

A Green Blue Deal for the Middle East

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EcoPeace Middle East.

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EcoPeace Middle East is a unique organization that brings together Jordanian, Palestinian, and Israeli environmentalists. Our primary objective is the promotion of cooperative efforts to protect our shared environmental heritage. EcoPeace has offices in Amman, Ramallah, and Tel-Aviv.

Foreward and Acknowledgments

This report incorporates earlier texts of EcoPeace Middle East including “An Agreement to Share Water between Israelis and Palestinians” (2012), “Regional NGO Master Plan for Sustainable Development in the Jordan Valley” (2015), “Can Water Bring The Political Process To A Safer Shore?: Water Issues from a Source of Conflict to Vehicle for Regional Cooperation and Stability” (2016), “Governance Structures for Transboundary Water Management in the Jordan Basin” (2016), “Water Energy Nexus: A Pre-Feasibility Study for Mideast Water-Renewable Energy Exchanges” (2017), “River out of Eden: Water, Ecology and the Jordan River in the Abrahamic” (2017), “Israeli Water Diplomacy and National Security Concerns” (2018), “Report on the Status of the Hebron-Besor-Wadi Gaza Basin” (2018), “Climate Change, Water Security, and National Security for Jordan, Palestine, and Israel” (2019), “Health Risks Assessment for the Israeli Population following the Sanitary Crisis in Gaza” (2019).

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1. INTRODUCTION

The climate crisis is often described as a threat multiplier, where the weak adaptive capacity of a state or a region to deal with the negative implications of climate change can threaten stability and national security interests. In the Middle East, the failure to resolve already existing water scarcity challenges is a national security issue, which under conditions of climate change will be multiplied to a level that threatens regional stability. However, climate change can equally be seen as a multiplier of opportunities, where a nation or a region could see the threats posed by climate change as a chance to reconsider existing policies and decide to work across borders, in order to increase adaptive capacities so that challenges can not only be overcome but more sustainable, equitable and prosperous results can be achieved. The “Green Deal” concepts in both the US and Europe are designed precisely for this purpose, where to date Europe is leading the global climate effort by adopting a set of targets related to climate adaptation and mitigation, including zero total carbon emissions, investment in green jobs and infrastructure, and advancing social equity by 2050. With the recent election in the U.S. of a Biden-Harris Presidency, the U.S. and European Union (EU) will seek to return to working together productively to advance climate issues and this should help attract new investment opportunities including Arab Gulf funding towards Middle East Green Deal endeavors. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, many OECD countries have further added the term to “build back better” focusing on climate adaptation and mitigation measures as their priority issues as a means to stimulate the economy and advance societal progress.

This report seeks to inform the policy considerations of Israeli, Jordanian and Palestinian policymakers and the understanding of international stakeholders as they work to meet the challenges posed by climate change in our region. The authors’ assessment is that a “Middle East Green Blue Deal” – one that gives additional emphasis to the particular importance of water and water scarcity issues in the region -- is a practical, feasible and effective policy approach to an urgent challenge, and one that can serve to address conflict drivers, advance a two state solution based on 1967 borders, and promote trust-building and cooperation in a conflict-mired region.

The recommendations in this paper build on learning from several programs and concepts developed and implemented by our organization, EcoPeace, over these last 26 years. In the deeply complex conflict environment in which we work and live, and at a time of climate crisis, our shared consideration is that these recommendations represent solutions to urgent problems that are also “low-hanging fruit,” - practical and solvable issues in the Arab-Israeli conflict context.

Our “Green Blue Deal” proposes harnessing the sun and the sea to create region-wide desalinated water and energy security for all; highlights the need and opportunity to solve Israeli / Palestinian natural water allocations today to achieve water equity; proposes climate-smart investments and green job development around the Jordan Valley; and recommends public awareness and education programs that can engage the stakeholder publics, especially the younger generations, to understand the importance of diplomacy in the water and climate fields as an effective tool for conflict resolution and peace building.

This report does not seek to propose a holistic policy program for the Middle East covering all issues related to climate mitigation and adaptation. On the contrary, the purpose of this report is to highlight regionally focused low-hanging fruit: opportunities that can serve as entry points for policymakers seeking to maximize fulfillment of their own countries’ interests, spurring momentum toward governments creating their own holistic “green blue” plans, and providing opportunities for mutual gain and dialogue on region-wide integrated programs.

No less important, these recommendations provide relevant context for international community stakeholders, to weigh the foreign policy implications of their own varied programs and policy deliberations related to the environment. The EcoPeace report therefore also makes

recommendations applicable to international community actors for paths that could not only contribute to climate security, cooperation, and development in the Middle East but simultaneously provide entry points for advancing Israeli-Palestinian and broader Middle East peace issues.

2. BACKGROUND: GREEN DEAL CONCEPTS IN THE US AND EUROPE AND LOCAL EFFORTS TO DATE

2.1) US Green New Deal

In recent months, the US has seen its own debates around “Green Deal” concepts, with members of the progressive wing of the Democratic Party proposing a plan formulated to tackle this century’s climatic, economic, societal and technological challenges.^{1 2} Rooted in U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal during the Great Depression, the Green New Deal focuses on issues such as stimulating the U.S. economy by investing in environmental jobs, upgrading to more efficient infrastructure and power sources, and implementing climate adaptation measures. The ultimate stated goal of the plan is the transition of the US to 100% renewable energy and by 2030 cutting greenhouse gas emissions in half.^{3 4} In addition, and differing from Roosevelt’s New Deal, social equity has a high profile in the Green New Deal of the Democratic Party.⁵ While President-elect Joe Biden has stated that he does not endorse the Green New Deal, and it is unlikely to be adopted should the Republican Party retain control of the U.S. Senate, there exists a real opportunity to see policies associated with the Green New Deal adopted under the new Administration, including US return to and leadership in the post-Paris Climate negotiations based on the “Biden Plan” for a clean energy revolution and environmental justice.⁶

2.2) European Green Deal

In 2019, the European Commission released a communication that set out a European Green Deal for the EU and its citizens on the basis of resetting their commitment to what they claim is this generation’s defining task – tackling climate and environment-related challenges.⁷ This new growth strategy aims for a just and inclusive societal and economic transition with the aim to “transform the EU into a fair and prosperous society, with a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy where there are no net emissions of greenhouse gases in 2050 and where economic growth is decoupled from resource use.”⁸

As part of Europe’s endeavor to become the world’s first climate-neutral continent by 2050, heads of European governments convened in Brussels in July 2020 for a 5-day marathon summit where an unprecedented climate action plan of more than 500 billion euros was agreed upon.⁹ This recent commitment to combating climate change is the largest ever in terms of EU budget allocation and is considered the world’s greenest stimulus plan, which will be dedicated to the development of clean energy resources, stimulation of the market for emission-free cars, investments in budding technologies, and energy efficiency promotion.

The “European Green Deal” lays out the challenges and opportunities of transforming the EU economy and society on to a more sustainable path. It additionally recognizes the global implications of climate change and biodiversity loss and grounds its proposal in an affirmation of EU responsibility to use its influence, expertise, and financial resources to mobilize and coordinate similar international efforts. Unlike the U.S. Green Deal described above, which is a conceptual document of just one of the country’s two primary political parties (the Democratic Party), the European Green Deal has become the official policy of all EU member states with a clear timetable in place and budget allocated to finance implementation.

2.3) Israel 2050

In 2020, Israel’s newly appointed Environmental Protection Minister, Member of Knesset (MK) Gila Gamliel, unveiled an “Israeli Green Deal” to address climate change and kick start the economy sustainably during the COVID19 pandemic and resulting economic crisis.¹⁰ The proposal calls for increased investments in the clean-tech and renewable energy industries, nature and ecosystem

restoration, and improved environmental performance across various sectors with associated greenhouse gas reductions and job creation. The plan, deemed “Israel 2050,” unfortunately does not commit Israel to a specific percentage of carbon emission cuts. Rather, it puts forth goals and visions for a “transition to a competitive, low-carbon, thriving economy by 2050.”^{11 12}

Notably the plan is that of the Israel Ministry of Environmental Protection and has yet to be adopted by the Israeli cabinet to become a plan of the State of Israel. The plan, however, was very much welcomed by the Head of Delegation of the European Union to the State of Israel, Emanuele Giaufret, and presented at the first EU-Israel forum on climate policy held simultaneously in Tel Aviv and Brussels in 2020.¹³ In recent years, the Israeli Ministry of Energy has committed to reducing carbon emissions by transitioning the energy sector away from coal and diesel fuels and toward natural gas and renewable energies, with plans to stop using coal for electricity generation within the next decade.^{14 15} Israeli Energy Minister Yuval Steinitz presented a plan in 2019 to raise the Israeli renewable energy target to the Paris Agreement commitments, from 17% to 30% by 2030.¹⁶

2.4) Jordan 2025

In 2017, the Jordanian Ministry of Environment released a national green growth plan called “Jordan 2025.” The plan is focused on a green growth economy, decoupling growth from carbon emissions.^{17 18 19} The plan of the Ministry of the Environment charts a path for Jordan for water security, energy security, and food security as mechanisms of resource security and management. Like the Israel Environment Ministry plan, the Jordanian plan too is not a plan adopted by the government as a whole and lacks clear targets, a timeline, and financing for implementation.

The Government of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan has conditionally committed in the Paris Agreement to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 14% by 2030, depending on availability of international financial aid and support for means of implementation.²⁰ Jordan is ahead of the schedule outlined in the Energy Ministry’s 2020-2030 comprehensive strategy for the energy sector and will supply 31% of its electricity from renewable sources by 2030.²¹

2.5) Palestinian Cross-Sector Strategy of 2017-2022

The Palestinian Environmental Cross-Sector strategy of 2017-2022 aims at integrating environmental issues and sustainability factors throughout the policies and programs of various sectors; setting out its framework to meet the national developmental goals and within the framework of 2030 SDG goals.²² The strategy mainly addresses: low and controlled levels of pollution; protected natural environment and biodiversity; and most importantly in relevance to a proposed Green Blue Deal, climate change adaptation and prevention of desertification, as supported by the National Climate Change Adaptation Plan 2016. Since the strategy and associated action plans have been adopted, the vision for cross-sector implementation still requires revision and extensive investments.

In 2012, the Palestinian Energy Authority set a goal of achieving 10% renewables by the end of 2020.²³ So far only 3% renewables has been achieved of the total energy demand. The new National Renewable Energy Action Plan 2020-2030, again sets the target at 10%, consisting of solar, wind and biomass.²⁴ For this to be achieved, approximately US\$734 million of investment by private sector, only in solar, is required over the coming 10 years.²⁵ According to His Excellency (H.E.) Zafer Melhem, Chairman of the Palestinian Energy Authority, investing in renewables is financially and environmentally feasible and necessary, however they require certain prerequisites to be attained, including policy incentives to be developed in order to attract investors, presenting guarantees and overcoming security concerns.²⁶ In a recent speech of H.E. Prime Minister Mohammed Shtayyeh, regarding a PA COVID-19 response plan, environmental sustainability issues are requested to be mainstreamed across the economy.²⁷

3. RATIONALE: WHY A MIDDLE EAST GREEN BLUE DEAL

3.1) Water Security Risks

Worldwide, there is a growing understanding that we have entered a climate crisis. In the Middle East, the impact of climate change is predicted to be particularly extreme. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has identified the Eastern Mediterranean as a climate hotspot.²⁸ While the rest of the world is seeking to avoid a 1.5 degrees centigrade increase in temperature, the Middle East is forecast to see a 4 degrees increase.²⁹ Large parts of the Middle East will become unliveable for the long summer period. Latest research from Tel Aviv University indicates that in the Levant, by the end of the century, summer months will increase by 50%, with rainfall forecast to drop by up to 40%.³⁰

The Middle East is already the most water-scarce region in the world, and intermittent water supply is the norm for much of the region. In 2015, shared water bodies of Israel, Jordan and Palestine were being overdrawn by some 300 million cubic meters (MCM) of water annually, just to meet domestic drinking water needs.³¹ If climate adaptation Green Blue Deal policies are not adopted, by 2030, the region will be overdrawing from natural sources double that amount just to meet domestic needs, threatening the very viability and sustainability of our natural water resources and jeopardizing the water of future generations.³²

Today, Palestinians in the Gaza Strip are living in an untenable water reality due to conflict, the Israeli / Egyptian blockade, overpopulation, and mismanagement. Access to drinking water is a daily struggle for the 2 million Palestinians in Gaza.³³ Years of overdrawing from the underlying coastal aquifer, coupled with groundwater pollution and seawater intrusion, has led to irreparable damage to the aquifer and rendered 96% of the water in Gaza unsafe to drink.³⁴ With climate change significantly decreasing natural water availability region wide, if there is no change in policies and politics to increase adaptive capacities, the populations of the West Bank and Jordan are likely to face in the coming decades the same reality as Palestinians in Gaza.

The interim agreement on water of the Oslo Accords¹ allocated 75% of the shared ground water of the Mountain Aquifer to Israel, with only 25% allocated to Palestinians in the West Bank.³⁵ The Joint Water Committee established under the interim agreement has proven to be an inefficient mechanism managing water resources, driving the PA towards further purchasing of manufactured water from Israel to meet water demands. Though the accord has Israel recognize Palestinian water rights, what quantity of water would fulfil those rights, including access to a rightful share of the waters of the Jordan River, were left to be negotiated as part of a final peace accord that was supposed to be completed within 5 years. Despite the demographic changes and increased demand, 26 years following the signing of Oslo Accords, allocated water quantities of natural water resources remain the same. Due to a combination of factors, about 15% of the Gaza population and 47% of the West Bank population have access to piped water supply for fewer than 10 days a month.³⁶ During the hot summer months, the situation exacerbates, leading to many communities in the West Bank receiving municipal water on average, once or twice during the entire season.³⁷

In Jordan, natural population growth and the flood of Syrian refugees, have cut weekly water supplies to residents of Amman by more than 50% from two days a week to just eight hours a week.³⁸ On the Jordanian side of the Jordan Valley, farmers are increasingly seeing their fresh water allocations

¹ (The Oslo Accords are a pair of agreements, known as Oslo I and Oslo II, between the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization, which were intended as the initial phase of a negotiation process that would lead within 5 years to the final resolution of all contentious issues in a peace treaty. The Palestinian Authority (PA) was established then as a self-governing interim institution. In 1995, Oslo II was signed, including the provisions on water in Article 40 of Annex III and related Schedules 8–11.)

reduced for the benefit of urban domestic water needs. With few opportunities other than agriculture for livelihood, many rural communities in Jordan live below national poverty levels. Ecological demise of the Jordan River denies local communities' opportunity to diversify incomes through tourism.³⁹

3.2) Youth Risks

Ecological demise, underdevelopment, and high poverty rates create opportunities for extremist groups to brainwash youth to participate in violent actions that threaten not only national regimes, but, as ISIS has proven, whole regions of the Middle East, North Africa and the Sahel.⁴⁰ Pockets of 40% unemployment in Jordan have created in those same areas over 50% youth unemployment, resulting in Jordanian youth being the third largest contributor to ISIS volunteers from the Arab world and one of the top five contributors globally.^{41 42 43}

Twenty-six years after signing the Peace Treaty between Israel and Jordan and signing the interim Oslo Accords between Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), not only has a culture of peace not been forged, but school text books on all sides at best continue to either ignore the existence of the other and in some cases deny the very right of the other to exist at all.^{44 45} Even on critical issues of common concern such as water insecurity and the climate crisis, an understanding of the shared nature of our environment and the necessity to work together to protect our scarce natural waters is rarely taught, with youth on all sides exposed to youth on the other side only through stereotypes based on fear and prejudice.

3.3) Adaptation and Mitigation to Risks

The growing evidence that climate change-induced drought, flooding, and other extreme weather events threaten Israeli, Palestinian and Jordan national security interests individually and regionally is at the heart of why EcoPeace is proposing a Green Blue Deal for the region.^{46 47} The threats range from water, food, and energy insecurity, to civil unrest, migration, and full-scale civil uprisings, all contributing to the possibility of more failed states in our region. While the impact of climate change on the national security of a given country is much dependent on the adaptive capacity of that country to adapt to changing climatic circumstances, the failure of a neighboring country to adapt to the climate crisis can lead to national security threats for all other states in the same region. The Syrian uprising is often cited as a case in point.⁴⁸ Israel feels confident that it has the adaptive capacity to deal with many of the threats associated with climate change, including water security. However, worsening water insecurity in neighboring Palestine and Jordan could contribute directly or indirectly to unrest and even uprisings not dissimilar to the ongoing conflict in Syria, with security implications for all in the region.^{49 50 51}

4. CLIMATE CHANGE AS A MULTIPLIER OF OPPORTUNITIES

Climate change could be seen as a multiplier of opportunities if Israeli, Jordanian and Palestinian political and civil society leaders were to take a proactive stance on 1) cooperation to improve their adaptive capacities on water and energy security, 2) advancing Israeli/Palestinian natural water reallocations, 3) developing the Jordan Valley through investments in region-wide climate-smart initiatives and green jobs and 4) promoting public awareness and education programs - particularly directed toward youth - on diplomacy in the water and climate fields as a means of conflict resolution and peace building. Through rigorous needs assessment, analysis and lessons learned from years of on-the-ground implementation, the authors have identified these four programs as the low-hanging fruit that can help produce sustainability and shared prosperity as a practical foundation towards a Green Blue Deal for the Middle East, in line with a two-state solution based on 1967 borders and regional integration. This report describes in further detail the four programmatic opportunities and makes priority policy recommendations to our own national governments and the international community. This paper highlights the self-interest and mutual gain for Israelis, Palestinians and Jordanians to move forward on the political will needed to advance these programs and the leadership

that the international community should take as part of the consideration and implementation of their own environmentally-focused foreign policies.

4.1) On Water and Energy Security

The Water-Energy Nexus (WEN) is EcoPeace's flagship project for climate change adaptation and mitigation, designed to create a regional desalinated water - solar energy community among Jordan, Israel and Palestine that would result in healthy and sustainable regional interdependencies. Israel and Palestine would produce desalinated water and sell it to Jordan, while Jordan sells Palestine and Israel renewable energy, thereby enabling each partner to harness its comparative advantage in the production of renewable energy and water.

The results of a prefeasibility study commissioned by EcoPeace and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation to explore the technical, economic, and geopolitical viability of the proposed exchanges concluded that this concept could indeed offer substantial economic, environmental, and geopolitical benefits to all three sides, with strong incentives for sustained cooperation.⁵² Once fully implemented, it would be a game-changer for the entire region; Israel would meet its Paris climate commitments to increasing renewable energy capacity, at cheapest cost, and see regional cooperation strengthened; Jordan would achieve water security at cheapest cost through the purchase of Israeli and Palestinian desalinated water and become a major exporter of green energy, to not only power Mediterranean desalination plants, but also sell enough solar energy to supply a substantial part of total regional energy consumption; and Palestine, in addition to becoming a water exporter to Jordan and perhaps the Negev in Israel, would become more independent from Israel to meet its water and energy needs.

EcoPeace is currently taking the WEN vision, researched at a pre-feasibility level, to the point of political decision and implementation. Following years of preparatory work, three more steps are needed to set the stage for the substantial political support, regulatory commitments, and financial investments required for full scale implementation: 1) Demonstrating the WEN concept with a cross-border solar pilot project; 2) Conducting WEN's full feasibility and investment case; 3) Outreach and education to policy and civil society stakeholders.

4.1.1) WEN Pilot Project

As part of the Israel / Jordan Peace Treaty, water is already flowing from Israel to Jordan in a pipe that takes water from the Sea of Galilee, to the King Abdullah Canal and then on to Irbid and Amman. Following a billion new Israeli shekel (NIS) (US\$ 296 million) investment currently being implemented to reverse the Israeli National Water Carrier, Israel plans to pump up to 300 mcm of desalinated water into the Sea of Galilee.⁵³ The quantity of water supplied to Jordan can increase substantially with not only Israeli desalination plants linked to the national water carrier but also future plants to be built in Gaza.

As to the proposed exchange of renewable energy from Jordan, electricity has never crossed the border from Jordan to Israel. EcoPeace proposes to implement a proof-of-concept WEN pilot project that will seek to establish this precedent by building a solar PV plant in Jordan, near the border, that will sell solar electricity directly to the Israeli grid. The project will reveal the challenges that might be placed by technical and regulatory authorities to such cross-border linkages and enable the governments and private sector to identify "the devil in the details," providing insight into technical and regulatory challenges and exposing what regulatory and perhaps legal changes would be required for the scaling of energy exchanges in the region. These and additional challenges raised in the pilot could then be studied and addressed with appropriate solutions in a full feasibility study, shared with investors, and used to inform business-case development, commercial arrangements and formal agreements between the relevant governments.

4.1.2) A Full Feasibility Study

A Full Feasibility Study will identify all areas and issues that require in-depth investigation, resolution, and planning for successful implementation of the WEN. This would include developing alternative

scenarios; considering environmental, socioeconomic and geopolitical considerations and options for decision makers; and crafting an advocacy plan targeting all stakeholders needed for successful implementation of the WEN Project. It will analyze and form recommendations for financial mechanisms for mobilizing public and private investments, commercial arrangements for sale, purchase and transmission of power and water between the three jurisdictions; the regulatory framework for the exchanges; and broader legal issues such as corporate governance, risk allocation and mitigation. The full feasibility study will fill knowledge gaps, analyze political and other risks to potential investors and the mechanisms to mitigate them, and assess WEN's social and environmental impact. A full study will assess likely market conditions in consultation with private sector actors currently active in the desalination and renewable energy market as well as with potential funders. It will include a financial plan with fully developed recommendations, alternative action plans and priority investments, identifying the kind of finances needed and developing investment cases that show the economic sense of the proposed investments. As the security risks for such a large-scale project are significant, the study will also incorporate estimates of the costs of securing the infrastructure as well as related insurance costs. In addition, it will include a full environmental impact assessment, including life cycle analyses of all options considered, and a thorough assessment of the regulatory issues inherent in implementing such a project needed to examine the legal and contractual issues that would be involved in project execution.

4.1.3) Outreach and Education on the Water Energy Nexus.

For a project such as WEN to succeed, Jordanian, Palestinian and Israeli national leadership would need to create an enabling environment for project-related investments, private sector investors would need to move forward on public/private partnership and private sector investments in WEN-related projects. Ultimately, this would be best achieved through mutual memoranda of understanding by each government and discussions on purchasing agreements.

The WEN program has met resistance and hesitation on all three sides, due to concerns of dependency on another state and concern that radical elements might seek to damage cross-border infrastructure, as occurred in the case of natural gas sales from Egypt to both Israel and Jordan. However, it appears that the tides have started to turn. Key relevant authorities are recognizing the advantages of the WEN program, with the overarching national security and climate security interests now more clearly understood and accepted.^{54 55 56 57}

Most recently, on June 8, 2020, Israel's Minister of Energy, Yuval Steinitz, issued a letter to EcoPeace Middle East welcoming a pilot project where solar electricity produced in Jordan could supply electricity to the Israeli grid and help meet Israel's commitment to 30% renewables by 2030.⁵⁸ The interest of the Israeli Energy Ministry is to benefit from Jordan's comparative advantage of large land availability, which is lacking on the Israeli side. According to Israel's Planning Administration, Israel lacks 50,000 dunams of land to meet its 30% solar power targets. The new position of the Energy Ministry builds on an earlier letter of support for the full WEN program issued by the Israel Ministry of Regional Cooperation in 2018.⁵⁹

The Palestinian Authority has undertaken serious steps towards diversifying energy from external sources. In June 2020, an agreement was signed with the Jordanian Government to increase energy supply through upgrading an existing electricity line connecting Jordan with Jericho, and supply electricity to Ramallah and Jerusalem by increasing capacity and connectivity by 200% by 2023, funded through a World Bank program.⁶⁰

In addition, business interests in Jordan, Palestine, Israel and internationally have come to appreciate the economic advantages of the WEN and are expressing an interest to invest not only in a pilot solar cross-border sale, but also in the full WEN concept. The economic gains to all sides could be very significant. As an example, the EcoPeace study concluded that by 2050, Jordan's supplying 20% of the energy needs of Israel and Palestine would increase Jordan's GDP by 3-4%, with total

revenue flows allowing Jordan to purchase Mediterranean desalinated water at quantities enabling Jordan to fully meet its own water needs and still be left with US\$1 billion annually.

Jordan is today producing solar electricity at under 3 cents a kilowatt hour, while in Israel and Palestine electricity is sold at 10 cents a kilowatt hour or more, making Jordanian solar energy not only more sustainable, but also much cheaper.⁶¹ Jordan, on the other hand, does not have convenient access to seawater for desalination, with its only sea located far from its capital and main centers of population. Bringing desalinated water from the Red Sea is three to four times more expensive than the cost of pumping desalinated water from the Mediterranean coast.^{62 63 64}

Through investment in the WEN, our three countries can meet regional security challenges and utilize the climate crisis as a multiplier of opportunities. While dependency brings with it the political concern of domination, interdependency can be a stabilizing factor. The creation of the European Union was designed precisely to create conditions of interdependency and joint economic benefits and has turned into a stabilizing political factor in Europe. Just like the EU started as a very limited economic agreement between former enemies focusing on only two resources -- coal and steel -- cooperation on water and energy has the potential to be a springboard for broader cooperation, greater stability, and better living conditions for all in the Middle East.

Priority recommendations to the Israeli, Palestinian and Jordanian governments:

- The Government of Jordan could consider issuing the necessary permits that would allow the private sector to sell solar electricity produced in Jordan to Israel.
- Implement the Jordanian / Palestinian agreement to increase electricity sales from Jordan to the West Bank through an existing linkage to Jericho with a focus on electricity sourced from renewable sources.
- Agreements already reached between the Palestinian Authority, Israel and the donor community in favor of large-scale desalination in Gaza and increased electricity transmission from Israel to Gaza should move towards implementation.
- Desalination plants, proposed to be built in Gaza, should be designed to meet not only Palestinian needs but include potential water export to Israel and Jordan, through linkage to Israel's national water carrier.²
- Commit to undertaking a full feasibility plan for the WEN, including the creation of a tri-lateral commission to manage the sale and supply of desalinated water and renewable energy.

Priority recommendations to the international community:

- Parallel investments currently made by international financial institutions (IFIs), such as the European Investment Bank (EIB) and European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), should align with European Green Deal foreign policy objectives. EBRD investments in solar plants in Jordan should encourage cross-border sales to Israel and Palestine. EIB investment in desalination facilities in Israel and Gaza should be powered by renewable energy sources, preferably sourced from Jordan. (See further details in section 4).

4.2) On Israeli / Palestinian Natural Water Allocation and Sustainable Management

Twentieth century assumptions that dictated water diplomacy led the Levant down a path of conflict and competition over water. Then the Levant was indeed wholly dependent on natural water, and therefore Israelis and Palestinians were in dispute over how to allocate the scarce natural water supply shared between them. This was the mind-set of how water was negotiated in the Oslo Accords in the

² The full feasibility study proposed by EcoPeace would substantiate the economic viability and geo-political attractiveness of such a deal.

mid-1990s. Water was left unresolved as one of five final status issues because coming to an agreement over sharing scarce natural water was difficult and would produce winners and losers.

Today advancements in water technologies, often led by Israeli innovation, present the opportunity for Palestinians to obtain their rights to natural water sources, without reducing water availability for the Israeli side. Depending on negotiations between the parties, Palestine could fully access its water rights by increased Palestinian pumping from the three basins of the Mountain Aquifer, with Israel correspondingly reducing its pumping from those basins and increasing its own supply through desalination. As regards riparian water rights from the Jordan River, Palestine, like Jordan, cannot presently access its water rights from the river directly due to water diversion and river pollution. Here one suggestion could be that Palestinian water rights be sourced through increased Palestinian pumping from the Mountain Aquifer or from the Sea of Galilee, in line with the precedent of the Israel / Jordan peace treaty.⁶⁵ The ground-breaking work of M.I.T. Professor Franklin Fischer further shows that from an economic and sustainability perspective, optimal water management could take place through the creation of water markets between Israel and Palestine, with even greater efficiencies achieved if Jordan is also included.⁶⁶

Israel's leadership in the utilization of treated wastewater for agriculture and the development of reverse osmosis desalination technology means that water is under fewer constraints as a resource. Presently 70% of the drinking water in Israel comes from desalination, and half the agriculture is grown with treated wastewater.^{67 68} The availability of large quantities of manufactured water, complementing natural water, makes the fair share of natural water between Israelis and Palestinians attainable. Reaching a deal on water would result in more water in every Palestinian home, dramatically improving the lives of every Palestinian, and meaningfully benefit the Palestinian economy.

Compared to the other Israeli-Palestinian conflict "final status issues" -- Jerusalem, refugees, borders/settlements and security -- water is today the least controversial and most solvable of final status issues. For the last 25 years, both Israelis and Palestinians have negotiated on the basis of having to agree to all final status issues as a single package. At the time of the Oslo Accords, all five final status issues were seen as difficult and solvable only as part of a deal, where each side would compromise on each issue as part of a single package. The failure to agree on all final status issues simultaneously has meant that there has been no advance on any of the final status issues. EcoPeace proposes a policy paradigm that prioritizes solvable issues, like water, to revive peace negotiations. This approach does not ignore the deep connection that water allocation has with other final status issues, such as borders, refugees and settlements. Both Palestinian and Israeli negotiators link the water issue to sovereignty and borders and to the water quantity needs of refugees and settlements. The fungible nature of water as a resource, however, means that water quantities can be agreed upon in a manner which takes into account these complexities and still represents agreement to full Palestinian water rights, paving the path towards solving the other final status issues too.

Moving forward on water issues would create a middle way; improving the conditions on the ground for the disadvantaged Palestinian side through allocation of their full water rights, while maintaining Israeli water security through increased desalination. Advancing on water as one of the core issues of the two-state peace process would show the public on both sides that there is a partner for peace and help rebuild the necessary trust between the two parties to advance the other final status issues associated with a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. No less important under a climate crisis, the need to act on water is more urgent than ever, and its resolution will serve the climate security needs of both peoples.

Despite population growth and development over the past 25 years, Palestinian withdrawals of water from the Mountain Aquifer remain limited to the terms of Oslo II, often enforced through Israeli military control. This has created significant water scarcity affecting large areas of the West

Bank, where municipal water services are provided in cities like Yatta, in the south of the West Bank, only one day per three months during the hot summer period.⁶⁹ Additionally, due to its geological characteristics, most of the Mountain Aquifer's recharge area is vulnerable to groundwater pollution and is degraded by inadequately treated sewage and unsanitary solid waste dumps, often caused by the limited ability to move forward in timely manner on projects in Area C communities.⁷⁰ An estimated 47 million cubic meters of Palestinian-sourced raw and poorly treated sewage are released into the shared environment each year.⁷¹

The Coastal Aquifer, under the Gaza Strip, is in a state of extreme overuse. As a result, 96% of the groundwater is no longer potable.⁷² Seawater infiltrates the aquifer, and salinity levels have thus risen well beyond World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines for safe drinking water. This situation is compounded by contamination from the discharge of the mostly untreated sewage of 2 million people. The continued blockade on Gaza and the failure to reach internal Palestinian reconciliation result in the water and sanitation crisis being a core cause of Gaza's not being a liveable place.⁷³

Israel too is severely affected by the water and sanitation crisis in the West Bank and Gaza. West Bank sewage is carried by cross-border streams into major Israeli cities and contaminates the ground water of the Mountain Aquifer that Israel takes the lion's share of. A 2009 UN report estimated that 50,000 to 80,000 cubic meters of untreated or partially treated wastewater was flowing from Gaza into the Mediterranean Sea daily since January 2008. By 2018 it was estimated that more than 108,000 cubic meters of raw sewage flow from Gaza into the Mediterranean Sea every day through 9 sewage outlets distributed along the Gaza coastline, directly threatening the viability of Israel's coastal desalination plants, which constitute 70% of the country's drinking water, threatening Israeli water security and national security interests.^{74 75}

By not resolving water issues, both sides are paying a heavy price that under conditions of climate change will further threaten the national security of both peoples. The COVID19 pandemic should be a wake-up call to both governments that sustainably managing shared water resources is essential to maintain basic standards of hygiene that are essential to the health and economic welfare of Israelis and Palestinians alike. Maintaining the status quo at a time when technological advances have altered the very rationale for why water was considered a final status issue in the first place only highlights that water issues are today being held hostage to other final status issues of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.⁷⁶ EcoPeace's efforts towards achieving a fair water agreement between Israel and Palestine emphasize equitable rights and equal responsibilities related to joint management of shared water. 'Equitable rights' does not mean that all sides will receive equal volumes of natural water. Rather, it means that they will have equal standing in the institutions for joint management and equal opportunity to participate in decision-making processes, criteria that indicate that it is not water but water management of all shared water bodies that is really shared.⁷⁷

Priority recommendations to the Israeli, Palestinian, and Jordanian governments:

- Give political support to change the all-or-nothing paradigm and agree to negotiate water issues first.
- Negotiate a water agreement to replace article 40 of the 1994 Oslo Accords.
- Create an action plan to address Palestinian water and environmental projects in order to solve urgent issues like water supply and sanitation in Gaza and the West Bank.
- Create a Joint Israeli-Palestinian Water Commission to manage all shared waters.^{3 78}

Priority recommendations to the international community:

³ A Joint Commission is proposed after water negotiations are completed and based on lessons learned from the failed Joint Water Committee as analyzed in the Brooks Trottier report: https://old.ecopeaceme.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Water_Agreement_FINAL.pdf

- Encourage the sides to break away from the all-or-nothing political paradigm in line with meeting Middle East and foreign policy climate security priorities.
- Create a “Friends of Water Group” as a coalition of states with influence on one or both of the Israeli and Palestinian governments, taking international leadership on the resolution of water issues in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the framework of a two-state solution based on internationally agreed parameters.

4.3) On River Rehabilitation, Biodiversity and Sustainable Agriculture and Tourism

The Jordan River Valley, stretching from the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea, is a border area with a region-wide population of 800,000 people, Israelis, Palestinians, and Jordanians. The valley's wetland ecosystem, the biological heartland of the region and one of the world's most important crossroads for migratory birds, is threatened by excessive water diversion and pollution. The Jordan River has seen some 95% of its fresh water diverted, half by Israel and the other half by Syria and Jordan, leaving Palestinians since 1967 without any access to river water and with its remaining flow polluted from Jordanian, Israeli and Palestinian sources resulting in 50% biodiversity lost.^{79 80} Competition for scarce water, misuse of natural resources, and lack of regional cooperation have led to the demise of the river valley and caused underdevelopment and poverty, especially on the Jordanian side of the valley. Due to the fact that the river itself is the border, rehabilitation of the river can only take place under conditions of cooperation. The climate crisis and resulting reduced precipitation makes rehabilitation of the Jordan River and its valley so much more difficult today. With the climate crisis leading to further reductions in water availability and increased temperatures reducing soil fertility, failure to act towards rehabilitation will deepen existing levels of poverty and animosities that as described earlier could directly contribute to instability. Alternatively, a Green Blue Deal that sees the climate crisis as an opportunity to promote Jordan Valley cooperation can restore the river to a clean, fast-flowing body of water, revitalize the valley's biodiversity, and attract tourism and pilgrimage that can help diversify incomes and raise people out of poverty, not only for the benefit of the region but for half of humanity that sees the Jordan River as a holy river.

Our own organization's efforts to promote the rehabilitation of the river have borne fruit and served as proof of concept. Such projects have resulted in Israel releasing some 9 mcm of fresh water from the Sea of Galilee into the Lower Jordan River annually since 2013 and is expected to increase to 30 mcm annually.^{81 82 83} Though a minor quantity to be released compared to historic flows, it does mark a change in policy given that for 49 years no fresh water was released other than a once-in-a-decade flood year.⁸⁴ EcoPeace advocacy also helped leverage investment of over US\$100 million in the construction of waste-water treatment plants, Israeli, Jordanian and Palestinian, in the Jordan Valley which are starting to remove pollutants from the Jordan River.⁸⁵ Also, an investment of a billion NIS in the reversal of Israel's national water carrier that will bring desalinated Mediterranean seawater to the Sea of Galilee creates opportunities to increase flow levels into the lower Jordan. From 2010 to 2015, EcoPeace, the Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI) and the German Global Nature Fund convened stakeholders from all sides and completed the first-ever integrated Regional Jordan Valley Master Plan (JVMP) for the rehabilitation and sustainable development of the Jordan Valley.⁸⁶ The rehabilitation of the Jordan River would allow the river to be utilized again as the natural regional water carrier, meeting the water needs of all three populations along its banks, not supplied through human-made water carriers on either side but accessed as needed from the river itself, allowing other important economic activities to take place the full length of the river. The Master Plan devised an investment strategy which would rehabilitate not only the Jordan River but the whole valley, with the potential to raise the prosperity of the Jordan Valley from a GDP of US\$4 billion at present to US \$73 billion annually if carried out.⁸⁷

Following the release of the JVMP, the Jordanian Government adopted the master plan on the Jordanian side, but due to outstanding final-status peace process issues, the Israeli and Palestinian governments have refrained from doing the same. Given the political stalemate, EcoPeace negotiated with all three governments the selection of particular master plan projects that were less politically

controversial to be advanced despite the political stalemate, as part of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the three governments to enable the creation of a World Bank Trust Fund to start implementation on agreeable projects. Deteriorating relations between Israel and Jordan however and the Israeli Government's proposal to annex the Jordan Valley have thus far impeded the signing of a trilateral MoU.

EcoPeace, therefore, created a parallel strategy to work with the private sector, connecting projects in the field of climate-smart agriculture with potential investors. Half a dozen such projects, including closed-system fish farming, high protein grasshopper breeding, solar-powered refrigeration for communal agricultural produce, and a palm fronds paper pulp factory -- all led by local entrepreneurs -- are several of the projects in various stages of seeing light. EcoPeace has secured financing for other climate-smart investments such as installing solar panels to power a Jordan Valley wastewater treatment plant, improving the effluent produced so as to replace fresh water for agriculture. In addition, EcoPeace has designed and distributed residential grey water systems in Jordan Valley homes to promote grey water reuse for fruit trees. All of the above projects focus on investments in the Jordanian and Palestinian side of the valley, with green job creation as a key objective. Local female plumbers have been trained to build and install the grey water reuse systems, and climate-smart agricultural training takes place for Palestinian and Jordanian farmers to improve water efficiency through the adoption of relevant practices developed on the Israeli side of the Jordan Valley.

In addition, plans for a protected ecological corridor, on both sides of the Jordan River between Israel and Jordan, have been developed in cooperation with architects from Yale University's Urban Design School. A set of design ideas has been proposed to develop ecotourism that is designed to provide opportunities for the preservation of biodiversity, joint environmental management, collaborative research programs, cross-border environmental education, and expanded economic opportunities for regional cooperation in ecotourism.⁸⁸ A pre-feasibility study conducted by the Jordanian company, EcoConsult, detailed how an investment of US\$10 million in the infrastructure mentioned above could draw over 250,000 visitors to the site annually, attracting strong private sector investment and significant green employment opportunities for local residents through eco-tourism.⁸⁹

With the support of SIWI, a governance strategy for the valley has also been proposed to create a trilateral Jordan River Commission. A river commission would act as a coordinating body fostering cooperation around the Jordan River under the principle of "one river, one management."⁹⁰
⁹¹ ⁹² A Jordan River Commission would help institutionalize long-term and strategic Jordanian, Palestinian and Israeli cooperation around the Jordan Valley needed to meet the challenges that climate change presents. In the future, the proposed commission should also include Syria and Lebanon as additional riparians to the river basin. The overall goal of EcoPeace's work in the Jordan Valley is to promote peace, prosperity, and security in the Jordan River Valley by promoting sustainable economic development that will safeguard and restore the valley's environmental and ecological values. All of the actions proposed by EcoPeace under a Green Blue Deal strategy increase the resilience of the local populations to not only adapt to climate change but, by improving their livelihood reality on the ground, help create trust among the parties to move forward on outstanding peace process issues.

Priority recommendations to the Israeli, Palestinian and Jordanian governments:

- Move forward on the creation of a World Bank Trust Fund advancing climate-smart, select, JVMP projects.
- Facilitate and advance permitting, where necessary, for regional and national climate-smart private sector investments identified in the Jordan Valley.

- Prioritize plans for further fresh water releases to the Jordan River and investments in the removal of pollutants so that the river can be used as a multipurpose natural carrier as proposed in the JVMP.

Priority recommendations to the international community:

- Support politically and financially the creation of a World Bank Trust Fund for the Jordan Valley.
- Encourage the sides to support investments that will improve climate resilience on the ground, in line with meeting Middle East and foreign policy climate security priorities and the peace process based on two-state solution principles.
- Support further research and joint learning required on international best practices for river rehabilitation and transboundary river governance for the Jordan Valley.

4.4) On Educating for Peace and Sustainability

Investment in mainstreaming educational programs that focus on the relationship between climate change and peace building is particularly needed in areas of protracted conflict like the Middle East, an area recognized as a climate hot spot. Environmental peace building is increasingly recognized as a unique peace-building practice that focuses on common threats and opportunities, such as those created by the climate crisis, to help create the political will needed for governments to act towards climate mitigation and adaptation. The 26 years of experience of EcoPeace Middle East is that an essential ingredient needed to create top-down political will is a long term investment in bottom-up community-based environment and climate education and public engagement programs. Mainstreaming educational programs that link peace and sustainability issues, both at the national and regional level, help create the needed public constituencies that support leaders to move towards cooperation and reject unilateralism. When communities living on either side of a shared water basin come to understand that their future is dependent on the actions of their neighbors, as much as it is dependent on their own behavior, then they can become powerful actors calling on their leaders to cooperate across the border, as a matter of self-interest, if not survival, of their own communities.

For this reason, EcoPeace developed a cross-border education and community-based awareness program called Good Water Neighbors. Instead of ‘good fences’ creating good neighborly relations, the experience of EcoPeace has been that the fences and other security barriers dividing communities not only contribute to ecological demise but are often the source of attitudes that blame the other side for all of the problems and prevents each side from taking responsibility for its behavior contributing to ecological demise. The bottom-up education and public awareness programs of EcoPeace have therefore focused on the shared interests in good water for all, as the entry point of mainstreaming peace and sustainability issues into education programs.

EcoPeace's award-winning community-based Good Water Neighbors (GWN) project has encouraged young people for nearly two decades to support concrete environmental solutions and become agents of change for regional cooperation.⁹³ GWN includes a school program that educates thousands of Palestinian, Israeli and Jordanian youth about the interdependent nature of water resources and environmental impact and the need for cooperation. "Neighbors Path" tours expose thousands of youth to their own water realities and that of their neighbors across the border and inspire them to plan and implement concrete community projects. Additionally, select groups of youth and young professionals are invited to cross-border activities that are designed to build networks of knowledgeable, empowered and regionally sensitive young leaders and professionals who forge vibrant cross-border connections to advance regional water and environment solutions. Teaching water and climate diplomacy to high school students encourages them to enroll in relevant programs at university, which then prepares them to choose a career path as young professionals and entrepreneurs who have the needed skill sets and comprehension to implement the critical programs earlier mentioned that would lead to such solutions as a water energy nexus, sustainable water

allocation and cross-border river and stream management. These are the tools required if we are to meet Green Blue Deal climate mitigation and adaptation goals. For those who do not adopt these issues as a career path, the investment made in water and climate diplomacy in schools and universities nevertheless significantly impacts mind-sets and helps create the public constituency needed in favor of cooperative rather than unilateral decisions.

The "Good Water Neighbors" project, significantly funded for close to a decade by the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), includes two main components: 1) National School Programs and 2) Regional Leadership Programs.

4.4.1) National School Programs

EcoPeace has developed national programs targeting youth (ages 16-18) in Jordanian, Palestinian and Israeli high schools, with EcoPeace helping to develop lesson plans that either expand existing official school curricula or introduce new curriculum, and provide national and regional teacher training, site tours, summit days and support for student-led projects. In Israel, EcoPeace has developed a water diplomacy program that annually reaches over 3,000 high school students in 80 high schools, representing all sectors of Israeli society. In Palestine and Jordan, EcoPeace has similarly helped develop unique interdisciplinary lesson plans that enable youth to become better informed and equipped to deal with environmental, water, and climate challenges, while offering educators up-to-date, practical training to provide relevant, interesting lessons and activities to their students about these issues.

4.4.2) Regional Leadership Programs

In parallel to the school programs, which are designed to target thousands of participants, EcoPeace has developed three leadership programs that identify and engage a select group of emerging young environmental leaders and young people with potential to serve as impact multipliers in regional cross-border people-to-people activities. Through these programs, EcoPeace seeks to create a network of empowered young leaders and professionals who will forge cross-border connections to advance regional water and environment solutions.

4.4.2.1) Youth Water Trustees

Each year, 36 youth (ages 16-18) from Jordan, Israel and Palestine (12 from each country) are selected in a competitive process to join the regional Youth Water Trustees track. Trustees meet each other in person at regional camps in Jordan and participate in trainings, simulations, master classes, and delegations that deepen their knowledge about climate change and regional security and help them plan and implement different kinds of climate-change initiatives, focusing particularly on developing ways to create dialogue with decision makers and other stakeholders, while they develop local, regional and global networks. The trustees are also deeply involved in the national school programs as local organizers and guest speakers.

4.4.2.2) Young Professionals

The Water Diplomacy for Young Professionals (ages 21-35) track has developed a regional leadership group of young leaders who cooperate to solve transboundary environmental issues by learning and practicing diplomacy skills and participating in cross-border encounters for networking and joint problem solving. The program targets young professionals in the early stages of their careers: university students, young water professionals, young political leaders, etc. from Palestine, Israel and Jordan. The program involves capacity-building activities in a series of national and regional workshops on water and environmental issues, track II diplomacy and negotiation skills. Working together with the PATHWAYS Institute for Negotiation Education, EcoPeace developed a Climate Change Toolkit for use in training and preparing the Young Water Diplomats across the region to interact directly to explore and brainstorm new region-wide cooperative solutions to shared environmental challenges through the prism of climate change as well as being exposed to international cases, trends, and developments to position them as global agents of change.

4.4.2.3) Green Social Entrepreneurship

The Green Social Entrepreneurship track (ages 21-35) will be launched in late 2020 and targets students and graduates of environmental science and environmental engineering faculties, young entrepreneurs, and young water professionals. The program aims to advance innovative green enterprises that generate social value and create a cohort of young Israeli, Jordanian and Palestinian entrepreneurs who cooperate to build shared prosperity and sustainable development in the region. The program will start with pre-incubation activities focused on the initial development of green initiatives, followed by regional workshops, the building of a regional network of entrepreneurs, and a long-term continuation program consisting of an incubator and a regional center of excellence.

4.4.3) Digital Activities and Virtual Technology

With the outbreak of COVID-19 in early 2020, EcoPeace accelerated and expanded the scope of its digital strategy, adding a variety of virtual and online educational activities that have been integrated into existing programs. The EcoPeace strategy is not just to mitigate current challenges, but to develop innovative virtual activities that offer added value in any scenario. This has led EcoPeace to develop a virtual immersive meeting environment for cross-border (people-to-people) activities. Based on gaming technology, enabling the design of highly realistic open worlds, EcoPeace is currently building a virtual Lower Jordan Valley that would enable participants, as virtual avatars, to freely explore the Jordan Valley, crossing borders and entering usually off-limit areas, while interacting freely and engaging together in quests and challenges built and managed by the EcoPeace education team, and learning about our shared environment. The content incorporates a combination of virtual and zoom meetings, presentations and video clips that can be experienced while in the virtual world, and virtual versions of the neighbors' path tours.

A virtual world brings value that can be used beyond the scope of the current crisis and offers access to a compelling vision of what our region could become. For example, the concept of building an ecological corridor connecting both sides of the Jordan River, long hampered by political constraints, is realized in a virtual world and creates a meaningful shared space for regional meetings and events.

Priority recommendations to the Israeli, Palestinian and Jordanian governments:

- Support national programs for Green Blue Deal education such as water and climate diplomacy and integrate them into nationwide programming across the national education system.
- Integrate Green Blue Deal concepts and priorities into national entrepreneurial programs.

Priority recommendations to the international community

- Increase support for the regional Good Water Neighbors' education and public awareness activities that could not take place without donor support.
- Support national government education programs that mainstream Green Blue Deal concepts and objectives.

5. CONCLUDING WORDS

Opportunities exist to better align Green Deal international foreign policy with Middle East Green Blue Deal objectives. As an example, Europe's declared leadership to advance climate security is an opportunity to see important European-led investments in Middle East desalination and solar electricity production, taking place at the moment on a bilateral basis, to harness regional Green Blue Deal linkages. The EIB recently announced financial support in Israel to build the largest reverse osmosis desalination plant in the world.^{94 95} While the investment is strategically significant for climate adaptation and water security, the energy source is fossil fuel (natural gas) and represents a missed opportunity to promote the use of renewables and help Israel achieve its Paris Agreement goals.

Equally, Europe is leading the effort to build a critically needed desalination plant in Gaza whose energy source would also be largely fossil. At the same time, Europe, through both the EBRD and EIB, is heavily invested in supporting Jordan's leadership in solar energy production.^{96 97} The opportunity on the table is to link these European-led investments in a manner that would facilitate the water energy nexus described above, so that Jordanian solar energy powers desalination plants along the Mediterranean that could then sell desalinated water from Israel and Palestine back to Jordan, to meet Jordan's critical water security needs.

Similarly, with the newly elected Biden Administration likely to reinstate Palestinian funding and increase peace-building funding opportunities, US government funding in the region, mainly through the US Agency for International Development, should be aligned not only with environmental objectives but also with the objective that such funding helps to create cross border regional synergies. As an example, US Congress 2020 deliberations to advance "The Middle East Partnership for Peace Act" provides an opportunity to align investment in people-to-people and economic activity with environmental goals.⁹⁸ The authorization of \$50 million for five fiscal years to establish the People-to-People Partnership for Peace Fund and the Joint Investment for Peace Initiative, which will provide investments in people-to-people exchanges and economic cooperation with the goal of supporting a negotiated and sustainable two-state solution, initiated by the Alliance for Middle East Peace (ALLMEP), is a prime opportunity to align environmental foreign policy objectives with Middle East Green Blue Deal objectives. Both EU and US cases demonstrate the potential for international actors to combine their influence in financial support with their climate action objectives through regional and international cooperation.

Finally, to harness and coordinate international political leadership in support of a Middle East Green Blue Deal, we propose the creation of a "**Middle East Green Blue Deal Coalition of the Willing**" that could bring together foreign ministers of interested states that support advancing a Middle East Green Blue Deal program. A Green Blue Deal combined with **post COVID-19 recovery** priorities, which are likely to remain on top of the agenda of international donors active in the region for upcoming years, would further help attract international investors including from Arab Gulf countries. To support such goals, we envision and recommend a series of Track II preparatory meetings to encourage countries to join such a coalition, public outreach, and pursuit of research and analysis that can further inform such conversations. In that vein, the US Institute of Peace is partnering with us on a report to be published in early 2021 that will explore the evidentiary and analytical basis of the recommendations made by the authors in this report. We additionally propose that an international conference be convened on a Green Blue Deal for the Middle East. The conference would seek to attract high-level business, think tanks, civil society, and academia. Behind the scenes, a "Green Blue Deal Coalition of the Willing" could lead Track I diplomacy with the governments of Israel, Palestine and Jordan to advance a detailed program with timelines and financing towards the implementation of a Green Blue Deal for the Middle East, to be announced in the proposed international conference. The European Union is well placed to initiate such an effort, inviting interested EU foreign ministers to lead and then broadening such a coalition with interested foreign ministers from non-EU states.

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