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Israel must connect the new Palestinian city of Rawabi to the national water grid

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Simulated plan of Rawabi

The new Palestinian city of Rawabi, near Ramallah, inspires envy. Not necessarily because of the extraordinary success that was achieved in planning an entire city meant to provide decent,

affordable housing for thousands of Palestinian families couples, nor on account of the stunning views it affords. No, this is the envy of Israeli settlers and politicians, for whom every Palestinian success is an Israeli failure.

The zero-sum game that characterizes relations with the Palestinians is played out not only in the international arena, but also in every inch of the territories and East Jerusalem. Rawabi, the construction materials for which were provided primarily by Israeli manufacturers and suppliers, has been waiting for months to be connected to the national water grid. Around 1,000 apartments that have been purchased there are move-in ready, but for a lack of running water.

The official excuse for the punishment meted out to the buyers is that the Israeli-Palestinian Joint Water Committee hasn't met for years, and since every permit for supplying water requires the unanimous approval of this panel's members, there's no way to approve Rawabi's connection to the water system. An ancillary claim is that the Palestinians have refused to convene the water committee because they don't want to approve the supply of water to Israeli projects and to the settlements.

At first glance, these claims are correct. After all, the Joint Water Committee was set up pursuant to the Oslo Accords, and the requirement that both sides must agree to both Israeli and Palestinian projects was meant to produce an appropriate and fair allocation of the water. But in reality, these claims don't hold water: There is no record of any Israeli project that has ever been thwarted for lack of a JWC permit.

More important, this reliance on the Oslo Accords as a source of authority for allocating water is ridiculous. After all, this agreement also requires Israel to remit to the Palestinian Authority the taxes it collects on the PA's behalf. The Israeli government, which long ago declared the Oslo Accords dead and buried, and which ignores many of their provisions, adheres to them scrupulously when they allow it to punish the Palestinians. The result is that Israel violates the Oslo Accords' provisions for giving the PA the tax money it owes, but complies when they allow it to withhold water from Rawabi.

Israel's Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories is in favor of connecting Rawabi to the water grid. It would not affect the security balance and would provide an excellent solution to the housing shortage in the West Bank. The cabinet must issue an immediate order to carry out the connection and allow home buyers to move in without further delay.