a lot of sense at a time when there were very, very few people out west, and lots of water, and at a time when agriculture didn't export around the world. Today, we have a crazy system where the great-grandsons and great-granddaughters of those pioneers still retain those water rights. And they have an incentive rather than to be efficient with that water, they have an incentive to waste the water.

HH: To waste it, yeah.

SS: If they don't use it, they lose their rights. How could that make any sense? Every state has to do this. Now I spoke to a number of, one of the glories of this book is it has gotten access to governors and senior government officials, both federal and state. And I raised this with three western governors. And they all said to me, you know how Social Security, each of them as if they were in the same room, they each said to me you know how Social Security is the third rail of American national politics? Water is the third rail of my state politics. You can't touch it.

HH: You bet.

SS: Can't touch it.

HH: You bet. And they're wrong. That's, but the federal government can touch it. It's sort of like the disposal of radioactive waste at Yucca Mountain. It's got to be done. Seth, to conclude, tell me a little bit about yourself. Where are you from? How did you end up doing this?

SS: This is a crazy story. I don't know. I started life as a lawyer. And then I had this...

HH: No, you started somewhere else. Are you a New Yorker originally?

SS: Yeah, yeah, born and raised in New York, lower middle class family.

HH: High school? Which high school?

SS: High school, I went to public high school called John Bowne, an important, John Bowne High School, an important man in American liberty, a good, somebody invisible, something important to know. And then at the young age of 16, I went to Cornell University on a scholarship, work money scholarship. And I worked my way through school. And then at the end of school having never left the greater New York area, having never seen anything, having never been on an airplane but having saved up, actually, remarkably, a couple thousand dollars, I said you know, I've never done anything. Let me fly somewhere. Let me go somewhere. So my first thought is I'm going to go to Italy because I love pizza.

HH: Good choice. Good choice.

SS: And then the Yom Kippur war broke out, and I said you know, I should go to Israel. I'm Jewish, and I've never, I don't know anything about Israel. I flew to Israel. I learned something of the Israeli story. I loved my experience there. And then I came back to America, I went to law school, practiced law for a while, and then one day, I'm sitting at my desk and I came up with a life changing moment, which was I had this insight into the idea that in the same way that fashion designers and cartoon studios license their intellectual property, that corporations could be doing the exact same thing. And believe it or not, at that time, nobody was.

HH: What?

SS: Yes. Truly. I quit my job. I was about to be made a partner at a Manhattan law firm. I was a young married, I said to my wife what do you think? She says if you're not going to do it now, when are you going to do it, you know? Now's the moment, you know? So I did it. I did it, struggled for a number of years, had a partner at the time, and we ended up, the company ended up becoming a global company, and some many years later, out of the blue, I get a phone call from Ford Motor Company asking me if they could buy my company. And right around that time, I was thinking to myself, you know, I've done enough in business. I like business a lot, but I really would love to use my skills to help try to make the world a better place. I'm not sure what that meant or what it was going to be, but the offer was large enough that I thought that was a way to do it. So I accepted the offer, and for almost 17 years now, I have worked in one do-gooder way after another. I've been a big advocate for Israel, Israeli interests. I'm a lobby, I'm a citizen lobbyist with quite a number of members of Congress, Democrats and Republicans, and have helped to make the case. I've brought many senators and Congressmen on the visits to Israel. And then about six or eight years ago, I started thinking about these water issues, and was able to dovetail my interest in Israel with my interest in water and to tell these stories. And for the past four years or

three years since the book has been out, I have been on the lecture tour. I've been invited to speak to hundreds of places. I've been on four continents. I've been in over 70 U.S. cities. I've been at 40 universities. And it's really, given several hundred lectures now, and it's really been a source of great joy for me to be able to be an evangelist for a cause that I believe in so deeply that I think that the media isn't covering enough, and certainly government officials aren't talking about enough, which is how we're going to assure ourselves of a secure water future.

HH: This is, you are an evangelist. This is very important that you get out there. Richard Nixon used to define progress as the ongoing incremental expansion of liberty and literacy in a growing number of stable regimes in or aligned with the West. So much of that depends upon water. And it, so much of it depends upon holding the attention of a world that doesn't want to focus on anything for very long. But if you can make it a story, I mean, if you can tell a story, people just go to it. So God speed on this. You ought to be on every campus in America. I can't think of a less political thing than water and a more political thing than Israel, and you combine them together and you've got the greatest presentation. I mean, do you use slides and stuff, or do you do it all by talking?

SS: I, occasionally, I'm asked to do slides, but I frankly prefer to have a rapport with the audience. Sometimes, the audience is just a few hundred, and I've had audiences of as many as 5,000, so it's really very nice when that happens. But I find that, obviously, it's hard to have a rapport with an audience of 5,000, but if it's an audience of, you know, several hundred, which is an audience size that I really love, I just try to get a feel for the audience. I speak for 15-25 minutes, and then what I love most is opening it up to their questions, what is it that they're concerned about, what are their fears, what are their worries, what do they want to know? And to your point, now I've spoken, you know, as I've said, to about 40 university campuses. I've spoken you know, at hundreds of other community centers and institutions and organizations and corporate retreats and so forth. And what's so fascinating to me is that in all those hundreds and hundreds of thousands of questions I have received, politics just about never gets into the equation. People, even, I've had, I remember I spoke at a school in California, Southern California, and I was expecting, it was my first university, and I was expected to have politics and people yelling at me and all the stuff that you've read about in the media. And it was the opposite. There were over, I asked for a show of hands. There were over 90 students who were foreign students there. And their questions were what could I learn from you that I can take back to my country?

HH: Huh. Yeah.

SS: That was so exciting, and that was, it was the Rady School of Business in San Diego, and I remember thinking to myself, oh my God, I've tapped into something very special here.

HH: And you're right. And you have, and congratulations on it. It's been my ambition for a couple of years, and I've been working on this with the Israeli Tourism Authority to broadcast for a month from Israel. When I do that, I want you to come over at that time, Seth, because like you could co-host with me. I actually think this is a brilliant way to reimagine Israel's relationship with the world if

people understand it.

SS: Hugh, I finish my current book, I'm on schedule to finish my current book sometime in late October. I will go with you for a month. You pick the time. I will buy my ticket. I will book my hotel. I will be there by your side. I'll make the coffee. It would be a pleasure.

HH: Terrific, Seth. I look forward to meeting you in person. Be well, my friend. Thank you, and the book is Let There Be Water. Go and get it, America. Get it today.

End of interview.